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Working with Mentors in Violence Prevention

The experiences and understandings of professionals

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and analyse the understanding the professionals', who work with youth at one of the schools where Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) was implemented, have of their work. Particular emphasis was made on the professionals' own positioning in relation to the gender theoretical starting points and structural perspective of the MVP-programme. Based on the increase in violence in Swedish society today, the overall objective was to problematize the work done with MVP in an effort to develop the violence prevention work. The analysed material consisted of four in-depth semi-structured interviews that were conducted with professionals that work with MVP, and observations. To analyse, a theoretical framework was designed that was comprised of Connell's theory on masculinity concerning hegemonic masculinity, Butler's theory on gender concerning social norms, and lastly bridging and bonding aspects of social capital. The findings indicate that the context of the municipality poses its challenges regarding the work with violence prevention with the identification of various factors such as the family and gang affiliations being counterproductive. While MVP has successfully been anchored in the school, which is a prerequisite for the support required to go against an existing hegemonic masculinity, the mentor and mentee pedagogical model of MVP as an approach is distrusted by the majority of the professionals. The training for professionals that work with MVP span two days, which means that their understanding of the gender theoretical starting points and the structural perspective of the MVP-programme is heavily dependent on their previous knowledge. The short training for professionals was reflected in the professionals' tendency to speak in individualising terms and not being cognizant of how different social structures intersect. The research concludes that knowledge-raising for the professionals who work with MVP have not been done in the extent needed.

Key words: *Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP), Youth, Social Norms, Hegemonic Masculinity, Bridging and Bonding*

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1 Introduction and problem area

Since time immemorial, crime has posed a threat to people, activity and property. While conventional crime, such as fraud, theft and murder persist, the nature of the crimes has become organized and transnational. Organised crime is alarming to citizens, politicians and media and can be viewed as a global crime threat. Organised crime has different root causes in different countries (United Nations, 2009).

Sweden has had an increase of lethal violence with firearms (Dagens Nyheter, 2015) since 2013. The steady increase in Sweden has been higher than most other European countries. The increase in lethal firearm violence in Sweden is strongly associated with criminal environments in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. The development is however difficult to explain and can be attributed to a myriad of factors (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2021, pp. 7-11). As a result of this increase the Swedish government has made a concerted effort to make Sweden safer, irrespective of where in the country you live. The efforts pertain to “law enforcement efforts today and preventative efforts for the future”. The Swedish government has made the largest expansion of the Swedish Police ever and is part of the most comprehensive effort against crime in Sweden (Regeringskansliet, n.d.). In addition to targeting the crimes, efforts are being aimed at the causes of the crimes. Crime prevention work is hence being strengthened at national, regional and local levels (Regeringskansliet, 2021). As stated by the United Nations "prevention is the first imperative of justice". Well-planned crime prevention strategies, apart from preventing crime and victimisation, promote community safety and contribute to sustainable development of countries. Long-term benefits of effective, responsible crime prevention reduce the costs that result from crime, including costs associated with the formal criminal justice system, and enhances the quality of life of all citizens (United Nations, n.d.).

The prevention efforts made by the Swedish government entail early intervention in schools, and particular investments have been made in schools in areas with socio-economic challenges (Regeringskansliet, 2021). Among children and adolescents' early intervention is imperative for preventing crime, norm-breaking behaviour and exposure to crime (Skolverket, 2022; Socialstyrelsen, 2021) hence, being attentive to antisocial and harmful behaviours displayed by children and adolescents and providing support is vital (Socialstyrelsen, 2021). A collection

of 33 methods that can be used when working crime preventatively with children and adolescents has been produced by The National Board of Health and Welfare in collaboration with the Police and in consultation with the National Agency for education. The methods are used in Sweden today within schools, police, social services, healthcare, leisure activities and associations and they are often in collaboration between several of these actors (Skolverket, 2022).

Swedish police want to increase their involvement in municipalities through so-called ‘citizen promises’ (Polisen, n.d.). Such promises have also been made in one municipality where the violence prevention work has been especially prioritised by the Swedish government and police in an effort to combat organised crime. This municipality, which partly consists of socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, in a large city in Sweden, is of focus in this research. The experience of the Swedish police points to a need of hindering new recruitment to criminal networks, hence early prevention focusing on the youth is imperative. The municipality in question has consequently had the aim to develop a cohesive violence prevention work with a focus on early intervention. This development started in 2012 when the social services received alarming signals from schools, leisure centres and from the youth themselves about a rough climate amongst children and adolescents in the municipality. With this in mind, as well as a large number of the cases within the social services regarding children and adolescents having violent elements, it was the starting point of the municipality’s cross-sectoral violence prevention work.

It is within the cross-sectoral violence prevention work in the municipality that you find the programme Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP), that is one of the 33 methods. The MVP-programme promotes discussions as to different forms of violence with a bystander and gender perspective (Bruno et al., 2020, p. 5). Including the gender perspective in the prevention work is something that is highly relevant to social work. Gender significantly impacts our lives, including how we treat others and how we are treated (Mattsson, 2010, p. 33). Gender is hence a key factor in determining how people interact (Kiboro et al., 2014, p. 86). When engaging with people and doing practical social work, it's crucial to have a variety of perspectives, the gender perspective being one of them (Mattsson, 2010, p. 33). In an effort to achieve social development, sustainable people-centred development, it is of importance to recognise local stereotypes in customary gender norms and values and challenging them (Kiboro et al., 2014, p. 86; Pivorienė & Bardauskienė, 2016, p. 1; Scourfield, 2006, p. 665).

1.1 Background: MVP in the municipality

The municipality was one of the first in Sweden to have implemented MVP. Ever since the implementation of the MVP-programme, and the municipality stopped working in silos and started working more cohesively regarding violence prevention work, there has seemingly been a decrease in violence. Three factors that the municipality attributes to the success are that all staff are educated in the method, consciously building relationships and the violence prevention work is made part of the regular work framework. Since the municipality previously has been the subject to projects that have not persisted, the aim has been to have the prevention work within the framework of the regular work in an effort to achieve long-term and strategic work.

The violence prevention work in the municipality was initiated and is still run by the social services as part of their section for preventative work. It is within the municipalities collaboration forum that the need, the ideas and the fact that the work should be conducted and financed within the framework of the regular work are anchored in. In order to strengthen the development of the violence prevention work it has been included in the municipalities and police's promise to its citizens, in addition to long-term planning for the social administration and the education administration.

A collaboration team was established in order to develop the prevention work consisting of the social services' prevention section, two of their coordinators, principals, the chiefs of police and the rescue service. This collaboration team decided to begin the work with three schools in particular in order for the work to not become deprioritized in case there would be a staff turnover. The schools were able to work as support systems for each other where they can learn about the work together. Since 2016, the violence prevention work has expanded to include preschools, leisure activity centres, the police, the rescue service as well as two additional schools.

The socio-ecological model permeates the prevention work in the municipality and connects the different areas of a person's life, through the identification of protective and risk factors for violence. In said areas it is the state and the municipality that operates. Since the model encompasses the joint effort of different actors in the municipality towards a common goal, the system has come to be called the whole-municipality approach. The areas included in the socio-

ecological model are at the municipal level, the local environment level, the relationship level and the individual level. At the municipal level the violence prevention work consists of adding writings and decisions in guidelines and governing documents, educating professionals and finding opportunities for collaboration with civil society. At the local environment level, which entails the school, competence is developed within the preschools as well as violence prevention programmes such as MVP. At the relationship level, where the parents and the families are included, there are various initiatives offered, among other things parental support programs. At the individual level, concerning the child at hand, we find prevention programmes such as MVP again, as well as initiatives which works with children's attachment.

The MVP-programme targets not only children and adolescents who show signs of problematic behaviours, but also those who do not. The programme originated in the United States in 1993 and is founded upon the explanatory models and ideas for change based on the bystander and gender perspective. MVP is an educational programme for the prevention of the use of violence, mainly in school environments (Bruno et al., 2020, p. 5). Since the MVP-programme focuses on a bystander and gender perspective the goal is hence to change the role of the bystander and challenge gender norms. Changing the role of the bystander implies changing the tendency for people to intervene when violence occurs. The intervention by the bystander can be done in various ways, either before, during or after the violence occurs. Challenging gender norms means that there is an encouragement for girls and boys to act in alternative ways beyond the stereotypical gender norms that can become limiting.

A specific recruitment-day is held during the spring semester where grade eight students are appointed to lead the MVP-programme as mentors the following year. At the start of the fall semester the appointed mentors, that are now in grade nine, receive training to be able to hold the MVP sessions. The target group for the MVP sessions are students in grade six. The sessions are hence based on peer mentoring; the ninth grade mentors work as role models for the eighth grade mentees in challenging norms as well as developing leadership qualities.

The MVP-programme spans eleven study sessions during one academic year in which ninth graders receive guidance to become mentors to sixth graders. The participants have an opportunity to reflect on norms linked to the use of force as well as become equipped with various ways to intervene against different forms of abusive treatment in their everyday lives. The work with the programme is led by a group of key persons in each school who are trained

in the method. The group of key persons consists of staff at the school as well as staff from the social administration and the police. This group is responsible for recruiting young mentors, supervising and supporting them, arranging and participating in kick-offs and closing meetings for the young mentors, as well as creating legitimacy for the violence prevention work in the other teaching staff at the school.

In order to keep the cross-sectoral model, which constitutes the socio-ecological model, it necessitates an on-going knowledge-raising work. Since new schools are added to the work, new needs are identified and there being a constant staff turnover, continuous knowledge-raising is required in order to provide support for long-term work. Considering the increase in violence in Swedish society today and the efforts made by the Swedish government and the police in its prevention, it is of interest to study how the work with the prevention programme MVP is experienced in practice. As a means to contribute to an understanding, problematizing and further development of the violence prevention work, this study will be focusing on one school that have worked with MVP for almost a decade. Particular emphasis will be on the identification and exploration of the understanding and the experiences of the professionals at the school who work as key persons.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyse how the professionals, that work with the MVP-programme, understand and experience the gender theoretical starting points of the programme in the context of a socioeconomically disadvantaged area in a municipality in Sweden.

1.3 Research questions

- How do the professionals understand the need for the MVP-programme in the municipality?
- How do the professionals experience the mentor and mentee pedagogical approach of the MVP-programme?
- How is the professionals' positioning relating to MVP's gender theoretical starting points and structural perspective expressed?

2 Literature review

In this chapter I will be presenting previous literature that is of relevance to the aim and the research questions. The process of searching for literature relevant to the topic and aim of this study required various approaches to be utilised. Initially, databases SCOPUS, Social Science Database and Proquest Social Sciences were searched with the keywords “*mentor* in violence prevention*” which resulted in a number of relevant hits. The databases Sociology Collection, Sociology Database and Criminology Collection were also searched with similar keywords which however did not result in any hits. Additionally, Gothenburg’s University Library and the Google (Scholar) search engine were utilised to find previous literature on the MVP-programme in a Swedish context, in addition to relating literature of prevention work in schools.

2.1 Origins of Mentors in Violence Prevention

MVP was founded at Northeastern University’s Center for the Study of Sport in Society in 1993 and was one of the first extensive prevention efforts to target men. MVP was also the first prevention effort to operate systematically in sports culture and the United States military. MVP applies a social justice and gender-focused approach to prevention and was the first to introduce the “bystander” approach to the field (Katz, Heisterkamp & Fleming, 2011, pp. 684-685; Katz, 2018, pp. 1755-1756). Previous approaches developed in the 1970s and 1980s employed the traditional perpetrator-victim binary wherein women were regarded as (potential) victims and men as (potential) perpetrators. Moving away from this narrow approach allowed for the MVP program to engage men more productively (Katz, 2018, p. 1760).

Initially, MVP was to be a program that educated “college male student-athletes about how they could play a positive role in changing some of the norms in male culture that supported sexist and heterosexist abuse” (Katz, 2018, p. 1758). In an effort to address the pervasive and persistent problem of men’s violence against women sports was used as a vehicle. MVP had drawn inspiration from the Civil Rights Movement in the idea that silence in the face of injustice equalled consent. College male student-athletes were initially the target group based

on their standing in male peer culture and the idea was for these students to use their position in speaking out against rape, sexual harassment and relationship abuse that was notoriously known as “women’s issues”. Additionally, the goal was to open a dialogue regarding men’s violence against each other and themselves (Katz, 2018, p. 1760). This was done based on the theory that the peers and younger boys would follow suit. This idea that was put in practice through MVP predated an emerging body of research in public health education wherein “popular opinion leaders” held power in shifting social norms and accelerating behaviour change (Katz, 2018, p. 1758).

Challenging and rejecting sexist attitudes and behaviours, particularly in hegemonic spaces such as sports culture and the military was according to Katz (2018, p. 1762) reported by MVP trainers to cause anxiety about rejection, criticism and possible ridicule from the group. This was particularly reported to be the reason why men tended to be reluctant to intervene in problematic situations. The pedagogical structure of the MVP program takes into account the social hierarchies in groups and acknowledges how one could lose social capital by going against what’s normatively acceptable (Katz, 2018, p. 1763), hence a supportive context needs to be provided for people participating in MVP (Katz, 2018, p. 1767).

According to the founder Katz (2018, p. 1767) there is also no “one size fits all” solution to the problems of gender violence prevention and the MVP program is flexible enough to incorporate cultural competence and sensitivity to its training and learning modules. It is also encouraged that MVP trainers apply the concept of (organic) intersectionality whenever possible. This concept “understands various manifestations of violence as institutionally connected, rather than manifestations of discrete phenomena”. Katz (2018, p. 1774) however emphasises that in order for MVP trainers to be able to address the complexity regarding the intersection between “gender, sexual orientation, race, and class and how these and other social inequalities both contribute to the problem of gender violence and present challenges in efforts to prevent it” they are required to receive rigorous training. This is however not always possible in practice due to lack of funding or structural obstacles.

Nevertheless, a critical aspect of the MVP pedagogy are the mentors that facilitate the sessions in high school and college settings who are only slightly older students. They are according to Katz (2018, p. 1768) the optimal workshop co-facilitators and do not need the same rigorous training as the MVP trainers. According to Williams and Neville (2017, p. 214) research on

social influence indicates that perceived social norms of fellow group members shape behaviour.

The MVP-programme can be understood as part of a larger tradition in change work. An example of a similar programme that has employed the mentor and mentee model is Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA). BBBSA is a non-profit organisation that provides mentoring for economically disadvantaged, at-risk youth. Through one-to-one mentoring relationships the goal is to foster youth relationships with family members, peers and other adults as well as offer encouragement to improve school performance and improve self-competence (Park, Liao & Crosby, 2017, p. 60). One evaluation made on BBBSA school-based mentoring shows how youth who received mentoring for 1.5 school years, compared to youth who did not, had more positive perceptions of their own academic abilities and performed better academically as well as experiencing having a special adult in their lives. However, when it came to rates of problem behaviour, relationships with peers, teachers and parents as well as classroom effort and global self-worth, no improvement was shown. Additionally, the improved academic performance was not sustained the second school year (Herrera et al., 2011, p. 346).

2.2 Schools as socialising arenas

Since its inception, MVP has expanded to institutional settings such as college, high school and middle school campuses, a process that continues to this day (Katz, 2018, pp. 1756, 1759). Schools are powerful socialising institutions that play a significant role in shaping conceptualizations of masculinity and gendered patterns of power (Elliott, 2018, pp. 18-19; Pascoe, 2007, p. 39). The world in which students grow up in is a world full of gender inequalities. These gender inequalities are, among other things, expressed through the media, popular culture, as well as textbooks and other curricular resources. Historically they have tended to focus on aspects of (toxic) masculinity such as physical strength, dominance and heterosexual prowess. Since there has been a normalisation of gender inequalities and sexist imagery of both men and women it has been recognized as something normal, or even natural. How people treat and think about others will be influenced by this normalisation of gender inequalities. Hence, it will be difficult to comprehend when discriminatory behaviour and the

usage of discriminatory language is taking place. Schools can therefore work as an actor to encourage students to think about their behaviour more critically (Elliott, 2018, p. 20) and work to prevent the reproduction of gendered patterns of behaviour that are harmful and violent.

2.3 MVP in Sweden

Two versions of the MVP-programme exist in the Swedish context. Various evaluations have been done on both of the versions of the MVP-programme in Sweden. Evaluations of the programmes are however difficult to make since there are local adjustments made to the MVP manual when needed (Bruno et al., 2020, p. 150), which is partly reflected in the existing two versions. While the results of said evaluations may not be generalizable, for the sake of this thesis will serve a purpose of helping us understand the complexity of the MVP-programme.

The first version of the MVP-programme is more extensive with an additional three sessions and with a more focus on norms concerning gender, gender expression and sexuality, whereas the second version contains three additional themes concerning violence in young people's relationship, honour-related violence and oppression and racism. The differences between the two versions also pertain to the extent and degree of violence. In the first version focus is on mild forms of violence occurring in the school day-to-day with a slight connection to society at large. The second version on the other hand tackles oppression and violence in young people's close relationships, the family and society at large to a greater extent (Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 11).

The schools that have implemented the first version tend to have students that are born in Sweden and the other Nordic countries. Based on the second version it is made clear that they have had to adapt the MVP-programme and be flexible to be suitable for the students in the municipality that may face other challenges, such as racism and honour-related violence and oppression (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 6). Hence, the differences in the two versions of the MVP-programme can be attributed to the ethnic difference in the schools the programmes are implemented in. The municipality that has developed and implemented the second version is multi-ethnic and the students that are participating in the MVP-programme may not be

completely comparable to that of the students that have participated in the first version of the MVP-programme.

MVP aims to be a gender-transformative intervention which entails that the gender perspective is central. Sexism and violence in the normalisation of boy's violence is enabled by gender norms, as structural conditions. It is for this reason that the MVP-programme wishes to problematize stereotypical notions about gender (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 65; Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 14).

Structural perspective is a theoretical starting point that the MVP-programme assumes to understand and explain violence. Such a perspective entails that violence and bullying does not refer to an individuals' social problems or mental illness but rather inequality and sexism that are overarching structural relations. This structural perspective of violence, while acknowledging that certain individuals may have special risk factors, deems that a culture that legitimises abuse, sexism and homophobia makes possible individual expressions of violence (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 63).

According to Eriksson et al. (2018, p. 10), while it is not mentioned explicitly in the programme there are clear theoretical connections to Raewyn Connell's gender-theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity. This concept insists that gender norms cannot be separated from the social relations that invest and construct masculinity (Wedgwood, 2009, p. 332). Hegemonic masculinity and the gender order is hence according to Connell based on consent and legitimacy, which directly relates to the MVP-programme's focus on the role of the bystander in perpetuating norms that enable violence (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 10).

Several pitfalls and risks have been identified in relation to the MVP-programme. Results from an evaluation made on the first version of MVP, which rather than having ninth graders as mentors, has adults as leaders for elementary and high school students' points to the fact that said leaders, and some students, do not feel comfortable with MVP's theoretical approach (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 7). According to Eriksson et al. (2018, p. 75) "some leaders are hesitant about the perspective, or at least that it should be governing."

When the adult professionals are not completely rooted in the programme's starting points it poses a risk for the programme's intentions to not be fulfilled (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 79). In

order to achieve long-lasting change a prerequisite is support among employees (Jonsson, 2019, p. 21) regarding the theoretical perspectives that MVP is based upon. Hence, a promoting factor is the professional's manual fidelity (Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 8). Previous evaluations of prevention programmes have also highlighted the importance of programme fidelity (Cross & West, 2011, p. 10). Other promoting factors include that time is allocated for planning, execution, reflection, further development as well as connecting to the students' everyday lives (Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 83).

A hindering factor for the achievement of MVP's goals are the social dimensions (Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 8). An evaluation done on the first version of the MVP-programme highlights the fact that individualising explanatory models to violence were frequently used, mixed with the more structural explanatory models (Bruno et al., 2020, p. 151; Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 63). According to Eriksson et al. (2018, p. 65) such an approach, while not being ill-intentioned, could rather than problematize stereotypical notions of gender to some extent reproduce them. In an effort to problematize norms, and not consolidate stereotypical notions of gender, it is not sufficient to only reveal them, one also needs to challenge and destabilise them (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 67). The social dimensions may as well affect the ability to create a safe space during the MVP sessions, in conjunction with the classes being too large (Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 83). Additionally, identified within the first version, the teacher's teaching experience can become a hindering factor. In order to convey the MVP-programme's message it would, according to Gottzén et al. (2021, p. 83) require an unconventional approach. However, teachers who work as MVP-leaders have a tendency to return to conventional pedagogy.

An evaluation done on several schools with the first version as well as one school with the second version of the MVP-programme however show that positive changes are seen in the schools with the first version compared to the schools with the second version. Schools with the first version of MVP have a higher degree of bystander intervention than that of the schools with the second version where there rather is a decrease (Gottzén et al. 2021, p. 133). Positive change in relation to gender norms can also be found in the one school with the first version. However, since these differences are not statistically secured, with a small number of informants at the school with the first version, it complicates such conclusions. Some indication of attitude and behavioural movements can be made of the results. Although it is important to understand these results in relation to the schools initial positioning before the implementation of the MVP-programme (Gottzén et al. 2021, pp. 134-135). The schools that have implemented

the first version tend to be closer to the MVP objectives compared to the schools that have implemented the second version in the sense that the former has a significantly lower degree of reported violations prior to implementation (Gottzén et al. 2021, pp. 128-129). Albeit, it is also indicated that the schools with the first version of MVP have a higher manual fidelity, which is a promoting factor (Gottzén et al. 2021, p. 137). International studies also point to this claiming that in order to achieve positive outcomes, it is critical to have an effective implementation (Cross & West, 2011, p. 10).

While the gender-transformative approach of the programme can at times meet some resistance, World Health Organization as well as both Swedish and international studies makes clear that interventions with such an approach are deemed more efficient when wanting to achieve behavioural change regarding violence in general (Barker, Ricardo & Nascimento, 2007, p. 4; Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 9). Challenging and destabilising stereotypical notions of gender related to violence, which is the goal of MVP, would require professionals to themselves be in agreement with the theoretical starting points of the programme and work in accordance with them. Hence, it is of interest to explore the professionals', who implement and work with the MVP-programme, positioning regarding the gender theoretical starting points of the programme. It is also of interest to explore the professionals' structural perspective of violence and how they either reproduce an existing culture or promote and contribute to a different culture that is not characterised by abuse, sexism and homophobia.

3 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework applied for this study is presented. The theories and concepts chosen for this research are; hegemonic masculinity, social norms and undoing gender and bonding and bridging aspects of social capital. Since the purpose of this research is to study the gender theoretical starting points and structural perspective, which is the basis of MVP, the chosen concepts and theories will provide a framework wherein the social phenomena studied can be understood and the research findings can be interpreted.

3.1 Hegemonic masculinity

Raewyn Connell is an Australian sociologist whose theory of masculinity is the most prominent one in the field of men and masculinities, as well as other disciplines (Wedgwood, 2009, p. 329). A critical feminist analysis of historically specific masculinities, while also recognizing the different levels that individual men play in the reproduction of dominant forms of masculinity, is provided by Connell's theory of masculinity (Wedgwood, 2009, p. 330). While the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been contested (Connell, 2005, p. 18) Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 834) conclude that its framework has provided a lot for developing research on men and masculinity. Growing research on men and masculinity has allowed for the expansion of the concept relating to the diversity in masculinities, the documentation of the consequences and costs of hegemony, uncovering mechanisms of hegemony and tracing changes in hegemonic masculinities.

Research on men and masculinities can be useful for various questions in the social sciences. Gendered power has many different facets, men's predominant use of violence being one of them (the others being men's predominance in state authority and corporate management) (Connell, 2005, p. 20). The concept of hegemonic masculinity has influenced criminology. Research in criminology has shown that hegemonic masculinity is linked to certain patterns of aggression. The reason for this is through the pursuit of hegemony (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 834). Since men and boys perpetuate crime more than women and girls the concept has allowed for the theorization of the relationship among masculinities and among a variety of crimes. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has thus been helpful for violence-prevention programs for youth, which has been one of the primary fields where the concept has been

applied since its formulation (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 833). There is however not a consensus on how we ought to understand the connection made between masculine gender and violence. One cannot simply understand violence through gender, there are multiple causes to violence which varies cross-nationally, socially and over time (Connell, 2005, p. 258). Nevertheless, the concept of hegemonic masculinity will serve as a useful framework for this thesis and will be applied with caution based on this fact.

While the concept of hegemonic masculinity for the most part has been used to only depict negative characteristics associated with masculinity that are seen as cause of criminal behaviour, which has been one of the critiques of the concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 840) emphasises the fact that hegemony has numerous configurations and the defining characteristics are not always violence. However, in some contexts the parts of hegemonic masculinity that refer to men's engagement in harmful practices such as physical violence is a necessary framework.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 840) debunks the idea that hegemonic masculinity excludes "positive" behaviour of men by stating that "positive" actions are included such as being a breadwinner, being a father etc. In order for something to be constituted as hegemony it would require some level of consent and participation by subordinated groups, which would be difficult if the only characteristics of the dominant group were violence, aggression and self-centeredness. As stated by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 841) "the concept of hegemonic masculinity is not intended as a catchall nor as a prime cause; it is a means of grasping a certain dynamic within the social process".

One of the major structures of all documented societies is gender relations, the relations among groups and people. It is not upon isolated acts that the practice relating to this structure consists of but rather when speaking of masculinity and femininity it takes shape in larger units, which is a constant process of gender practice (Connell, 2005, p. 72). Practice is something that makes a world. When we act we change initial situations into new situations, "practice constitutes and re-constitutes structures". Human practice makes the reality we live in, thus the practices that construct masculinity makes the reality we live in. According to Connell (2005, p. 67) masculinity can be viewed as an aspect of a larger structure. "Gender is social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do" (Connell, 2005, p. 71).

Connell (2005, p. 76) recognizes that 'hegemonic masculinity' is not something that is fixed, meaning it is not always the same everywhere. 'Hegemony' as a concept "refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life". One form of masculinity is at any given time more culturally exalted than others. Hence, hegemonic masculinity can be understood as the current acceptable gender practice that legitimises patriarchy. Worth noting however is that hegemony can only be established if a correspondence exists between cultural ideals and institutional power. While violence often supports authority, it is rather the successful claim to authority through culture, institutions, and persuasion that is the indication of hegemony (Connell, 2005, p. 77; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). While a lot of men do not entirely meet the normative definitions of masculinity the majority of men are favoured by patriarchy (Connell, 2005, p. 77). In some local contexts displaying that you 'are a man' may even be demonstrated in the distance one takes from a regional hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840).

Since social practice is structured by gender in general it cannot be isolated from other social structures such as race and class. The interaction between different social structures is constant and has implications for the analysis of masculinity (Connell, 2005, pp. 75-76). In an effort to understand gender one needs to understand the other social structures such as class, race or global inequality and vice versa. Connell (2005, p. 76) recognizes that multiple masculinities exist. Within the overall framework of the cultural dominance relating to hegemony there is subordination of groups of men based on sexuality (Connell, 2005, p. 78) but also race, class, region and generation (Connell, 2005, p. 75; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 835-836, 839-840). In a gender hierarchy among men homosexual masculinities are according to Connell (2005, p. 78) at the bottom, however heterosexual men and boys can also have lower ranks. The process of excluding certain groups of men from the circle of legitimacy can be distinguished by verbal abuse that has an obvious link to femininity, with words such as sissy, wimp, motherfucker etc. (Connell, 2005, p. 77; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 834).

A site of gender configuration, where production and negotiation of masculinities takes place, are institutions such as the school (Connell, 2005, p. 73; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). While the school as a site has been used to study and research masculinity, there has according to Connell (2005, p. 238) been little discussion on how schools and education can be a site of the transformation of masculinity. There is a tendency to speak of education simply as the distribution of information by teachers to students, however that is only one part of the

process, “education is the formation of capacities for practice” (Connell, 2005, p. 239). Connell (2005, p. 239) emphasised the need for curricular justice, meaning that curriculum ought to be from the point of view of the least advantaged. This does not mean abandoning existing knowledge but rather to reconfigure it in an effort to expose what is concealed in current social inequalities. A step in this direction of gender relations that need to be taken decisively and delicately is for example involving boys in curriculum around the interests of girls as well as involving heterosexual students in curriculum about the LGBTQ+ community. This approach goes against what is systematically denied in hegemonic masculinity, which is the capacity for empathy (Connell, 2005, p. 240).

Additionally, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 848) illuminate that gender is always relational meaning that a contradistinction between patterns of masculinity and some model of femininity occur in an effort to point to the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order. If one were to ignore this one would fail to realise the role women have in the construction of gender among men. In the construction of masculinities, women are very much central in its processes as everything from mothers, girlfriends, schoolmates etc.

Important to note is that the change that occurs regarding hegemonic masculinity may also be intentional, which is the case in many educational intervention and change programs where adults as well as children criticise hegemonic masculinity and deconstruct gender binaries. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 848) there ought also to be an acknowledgement of the possibility of democratising gender relations when conceptualising hegemonic masculinity, and not simply reproducing hierarchy. It therefore exists an opportunity to work towards attempting to establish a “positive” hegemony among men. Doing this in practice is however very difficult (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 853).

By using the concept of hegemonic masculinity for this thesis I will attempt to understand and analyse the reproduction and re-constitution of gender relations. Gender is inseparable from the social relations that participate and construct masculinity (Wedgwood, 2009, p. 332). Hegemonic masculinity is according to Connell (2005, p. 18) essential when wanting to theorise gendered power relations among men as well as in understanding the effectiveness of masculinities in the legitimation of the gender order. Connell (2005, p. 18) also states that this is particularly necessary when wanting to address practical issues such as the prevention of violence, which is the focus for this thesis.

3.2 Social norms and undoing gender

Since hegemonic masculinity requires legitimacy, it is suitable to incorporate the concept of social norms in order to analyse the acquired data properly. While norms are necessary in order to live well and to know which direction we want to transform our social world, norms can also be constraining. This constraint can be expressed through violence done to us that we ought to oppose (Butler, 2004, p. 206). In an effort to understand the meaning of undoing restrictive normative conceptions of gendered life I will be using Butler's (2004) work. According to Butler (2004, p. 1) gender is an incessant activity that is performed, something that you are constantly doing (unknowingly and unwillingly). This however does not mean that the doing is something automatic or mechanical but rather "a practice of improvisation in a scene of constraint" (Butler, 2004, p. 1). Butler (2004, p. 1) emphasises that doing gender is an interaction made with or for others, whether the other is real or imaginary.

What constitutes our existence are social norms that do not originate with our individual personhood. The complexity in this is the fact that we are fundamentally dependent on these social norms for the viability of our individual personhood. Desire and recognition are linked together in the Hegelian tradition wherein desire is always a desire for recognition. One only becomes constituted as a socially viable being by the experience of recognition. However, important to note is that the terms that constitute a viable human being are changeable and can deprive some individuals of the possibility of achieving that status. How human beings are understood are a result of social norms. Factors that affect this understanding are for instance race and sex (Butler, 2004, p. 2).

If one does not want to be recognised within certain norms they would have to escape them. Distancing oneself from certain social norms that would grant recognition may lead to the impairment of one's social belonging. In order to deter from certain social norms, one needs the capacity to develop a critical relation to them. This capacity is collective and entails the articulation of alternative sustaining norms or ideals that one could act according to. "If I am someone who cannot *be* without *doing*, then the conditions of my doing are, in part, the conditions of my existence" (Butler, 2004, p. 3). Hence, according to Butler (2004, p. 3) presenting alternative ways of acting, or *doing*, allows for people to exist without acting in accordance with the social norms that they wish to distance themselves from.

3.3 Bonding and bridging aspects of social capital

In that gender is always relational and inextricable from social relations it is appropriate to include parts of social capital to the theoretical framework in an effort to further understand gender, as it is in the interaction with others that gender is conceptualized. The concept of social capital is associated with a number of outcomes that are normatively desirable for most people. Such outcomes include democratic stability, well-performing democratic institutions, economic growth, personal happiness, optimism and tolerance. The concept can be understood as access to and membership in various types of networks, generalised trust and norms of reciprocity. The part of social capital that is of most importance is the aspect of generalised interpersonal trust. This is due to the fact that the desired outcome of a particular network may not be achieved if there exist untrustworthy members (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 441).

According to the society-centred approach to social capital, regular social interaction, ideally through membership in voluntary associations, is considered the most important method in generating social capital. However, one cannot simply claim that associational membership of adults creates social capital that can be used in the wider society. There have been a number of studies done in different democratic countries that have called into question the effect of participation in many voluntary associations in relation to members' willingness to cooperate outside of the specific group. The social ability to trust and cooperate with others are desired traits and although it may be true that people who join voluntary associations tend to generally trust others more, activity in such organisations does not add much in these desired traits. Members tend to become purely more trusting of their fellow members and the cooperation is done for group purposes only (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 442).

Social interaction can manifest in various ways. One can distinguish groups according to the degree of contact members have with individuals unlike themselves. When having contact with people who are dissimilar, it is labelled bridging. Whereas when having contact with people like oneself, it is labelled bonding. Social interactions of the bridging sort are believed to create more desirable outcomes (Ceci, Masciarelli, Poledrini, 2020, p. 896; Kanas, van Tubergen & van der Lippe, 2009, p. 183; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 442).

4 Methodology

In this chapter the methodological approach of this research will be accounted for, including; research strategy and design, my positioning as researcher, data collection and sample selection, analysis of the data, ethical considerations, quality assurance as well as the limitations of the study.

4.1 Research strategy

Based on the research questions I aim to answer with this thesis I have conducted qualitative research. By employing a qualitative approach to my research I will be able to emphasise words, more specifically how the professionals interviewed interpret their social world (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 3; Bryman, 2012, p. 36). Qualitative research tends to have an epistemological positioning, i.e. view on what should be regarded as acceptable knowledge, that is interpretivist, which applies to this thesis. Interpretivism entails that there is an emphasis on how participants of a social world interpret said social world, which in extension informs the examination the researcher does of said social world (Bryman, 2012, pp. 27, 380). Interpretivism emerged through a critique of the applicability of the scientific model to the study of the social world. It has been influenced by various intellectual traditions that share the view that people and their institutions as subject matter of the social sciences is intrinsically different from that of the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012, p. 28). Interpretivism hence requires a strategy that realises the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman, 2012, p. 30). Adopting an interpretivist epistemology does not simply entail how members of a social group interpret the world around them, it is however the first level of interpretation. The second level of interpretation is when the researcher interprets the interpretation of others'. The third level of interpretation entails the interpretation of the researcher's interpretations through literature of a discipline, concepts and theories (Bryman, 2012, p. 31).

As for ontology, the nature of social entities, qualitative research tends to have an ontological positioning that is constructionist, which applies to this thesis. Constructionism asserts that social phenomena is not something that is separate from individuals but rather something that is the outcome of the continual interactions between individuals as social actors. Hence, social

actors are understood to be part of the construction of social phenomena (Bryman, 2012, p. 33 & 380). The idea of culture can be understood through a constructionist position as a continuous state of construction and reconstruction rather than an external reality that acts on and constrains people. Bryman (2012, p. 34) however emphasises that “the constructionist position cannot be pushed to the extreme”. One ought to be cognizant of how culture has a reality that predates and persists the involvement of certain people, which shapes their perspectives. This shaping however cannot be understood as a static objective reality which only implies constraint. It rather “acts as a point of reference but is always in the process of being formed”. Constructionism also suggests that people employ categories in order to understand the natural and social world. These categories are viewed as social products that have their meaning “constructed in and through interaction”. Such a category is ‘masculinity’. Masculinity can therefore be understood as a social construction whose meaning is built up during interaction and which varies depending on time and place (Bryman, 2012, p. 34).

Since the empirical point of departure in this qualitative research was the perspectives of the professionals interviewed an abductive reasoning was employed. An abductive approach to research implies that the researcher needs to have a scientific account, a theoretical understanding, for the explanation and understanding of the participants' contexts and perspectives of their worldviews. It is critical that the researcher, when arriving at a scientific account, do not lose sight of the participants' worldviews, since the scientific account ought to be grounded in it (Bryman, 2012, p. 401). As a researcher I was previously cognizant of the theoretical starting points of the MVP-programme, which guided me in the formulation of the purpose and the research questions of this thesis. During the data collection, which will be further discussed in 4.4, it was made clear that the theory on hegemonic masculinity as well as social norms and undoing gender were in line with the participants' worldviews. After further assessment of the empirical data the bonding and bridging aspects of the concept of social capital were also identified as a supplementary scientific account of the participants' perspectives.

4.2 Situating myself

Since the ontological positioning of this thesis is constructionist, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the researcher's own constructions in their account of the social world. This would imply that "the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive" (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). This acknowledgement goes in line with reflexivity which is a term that signifies the awareness the researcher has of their values, biases and location in time and social space which will affect the knowledge generated (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). I as a researcher have to be introspective of the fact that am a young black woman with parents who immigrated to Sweden, who has lived in various areas and cities of Sweden as well as abroad, and how my values, biases and beliefs that have been shaped by my experiences will influence how I understand and interpret the data collected.

Another aspect of reflexivity is the consideration of the relationship the researcher has with the ones being studied (Bryman, 2012, p. 394). Considering I have lived in the municipality that is the focus of this research, one could view my positioning as a researcher to be that of an insider. Doing insider research has its advantages, which include greater access, understanding and rapport, as well as disadvantages, such as bias, subjectivity and lack of critical distance. There exists a variety of insider roles, which could be based on race, ethnicity and various forms of community (Toy-Cronin, 2018, p. 2). Important to note however is that it is not possible for a researcher to completely be an insider not an outsider. The insider-outsider dichotomy is complex, fluid and multidimensional. A researcher has many characteristics and their belonging to a group in one dimension, shared race for example, "does not necessarily equate to 'inside' status with the group if the researcher's other characteristics mean they are also 'outside' the group" (Toy-Cronin, 2018, p. 3). Since I am only an insider in the aspects of having lived in the municipality, and being second-generation immigrant, I consider my 'partial insider positioning' as an advantage that can be realised without compromising ethical practice (Toy-Cronin, 2018, pp. 14-15).

4.3 Case study design

The case study design often favours qualitative methods, which already were employed for this research (Bryman, 2012, p. 68). Employing a case study design entails conducting a comprehensive analysis of a single case. A case study is hence “concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question” (Bryman, 2012, p. 66). Such a case is associated with a location, such as a community for example, and there is an emphasis on the “intensive examination of the setting” (Bryman, 2012, p. 67). The case developed during the research process came to be a school that had implemented the MVP-programme in the setting of a municipality in a large city in Sweden. Since the interest of this study is the MVP-programme specifically in this context, the case in its own right is the focus of interest. The municipality in question is not simply a backdrop to the findings but rather a part of the unit of analysis in conjunction with the sample (Bryman, 2012, p. 68). Since the professionals’ work in school that early implemented MVP in Sweden the case of my choice could be called a representative, typical, exemplifying case because it “exemplifies a broader category of which it is a member” and provides “a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered” (Bryman, 2012, p. 70).

There exist several misconceptions about case study research, one of which is that generalisations cannot be made of a single case and therefore the single-case study does not contribute to scientific development. This particular misconception is also interconnected with the misconception that case studies are not suitable for hypothesis testing and theory building but rather more useful for the generation of hypotheses (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 219). The subject of generalisation will be further discussed in 4.7, however it is of importance to shortly mention this when discussing this particular research design. While generalisation can at times be appropriate and valuable (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 225), it is imperative to emphasise that formal generalisation is only one of the practical skills that can be employed when conducting scientific research. Generalisation “is considerably overrated as the main source of scientific progress” and only represents one way people can gain and accumulate knowledge. A case study that has no attempts to generalise but that is purely descriptive is in and of itself a legitimate method of scientific inquiry. Case studies can therefore be part of the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or society and could aid in paving the way for scientific innovation (Flyvbjerg, 2006, pp. 226-227).

4.4 Data collection and sample selection

In order to answer my research questions, I conducted qualitative interviewing. Qualitative interviewing is characterised as being flexible, where one values what the respondents understands to be important and relevant and can therefore adapt the questions being asked based on the respondents' replies. What the research emphasises can be adjusted based on significant issues brought up in the respondents' answers. Hence, the researcher wants to collect in-depth answers (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). Since the intention of this thesis is to understand the experiences of professionals who implement and work with the MVP-programme, I more specifically conducted semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012, p. 472).

In the beginning of each interview I went through the purpose of the study, asked to record the interview and how the data will be handled (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). For further information, see the information letter in both Swedish and English in appendix 8.1 and 8.2. The interviews were held in Swedish and I used an interview guide as a script which I followed to a certain degree. The interview guide contained specific questions relating to the specific topic of this research. Although I was guided by set questions, which were asked to all respondents, conducting semi-structured interviews allowed for the respondents to be flexible in their answers. The flexibility that is afforded with qualitative interviewing also relies on my ability as a researcher to notice and pick up on the things expressed by the respondents that can allow me to ask questions that may not be included in the interview guide (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). The interview guide employed for this thesis can be found in appendix 8.3 and 8.4 in both Swedish and English. How and where the interviews were held was based on what was most suitable for the respondents. Only one interview was conducted in real life at the school whereas the rest were conducted through phone interviews. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour.

Purposive sampling has been employed in order to select people with direct reference to the research questions that I have posed, in order for them to be answered (Bryman, 2012, pp. 416, 418). I was initially interested in the participation of eight professionals from three different schools that are working in schools that have implemented the MVP-programme in the municipality. This would have entailed teachers as well as social workers that are working as school counsellors. In an effort to achieve this goal snowball sampling was used (Bryman,

2012, p. 418). This sampling technique entails starting with a small group of sampled participants relevant to the research that will then suggest additional potential respondents (Bryman, 2012, p. 424). The process of sampling respondents was done through messaging and emailing principals, vice principals and staff from schools that had implemented MVP in the municipality. Only two principals replied. One principal stated that the school was busy and could not be of help. Another principal forwarded the email that I had sent that contained the information letter to the staff at the school, without result. One staff replied however and wanted to partake. Through this sampled respondent, three other respondents from the same school were sampled. Although the goal was to have more respondents for the study from other schools as well, as time went on it seemed necessary to redefine the case to become one school in the municipality.

The majority of the respondents sampled were teachers and one other respondent did not have a pedagogical role but is attached to a position related to student health. The majority of the respondents had only worked with MVP for 1-2 years whereas one respondent had worked with it for a long time. When conducting one of the interviews, which was held in real life at the school, I unconsciously took the opportunity to make observations (Bryman, 2012, p. 46). While I was walking along with the respondent in the school I was able to observe the physical environment and hastily see the interaction between school students and the respondent. Apart from this, an observation by chance was made by me outside of the school and the municipality that related to the topic of this study. The observations made contributed to my understanding in conjunction with my pre-understanding.

4.5 Transcription and thematic analysis

In order to structure and analyse all the data collected I firstly transcribed the interviews that had been conducted. “Transcription is a powerful act of representation” and the transcription process ought therefore to be presented (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005, p. 1287). The style employed when transcribing was predominantly drawn from denaturalism. Employing the transcription style of denaturalism entailed the exclusion of idiosyncratic elements of speech, such as involuntary vocalisation, stutters, pauses etc. (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005, pp. 1273-1274). With the choice of employing a denaturalised transcription an acknowledgement

has to be made of its potential constraints. A critique directed towards denaturalised transcription is that the transcription could risk over-filtering the data through a priori assumptions (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005, p. 1279). Despite this a denaturalised transcription was chosen since the interest lies in the informational content of speech, the substance of the interview. The choice was based on the research objective, wanting to explore the professionals' experiences of working with the MVP-programme and how they understand them (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005, p. 1277). Since I also made observations both during one of the interviews as well as a private person, field notes were written as well.

Once the data collected had been transcribed and the field notes had been written down, I employed the approach of thematic analysis. While thematic analysis may be the most common approach to qualitative data analysis, there are no specific or distinctive techniques to utilise when employing the approach (Bryman, 2012, pp. 578, 580). There is no consensus regarding what constitutes a theme, some imply that a theme equates to a code whereas others suggest that a theme is built up of several codes (Bryman, 2012, p. 578). Nevertheless, a theme could be understood as an identified category of the data built on codes that relates to the research focus and the research questions and provides the base for theoretical understanding of the data (Bryman, 2012, p. 580). Bryman (2012, p. 581) accounts for Ryan and Bernard's suggestions for conducting a thematic analysis, which includes searching for repetitions, transitions, similarities and differences as well as using social scientific concepts as points of departure in the search for themes. The previous mentioned steps in conducting a thematic analysis were used for this thesis.

Repetitions, which is the most common criteria for constituting a theme (Bryman, 2012, p. 580), was utilised in conjunction with its relevance to the research questions and focus. The four transcriptions were read through several times, similar statements were grouped into themes and subthemes, and previous literature and theories were applied where appropriate. The flexibility of a thematic analysis approach allowed for a wide range of analytical options and for a large body of data to be summarised through key features and disparities (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 37). During this process different angles of approach were tested that all relate to gender, such as intersectionality and the socio-ecological model. While the theory on hegemonic masculinity and social norms and undoing gender had already been identified previously to data collection through the literature review, they were further strengthened by the data. However, since the concept of intersectionality was being accounted for in the theory

on hegemonic masculinity, and the socio-ecological model had previously been accounted for, the decision was made to relinquish them from the theoretical framework. It was also during this process that the addition of bridging and bonding aspects of social capital to the theoretical framework was done. Translation was done immediately during the writing up of the analysis.

4.6 Ethical considerations

When conducting social research ethical issues will arise (Bryman, 2012, p. 130). When speaking of the ethical principles of research four main areas, which somewhat overlap, have been identified; harm to participants (confidentiality), lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception (Bryman, 2012, p. 135). In an effort to fulfil these principles an information letter was sent out to the respondents through e-mail. The issue of harm to participants entails various facets, but mainly concerns maintaining the confidentiality of records and identities (Bryman, 2012, pp. 135-136; Kaiser, 2012, p. 457). Additionally, care needs to be taken when publishing findings to make sure that individuals or places are not identified or identifiable (Bryman, 2012, p. 136; Kaiser, 2012, p. 462). Conducting qualitative research, which is the case for this study, poses its challenges when manoeuvring the ethical principle of confidentiality (Bryman, 2012, p. 136) since “ethical challenges and dilemmas are unexpected and emerge as research unfolds” (Toy-Cronin, 2018, p. 13).

While it is not entirely possible to identify which circumstances would imply risk of harm, nevertheless effort ought to be made in seeking to protect participants from harm (Bryman, 2012, p. 138). For this research the decision was initially made to identify the municipality without the use of pseudonyms since it initially was planned to have respondents from several schools in the municipality. When the research turned into a single case study the question arose whether the municipality still ought to be mentioned by name. During this phase in the research process in spite of this turn of events, the decision was still made to have the municipality remain identified with the motivation that municipality has previously been mentioned in both internal and external evaluations. However, further into the work during the seminar treatment of the thesis it was concluded that the municipality ought to be unidentified. Since this was concluded, referencing that revealed the municipality was excluded from the introduction and background. Anonymization had to be done throughout the literature review

as well. Since the research unfolded into a case study with the focus of one school, the decision was made to keep the name of the school, and the area in the municipality that the school is in, anonymous.

In an effort to decrease the chances of the respondents to be identified or identifiable, the respondents received the pseudonyms Respondent 1-4, or [R1]-[R4] (Bryman, 2012, p. 136; Kaiser, 2012, p. 462). The sex and age of the respondents, as well as exactly how long they had worked with MVP, have been in mind during the analysing process. However, detailed accounts of their sex and age has not been disclosed. The respondents' role in the school and how long they had worked with MVP were somewhat disclosed with motivation that if not disclosed it would risk affecting an accurate account of the social world experienced by them (Kaiser, 2012, p. 457). While pseudonyms are used to describe the respondents, the usage of snowball sampling complicates the achievement of full confidentiality, since the participants are colleagues of each other and have suggested each other for the participation of the study. In an effort to combat this dilemma, the respondents have not been numbered in the order that the interviews were conducted in.

The ethical principle of informed consent entails that research participants are informed about the study and the research process (Bryman, 2012, p. 138; Vetenskapsrådet, 2017, p. 8). This ethical principle is very closely related to the ethical principle that concerns deception. Deception would occur if the research is presented to be something that it is not (Bryman, 2012, p. 143; Vetenskapsrådet, 2017, p. 8). Fulfilling these principles comes with its challenges since minor transgressions pervade most social research. Such transgression could be deliberately underestimating the amount of time an interview will take or not detailing everything about the research in order to not contaminate the respondents answers to the interview questions (Bryman, 2012, pp. 134, 139, 143), which could also simply be based on the fact that qualitative studies tend to be less predictable (Bryman, 2012, p. 140). While informed consent forms are preferred, the decision was made to exclude written consent forms and only obtain verbal consent based on the difficulty in sampling respondents for this study, in an attempt to not prompt concerns of prospective participants so that they would decline to participate (Bryman, 2012, p. 140). The notion of informed consent is very much linked to invasion of privacy. While participants may have given their informed consent, meaning their right to privacy has temporarily been surrendered for that limited domain, their entire right to privacy has not been

surrendered. Participants can at any time refuse to answer certain questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 142).

In an effort to cover all these ethical principles in practice the information letter covered the purpose of the study and the methods used in addition to the guaranteed confidentiality of participants and their right to withdraw their consent at any time. Moreover, the maintenance of the recordings of the interviews were accounted for (Bryman, 2012, p. 143; Kaiser, 2012, p. 462; Marzano, 2012, p. 443). Regarding the observations made it could be deemed as ethical transgression by including them in the research. While there previously were no intentions of conducting observations as part of the methods used for this study, which as previously mentioned is common for researchers of qualitative research to not anticipate the ethical issues that can arise (Toy-Cronin, 2018, p. 13), it was concluded that including the observations in my findings did not cause any harm to the respondents. Additionally, another aspect that was brought to light during the analysis process was in regard to the youth who are participating in the study as third parties. The respondents' negative interpretations of the youth, their parents and family as well as the local community can be hurtful. Came to the conclusion, however, that the focus is to develop and problematize the violence prevention work with MVP.

4.7 Quality assurance

When conducting social research there are three prominent criteria of evaluation as for the quality of the research; reliability, replication, and validity (Bryman, 2012, p. 46). The discussion on these criteria's often centres on quantitative research rather than qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 48). However, it is still of relevance to discuss these aspects in relation to qualitative research in order to evaluate the quality of the research. Moreover, it is important due to the critique of qualitative research being too subjective, difficult to replicate, problems of generalisation and lacking transparency (Bryman, 2012, pp. 405-406).

The criteria of reliability concern whether the results of a study are repeatable (Bryman, 2012, p. 46; Hernon & Schwartz, 2009). Replication as a criterion is close to reliability and has to do with the replicability of findings of others. Lastly, validity pertains to the integrity regarding conclusions of the research. Four different types of validity are distinguished; measurement validity, internal validity, external validity and ecological validity (Bryman, 2012, pp. 47-48).

There is no consensus among writers regarding the applicability of the concepts of reliability and validity in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 48). Bryman (2012, p. 69) however states that when conducting a case study research, it is up to the researcher to determine whether the criteria are appropriate to consider.

For writers conducting case study research of the qualitative kind however, it is most common for these criteria to either be minimised or to not be mentioned at all. Nevertheless, discussion of the factor of external validity in case study research is recurring. The concern relates to how a single case could generate findings that are generalizable (Hernon & Schwartz, 2009), which is the standard criticism of the case study (Bryman, 2012, pp. 69, 71). Bryman (2012, p. 71) however emphasises that case study researchers do not aim to present generalizable results but to rather intensely examine a single case and engage in a theoretical analysis. The crucial question concerning case study research is hence the quality of the theoretical reasoning, i.e. how well theory is generated out of the findings. Case study researchers are however able to generalise by utilising findings from similar studies (Bryman, 2012, p. 71). An emphasis on how validity ought to be adapted for qualitative research is however made by Bryman (2012, p. 389), concluding that validity imply that “you are observing, identifying, or ‘measuring’ what you say you are” (Bryman, 2012, pp. 389-390).

Bryman (2012, p. 390) additionally introduces the criterion external reliability, which similarly to reliability and replication concern replicability. Fulfilling such a criterion in qualitative research is, as previously mentioned, difficult since a study’s social setting and circumstances cannot be frozen in time. As for internal validity it relates to the correspondence between the researchers’ observation and the theoretical ideas developed by them. In qualitative search internal validity could be a strength. This is particularly the case when conducting ethnographic research since “the prolonged participation in the social life of a group over a long period of time allows the researcher to ensure a high level of congruence between concepts and observations” (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). However, since I as a researcher has the position of being a partial insider, who has prolonged experiences of living in the municipality as well as other identification markers such as being second-generation immigrant, I believe that I possess a higher level of congruence between the observations made with the concepts applied (Bryman, 2012, p. 390).

4.8 Limitations and delimitations

Throughout the methodology an account has been made of the limitations of the methods employed during the production of this thesis. Additionally, attention needs to be drawn to how the thesis is limited to the experiences of professionals that work with the MVP-programme. The choice was made not to have the study focus on the children and youth's experiences of participating in such a prevention programme based on their ages being between 12-15 years of age. Including the participation of the children, whether through interviews or observations, would imply ethical issues concerning whether or not adequate informed consent could be given by children (Uppsala Universitet, n.d.). As previously mentioned, the initial idea was to interview eight professionals. Having a larger sample size, with more participants who had worked with the MVP-programme for a longer time, would have strengthened this thesis. However, due to the time limit we had in conducting this thesis more time could not have been allocated to try and garner a larger sample size. Nevertheless, the interviews conducted were in-depth and provided with a large amount of data that could be analysed and processed to generate knowledge relating to the incentives of the research.

5 Findings and analysis

The aim of this research was to examine the professionals', that work with the MVP-programme, position themselves in relation to the gender theoretical starting points and structural perspective of the programme and their experience of the work in the context of a socioeconomically disadvantaged area in a large city in Sweden. Through analysing the gathered empirical data three themes were identified in regard to the purpose of the study. While these themes may connect on several points they were divided into these themes in an effort to capture the nuances and the different angles of approach to analysing the empirical data. The themes identified were; (1) The arena of prevention, (2) Working with youth at school, and (3) The key persons own positioning.

5.1 The arena of prevention

The respondents express concern regarding working in the municipality, a predominantly socioeconomically disadvantaged area, stating that it poses its challenges: *"It is a rough area we live in here in Sweden as well, it is very difficult."* [R1]. The difficulty of the area can be attributed to the violence one sees and which has become normalised: *"some find it very easy to justify violence in different ways At the societal level."* [R2]. The normalisation of violence is understood on a societal level. Respondent 4 state that it is upon each and every one of us to act as proactive bystanders against the negative development in Swedish society today. However, working towards creating proactive bystanders of youth in a school environment has its limitations, depending on the area. Respondent 4 proceeds in telling how it is common for youth to be selling drugs for other older people in the neighbourhood, either for financial reasons or for group affiliation or whatnot. They elaborate on how when they meet these youths in grade eight or nine they either tend to opt out, which is rarely considered to happen, or they end up in severe criminal and violent behaviour. Actively working against an existing violent culture may also come with repercussions for professionals. A respondent reveal how they previously have received threats due to interfering with a student's track towards engaging in criminal activity. These sorts of accounts show how early prevention efforts in schools that are located in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas are counteracted by outside influences.

The local community in the municipality is affected by violence and criminality and the response from the city at large is not always helpful. Respondent 1 mentioned how even though there has been a steady decrease in rent and that a lot of people with immigrant descent move to the municipality, a lot of people still move away from the municipality. This sort of segregating tendencies is echoed by respondent 4 who experiences resistance from both sides. When this respondent tried to find internships for the students in the city centre, neither students nor potential employers were fond of the idea. Said respondent states that a lot of students in the school may not have ever left the municipality and that it would be beneficial for both the students and people in the city centre to engage and interact with one another. One respondent experiences how their presence at the school in question may have an impact,

When I started at this school all my students thought I was a homosexual because I have a pretty masculine profile, so in that way it is good that I have this... it is difficult when you do not get much representation. [R3]

The presence of Respondent 3, that deviates from the norm in the particular school and local area in general, provides the students with representation of a norm-breaking appearance and an interaction with someone whom they may be hesitant to interact with, since it may be different to them. This example from Respondent 3 shows how the professionals themselves also can work as representatives of someone who is not the norm, or at least not the norm for the particular school or area. The same respondent proceeds in stating how macho culture permeates the school,

The biggest problem we have is macho culture and it's a lot of fun quarrels and it's not just macho culture then I'm not just talking about the boys but it's the girls too, a lot of culture about being tough and strong and that it's okay. [R3]

According to the respondent, macho culture expresses itself in the school in the form of fun quarrels, being tough and strong. Furthermore, according to the same respondent there is no current representation among the students, what they are aware of, of feminine boys and very masculine girls in the school. However, they do note that if anything there is always a surplus of masculine girls: *“there is always a surplus of masculine girls than feminine boys”* [R3]. The

lack of representation of norm-breaking boys and girls is by two respondents compared to that of students in the city centre,

I think there are more parents (in the city centre) who are interested in gender. I mean everything comes not only from us teachers who are to teach about gender but it is also from the families as well, letting their children wear whatever they want. Here it is families who are very indoctrinated in how to be a boy and how to be a girl and it shows. [R3]

According to these respondents the parents and the families play a large role in how the concept of gender and its attributing characteristics are shaped for the youth. The respondents imply that parents and families from the municipality in question are behind in the exploration of gender and the concept of being non-gender conforming: *“I think that this particular part of [the city as a whole] needs to get a little further I think in these parts of norm-critical thinking and how to do gender.”* [R3]. The parents and the families who live in the city centre are understood by the respondents to have come further along in the discussion of gender: *“I think if you are in a school in [the city centre], I think things like this happen much much more naturally because you see it is represented much much more.”* [R3]. Depending on the parents or the families’ opinions in relation to gender and what determines gender and how gender is done, it is understood to have an impact on the children who are students in a school where their conceptualisation of gender will be expressed not only through themselves but also in their interaction with others and their reception of others.

All respondents mention the role that the family plays in the success of a programme such as MVP. According to them they can say but so much, but if the message they try to convey is being met with resistance at home it is very difficult. Three respondents recall an occasion in the school where a student had been called gay by other students and said student had simply confirmed that he was gay and was met with acceptance and support from other students. One of the respondents however stated how the gay students parent had called the school after their child had come out as a homosexual and blamed the school: *“The father called the school and said that it was your fault that my son had become gay”* [R3]. This is an example of how the objectives of the MVP-programme, which in part is to increase the acceptance of non-stereotypical notions of gender including different sexual orientations, is met with resistance from the parents and the family. The same respondent expresses how: *“It is absolutely fantastic to get a guy at a school who is in an area like this who actually says he is gay, so there is a lot*

of homophobia among my students I can say.” [R3]. The respondent acknowledges the existence of homophobia among students, which can be reflected in the previous response of the parent. One respondent connects this by stating: *“it’s a lot about upbringing”* [R2]. An additional respondent, Respondent 1, expresses how the school is far from reality when it comes to accepting different sexual orientations and how you get teased if you are believed to be gay. However, the existence of homophobia in the school does not mean that all the students are homophobic. Another respondent brought up an example of how students: *“they might be able to accept it but they would never be able to bring home a friend who was just because the parents might not”* [R1]. According to the respondent students that may express acceptance towards people of different sexual orientations may still have to orient themselves around their parents’ level of acceptance when it comes to inviting friends home.

Another respondent also mentioned how when they experience resistance from the students concerning the contents of the MVP-programme they have in some instances had meetings with the parents: *“we have even had in some cases where we had meetings with the parents.”* [R4]. An example of such a meeting that ended up being successful according to Respondent 4 was when a student had expressed negative opinions about people that are part of the LGBTQ+ community. During a meeting with the parents, the student and the respondent, it was revealed that one of the students’ parents had a very close friend that happened to be gay. The student was in disbelief because as they had understood it their parents were not accepting of such things. Respondent 4 however also acknowledged that such a successful outcome, according to them, is not always the case. Oftentimes when conducting such meetings with the parents outside of the MVP sessions the goal is to understand where the student has gotten their opinions from. There are other instances where the parents say that they do not accept people of different sexual orientations based on their religion for example according to Respondent 4. This sentiment, relating homophobia with religion, is frequently echoed by the students and is something that was reoccurring throughout the interviews as well.

One respondent mentions that the school receives the most newly arrived immigrants in all of the municipality with a total of four classes.

Only in our school we have four classes with only newly arrived immigrants, and it is the most in the whole of the municipality. Every other school does not have four classes, for example. [R4].

Based on this it is apparent that the situation in this particular school differs from that of others. The same respondent mentioned how some of the students do not always know where they will be living the next week. This statement is indicative of how the experience of not only the students themselves but also the professionals who are staff in the school will be different compared to a school that consists of students who are born in Sweden, perhaps to ethnically Swedish parents, and who come from financially stable families.

All respondents stated that the occurrence of name calling is frequent at the school. One respondent mentioned that the insults relate to someone not belonging to the norm: *“It can be insults among students that indicate that they do not belong to any kind of norm simply.”* [R2]. Another respondent elaborated on how these insults between students may look in practice by stating,

It is usually again the everyday and it is usually that someone calls someone gay or when you play football: - you are a sissy. The word sissy is associated with the fact that you are weak, either you are a girl or you are gay. They do not want to say it outright but that's how they think a little. [R4]

This sort of example point to how the name calling can be oriented to sexual orientation, whether someone is gay or not based on what is perceived to be strong or weak. The same respondent proceeds in stating how the name calling also could be oriented toward something other than sexual orientation: *“We have students who call our newcomers or unaccompanied minors ‘forex’.”* [R4]. Students who are newly arrived immigrants also get made fun of by other students. This sort of name calling is understood by the respondent to lead to greater violence and has resulted in many fights in the school. Another respondent states that it is very hard for newly arrived immigrant students to get accepted,

Those who are perhaps a little more immigrants who have just entered the country they stick to themselves because they feel alienated from the others because they are not really accepted. Then after two years maybe they start to make friends who have been in Sweden longer. [R1]

Students who are newly arrived immigrants experience a harder time making friends at the school according to Respondent 1. Based on this, groupings are created between students. The

name calling occurring in the school can be attributed to a couple of things, namely sexual orientation or whether or not you are a foreigner that haven't adapted to Sweden yet, which all relate to whether or not one fit the norm or not.

The surplus of masculine girls in the school can be understood through Connell's theory on masculinity. While Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 848) explain that gender is always relational, meaning there is a distinction between the masculine and the feminine, wherein women play a role in the construction of gender among men. The surplus of masculine girls can be understood as the girls wanting to, and it being more socially acceptable, rank themselves higher in the patriarchal gender order. As Connell (2005, p. 76) describes, the concept of hegemony signifies a group's leading position in social life that is sustained through a cultural dynamic. Said cultural dynamic implies the existence of consent and participation by subordinated groups, such as girls and women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). Hence, girls tending to be more masculine could be attributed to the fact that boys and men, i.e. masculinity, generally are positioned higher in social life. One could therefore describe it as the masculine girls being in pursuit of hegemony. In this pursuit of hegemony, it can be understood as the masculine girls' reproducing hierarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 834, 853).

The mentioning of upbringing and parents is most certainly of importance, especially since the municipality employs a socio-ecological model for their prevention work. By doing so one can be able to identify risk and protective factors for violence at the relationship level. When students' families do not agree with the MVP-programme it can be understood as the children may then be in a conflict (or ambivalence) between the school's ambition and what they encounter in their families and in their congregation. The initiatives that target the relationship level, which includes the family and the parents, in the municipality were however not mentioned once during the interviews. This can be an indication that the interviewed professionals are not aware of these initiatives that could benefit their work with the youth. In order for the employment of a socio-ecological model to become successful it is required that knowledge-raising is a constant aspect.

While keeping the socio-ecological model in mind when working preventatively with youth one still has to be cognizant of the intersecting social structures that are taking place. According to Connell (2005, pp. 75-76) an analysis on masculinity cannot be done by isolating the social

structure of gender from other social structures such as race and class. The comparison of parents from the municipality in question and parents from the city centre indicates a lack of awareness of the intersection between social structures. Since gender does not occur in a vacuum, not acknowledging how the parents are products of their environment, culture and society, there is a risk of statements criticising upbringing and parents becoming individualising. The MVP-programme assumes a structural perspective in order to explain and understand violence, meaning that an individual's expressions of violence is enabled by a culture that legitimises homophobia, sexism and abuse (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 63). Butler (2004, p. 2) explains that while social norms do not originate from individual persons, individuals are fundamentally dependent on them for recognition (Butler, 2004, p. 2).

Despite this, the tendency to express oneself in individualising terms is something also reflected in the earlier literature. According to Eriksson et al. (2018, p. 63) and Bruno et al. (2020, p. 151) who made an evaluation of the first version of the MVP-programme emphasised how frequently individualising explanatory models to violence were used in tandem with structural explanatory models. This can according to Gottzén et al. (2021, p. 8) be a hindering factor. While it may not be intentional nor ill-intentioned, individualising sentiments can according to Eriksson et al. (2018, p. 65) rather reproduce stereotypical notions of gender rather than problematizing them. The parents in the municipality that oppose MVP's objectives may want to be recognized by existing heteronormative norms for example, in order for their social belonging to not become negatively affected. A collective capacity is required in order to go against existing social norms (Butler, 2004, p. 3).

Parents from the city centre tend to be ethnically Swedish and wealthy, or at least financially stable, whereas parents from the municipality in question tend to have immigrant background and tend to be socioeconomically disadvantaged. When one respondent mentioned above that 'reality' is not in the municipality, pointing to the fact that there is less of an acceptance towards people who are LGBTQ+, it indicates that there could only be one reality. Based on the differences between for example parents in the city centre versus parents in the municipality everyone's reality does not look the same. On the one hand it could be understood that parents from the city centre have less inequalities intersecting and that they are therefore being afforded the privilege of being 'gender interested'. On the other hand, the interest in gender for parents from the city centre could be understood as them having a greater capacity (Butler, 2004, p. 3) to develop a critical relationship towards heteronormative and homophobic social norms.

Parents from the city centre may have more of a capacity since a greater bridging social capital exchange (Ceci, Masciarelli, Poledrini, 2020, p. 896; Kanas, van Tubergen & van der Lippe, 2009, p. 183; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 442), with specifically LGBTQ+ people, may contribute to a wider array of articulated alternative ideals and sustaining norms that are accepting of people who are LGBTQ+. Desirable traits such as the social ability to trust and cooperate with others require social interactions of the bridging kind, where people who are different from one another socialise with each other. However, based on the accounts of the respondents, it seems as though the students from the municipality in question take part in bonding like social interactions, meaning they solely interact with people who are similar to them. Such a social interaction can lead to distrust towards people unlike yourself (Ceci, Masciarelli, Poledrini, 2020, p. 896; Kanas, van Tubergen & van der Lippe, 2009, p. 183; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 442).

The professionals working as representatives of norm-breaking behaviour is however a way for the students to experience more bridging interactions (Ceci, Masciarelli, Poledrini, 2020, p. 896; Kanas, van Tubergen & van der Lippe, 2009, p. 183; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 442). This exemplifies how the school is a site for gender configuration, wherein the respondents very presence affects the production and negotiation of masculinity taking place (Connell, 2005, p. 73; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). Interactions with or for others is what it means to do gender (Butler, 2004, p. 1). It is the relations of groups and people that constitutes gender relations, gender is thus a social practice. It is within this social practice that masculinity is constructed (Connell, 2005, pp. 71-72). If social practice changes, for example if students or parents from the municipality in question were to leave it for more bridging sorts of social interaction, it could lead to more tolerance (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 441) as well as the construction of a different sort of masculinity, preferably the kind that is non-violent based on MVP's objectives.

The phenomenon of name calling that occurs in the school could through Connell's theory on masculinity be understood as a marker of an existing hierarchy (Connell, 2005, p. 77; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 834). According to Connell (2005, p. 78) there exists hierarchies within masculinities that get distinguished by verbal abuse that is linked to femininity, being a "sissy" for example. Such name calling indicates how homosexual masculinities have lower ranks. Besides homosexual masculinities having lower ranks, other masculinities exist as well that are subordinated, such as the newly arrived immigrant students. The newly arrived

immigrant students are ranked lower in said hierarchy and are subject to ostracism that rather is about race, ethnicity and nationality than that of sexual orientation for example (Connell, 2005, p. 76).

In earlier literature it is emphasised by Katz (2018, p. 1767) how the problems of gender violence prevention do not have a “one size fits all” solution. It is apparent that students living in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas who participate in the MVP-programme are in need of a different approach, which has been clear based on the differences between the second version and the first version of the MVP-programme. Additionally, one could argue that students who live in wealthier neighbourhoods with less ethnic diversity such as in the city centre are in need of being exposed to topics such as race and honour-related violence and oppression as well. This could contribute the understanding of different peoples’ social situations and could possibly pave the way for more bridging social interactions (Ceci, Masciarelli, Poledrini, 2020, p. 896; Kanas, van Tubergen & van der Lippe, 2009, p. 183; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 442), that is a mutual interaction, that would be benefitting to the goal of a society free of violence.

5.1.1 Anchoring the MVP-programme in the youths’ everyday lives

Despite some resistance from both parents and students of MVP’s objectives, the MVP-programme has managed to anchor itself in the school,

I do not know what it looks like in other schools but in my school I know that we have tried because we are one of the first schools that started with MVP after all so I think we had time and built up a culture. We see it also every year grade eight can apply to become an MVP mentor in grade nine. We have maybe 30-35 applications every year and then you should only choose 12 so it also says a lot while others schools receive barely up to 12 for various reasons. But we still take the positive way of looking at it, because our students want to be that and be a part of this change work. [R4]

The anchoring of the MVP-programme is reflected in how many students apply to become MVP mentors. Respondent 4 recognises the different reception students have in different MVP schools based on how many students want to become MVP mentors. Additionally, as you walk into the reception of the school you can see a mural painted depicting a young person with an

MVP hoodie walking down the street. With this mural the school takes a position in the effort towards having the entire school on-board with the mission of a violence free school environment: *“in my school everyone knows what MVP is”* [R4]. Respondent 4 state that the school is very adamant about that every student in the school should be aware of the values that they strive towards and another respondent state: *“all students at the school should actually have more or less done [another prevention initiative] or MVP”* [R2]. Respondent 2 further clarifies that beyond the fact that all students are aware of the values, they ought to have participated in the prevention initiatives that the school has implemented. The amount of students wanting to become MVP mentors could be understood in relation to this. If all students in the school are aware of the prevention work that is taking place, it could yield a greater response from the students to participate in the work. The effects of the anchoring of the MVP-programme within the school can be seen outside of the school as well. The hoodie you receive when becoming an MVP mentor could be seen by myself on another occasion outside of the municipality worn by a previous student (it is however unclear whether the person had attended the school in focus for this particular case study).

While the MVP-programme has been successfully anchored in the school, some respondents mention that it may be necessary for it to be worked with even outside of the school.

Maybe a leisure centre is MVP certified as well, that you know that those who go there have also gone through the MVP training and in some way then maybe it will be like this there is outside the school also, then maybe you give it a little more weight... that you would put it almost as a counterclaim, you must have gone MVP to be allowed to be part of this maybe I do not know. [R2]

Respondent 2 suggested that leisure centres could become ‘MVP certified’ where attendees have participated in the MVP-programme and/or that it is a requirement for visiting the leisure centre. Another example, as stated by Respondent 1 and 3, of how MVP can be taken outside of the school is through an association that has been created by a few previous MVP mentors who are now at the age of 19-20 where they travel and lecture about the contents of the MVP-programme.

Earlier literature emphasises how schools play a significant role in shaping young people’s perceptions of gender and masculinity (Connell, 2005, p. 73; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840; Elliott, 2018, pp. 18-19; Pascoe, 2007, p. 39). Anchoring the MVP-programme in the

school and beyond is according to earlier literature a promoting factor since it connects with students' everyday lives (Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 83). Anchoring the MVP-programme in the school and beyond can be understood as wanting to influence the normalisation of gender inequalities (Elliott, 2018, p. 20) and creating a culture that does not legitimise sexism, homophobia and abuse (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 63). For the students to be reminded daily on the MVP-programme by for example the mural, it can work as a constant reminder to behave more critically in relation to existing harmful gender norms (Elliott, 2018, p. 20). One could understand this as an intentional attempt to establish a “positive” hegemony amongst the students (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 848, 853) and wanting to escape violent norms (Butler, 2004, p. 3). Having the MVP-programme anchored in the school as well as beyond, i.e. having “everyone being on board”, could also decrease the likelihood of becoming socially impaired when going against the existing violent hegemony since it becomes a collective effort (Butler, 2004, p. 3). Making a collective effort towards a common goal is also the whole purpose of the socio-ecological model that has been employed in the prevention work in the municipality.

5.2 Working with youth at school

The work with MVP targets day-to-day occurrences and ways in which one can act as a proactive bystander to violent situations, both verbal and physical: *“We work a lot with the everyday things with MVP, that we should act, that we should say no and then we give them tools and a lot of support in it.”* [R4]. The recruited ninth grade mentors receive guidance from the key persons, i.e. the professionals who are either teachers or counsellors at the school, a week before the MVP sessions where they go through the manual that is supposed to be used. During the MVP sessions the ninth grade mentors use the MVP manual where there are scenarios of violent situations and alternative ways of intervening in order to promote dialogue in the group of sixth graders. The role of the key persons is to be present two at a time during the MVP sessions and act as support when needed, which respondent 4 elaborates on by stating,

If you as a student act, you should know that there are thousands of others behind you who support you in it. So that no one else can jump on you. So that's what we try to work on very much, that you should dare to do something and then the whole school or everyone in the area should know that you did it and there is a lot of

support behind you so they cannot come to you and say: - Why did you do it, this is not your business! [R4]

Wanting to create a school environment where bystanders act against violent situations requires support for the ones speaking out. The respondents note that the school works hard in trying to provide a space for students to feel safe enough to speak out against violence, which also is reflected in the anchoring of MVP in the school as previously stated.

While efforts are being made to support students in the work with MVP the mentors and mentees differ from year to year, meaning the experience of a successful or unsuccessful MVP year varies according to respondent 2. Respondent 2 proceeds by stating that it would be easy to identify whether or not the new group of MVP mentors would be able to succeed in their role. The respondents state that some of the MVP mentors are very good and take great responsibility, however, something echoed by the respondents is that the task the ninth grade MVP mentors have is for some of them too much of a responsibility.

You should be able to stand a little for yourself and how many young people can do it when you are like 14-15 there are not many and that is why we have adults because we adults should be able to stand firmly for ourselves as well as withstand a lot of shit and as if children and young people should cope with it in the same way and not fall for peer pressure and stuff, it's a lot to ask of a child. [R3]

To appoint the role of being an MVP mentor to ninth graders is according respondent 3, as well as respondent 2, perhaps unfitting. It could be difficult for a student at that age to go against other students who may behave poorly and it is understood by the respondents to be a lot of responsibility. Respondent 2 also mentions how these sentiments can at times be shared by one year of MVP mentors who themselves may feel hopeless for the upcoming MVP mentors as they feel that they are not suitable at all. The experience of three of the respondents is that some of the ninth grade mentors do not take the task seriously and that they therefore may not execute the MVP sessions successfully.

A successful MVP-programme was by the respondents connected to how the MVP mentors behave outside of the MVP sessions as well. The respondents mention that some of the MVP mentors may conduct themselves properly during an MVP session but outside of the session they may directly go directly against the MVP objectives. Respondent 1 recalls an incident where two girls who are MVP mentors behaved badly during class by bringing soft drinks with

them while standing in a corner of the classroom and talking when the lesson was starting. The girls had been asked to leave the classroom to get rid of the drinks and it had taken them a quarter of an hour before they came back and they did not work during the lesson. Respondent 3 states how some MVP mentors are late to school almost every day and that they can behave disrespectfully and bully both teachers and students. These accounts of poor behaviour of MVP mentors outside of the MVP sessions is further exemplified by an additional respondent,

I can give a pretty personal example; I have students who are MVP mentors who have tried to make fun of me during lessons. You could say that some of them are trying to bully teachers. As I said, not everyone but I have had a bit of that kind of stuff, then it may be that they say very ugly things and not one hundred percent lead by example for the younger students. I think you should not only set a good example when you have an MVP session, but then you should actually do it all the time in such cases. [R2]

Respondent 2 mentions how they themselves have been subjected to bullying by students and how they think that the role of MVP mentors do not end once the MVP session ends. While the MVP mentors' poor behaviour relating to bullying can be understood as them going against the MVP objectives, some of the poor behaviour, such as being late to school, could be understood as regular poor behaviour for the age group in a school setting. When Respondent 3 includes the example of the MVP mentors being late to school, it seems as though they understand the assignment of the MVP mentors to be role models to all of the students in relation to everything.

While there exists an MVP manual for the MVP mentors to use during the sessions, which according to respondent 4 can provide certainty for the MVP mentors in exactly what to say during the sessions, other respondents seem to experience the MVP mentor's usage of the manual negatively.

The ninth graders may read the manual very inwardly and this may cause their credibility to drop very much in the sixth grade students. They may not take their task seriously; it may be interpreted as etc. they may not come as prepared as they should be. [R2]

Respondents 2 and 3 experience that some of the MVP mentors use the MVP manual in a way that can be equated with playing charades. This makes for a non-dynamic MVP session

according to the respondents since the way that some of the MVP mentors act during the session may not be believable to the MVP mentees.

Providing support to the MVP mentors in their role is something that is essential. According to Butler (2004, p. 2) we as people require recognition in order to be constituted as viable human beings. Since the incentives of working with the MVP-programme is to go against an existing violent environment one could explain it as the school wanting to establish recognition for doing something good, that might go against the existing violent social norms and in extension hegemonic masculinity, in an effort to make sure the students do not impair their social belonging. This is also reflected in the earlier literature where the MVP founder Katz (2018, pp. 1763, 1767) emphasises how a supportive context is necessary when going against what is normatively acceptable in order for people to not be reluctant to intervene in problematic situations.

Taking responsibility and living up to the manual's ideals seems to be difficult for some of the MVP mentors according to the respondents. While some of the MVP mentors can completely go against the MVP objectives by bullying, some MVP mentors are deemed to be unfitting by coming late to school by the respondents. While having the MVP mentors being role models to all students in general may be ideal, the premise of being an MVP mentor is to be a role model in how to act against violent problematic situations (Katz, 2018, p. 1762).

The usage of the manual by the MVP mentors is by some of the respondents perceived to be unfavourable since they read it directly, which can come across as lacking empathy according to respondents. Manual fidelity is according to Gottzén et al. (2021, p. 8) in previous literature desirable when working with MVP, since it is a promoting factor it can increase the chances of the MVP-programmes intentions becoming fulfilled (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 79). An effective implementation of a programme is critical to achieve positive outcomes according to Cross and West (2011, p. 10) and according to a previous evaluation done on the second version of MVP showed a higher manual fidelity compared to that of the first version of MVP (Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 137).

5.2.1 Recruitment of MVP mentors

A recurring concern when conducting the interviews was the recruitment of the MVP mentors. While Respondent 4 as previously stated in theme 1 sees the positive in having a lot of applications from eighth graders to become an MVP mentor in ninth grade, that is not the case for the other three respondents. The respondents worry that since MVP has had such a successful anchoring in the school, students who behave poorly might want to become MVP mentors for the wrong reasons, either getting better grades, being able to put it on their CV or because it has become the cool and popular thing to do: *“As it looks now, the cool gang has become MVP mentors and so it was like that a bit last year too, I think it's a shame.”* [R3]. Respondent 3 recalls how for the last two MVP years the MVP mentors have been a part of the cool gang in the school. The respondent does not believe it to be favourable since they are considered to take on the role for the wrong reasons according to the respondent.

The process of recruiting the MVP mentors is something that according to one respondent is yearly revised, among other things,

Every year we revise everything we do and then we change manuals, our way of being in the school, which way we talk, which way we recruit so it improves every year and we will continue to do so until, well yes it will never end. And at the same time we try to add things, we have added racism, for example based on time, needs and what the young people and the municipality want to talk about, we add it and talk about it. [R4]

Respondent 4 is a part of the recruitment process of the MVP mentors as well as the revision process. Through revision the goal is to be able to identify ways in which the MVP-programme can be improved. While respondent 4, who has worked with MVP for a long time, is part of the recruitment process, the rest of the respondents, who have worked at the school for 1-2 years, state however that they have not been a part of the recruitment process. The three other respondents also state that they are not completely aware of how the process is conducted nor on what grounds an eighth grade student gets chosen to become an MVP mentor. One respondent states however how they have expressed their concerns in regard to the recruitment of MVP mentors and will be participating in the upcoming recruitment process.

I have not been involved so now I will be part of the recruitment process that is coming now, but I do not know if it makes any difference either because I mean

MVP is about giving these young people a chance to develop. I think young people who have other things in life, it is very difficult for them to develop over a period of one year. [R3]

Since three out of the four interviewed had only worked at the school for 1-2 years it is more understandable that they have yet to partake in the recruitment process. Based on Respondent 3, it could however be understood that key persons are able to participate in the recruitment if they would like to. While this particular respondent now will be joining the recruitment process, they are unsure of the potential the youth have of making such big changes to their lives in the period of an MVP year. The uncertainty is based on the myriad of factors that affect a young person's life, particularly considering the socioeconomically disadvantaged area they live in.

Whether students who have problem behaviours should be recruited as MVP mentors or not was also something mentioned during the interviews.

I had not recommended those who do not handle the assignment in the right way... but perhaps in the selection process you can feel a little okay, it may not be individuals who are one hundred percent fit right now but we want to give them a chance to improve as well. [R2]

Respondent 2, who has previously and at the time of the interview not been part of the recruitment process, would not suggest for students that may behave poorly to become MVP mentors. Nonetheless, they do understand that the students who may not be completely suitable for the assignment ought to be given a chance. This sentiment is however opposed by another respondent that vehemently disagrees: *“It's a bit strange that we should then give them several chances like this and we should like have some kind of consequence ladder in the MVP-programme, I do not really have time for that.”* Respondent 3 finds it to be unsustainable to recruit students to become MVP mentors who are unfit as it requires a lot of time and effort. Respondent 3 would rather have a better recruitment process that entails recruiting students who are well behaved.

The point of MVP is to have popular people so they can influence, which was the case initially for MVP by having college-male student athletes use their position in their male peer culture to positively influence their peers (Katz, 2018, p. 1760). Having the cool kids as MVP mentors, if they were to take the responsibility required for the role seriously, would be to a benefit since

they would hold the power to shift social norms and accelerate behavioural change (Katz, 2018, p. 1758). Their popularity could influence what types of behaviours in the school that should be deemed legitimate or not. This is of vital importance to the MVP-programme since hegemonic masculinity and the gender order is according to Connell based on consent and legitimacy, which directly relates to the MVP-programme's focus on the role of the bystander in perpetuating norms that enable violence (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 10).

The revision of the MVP manual is something that is reflected in the previous literature, wherein local adjustments made to the MVP manual should be done when necessary (Bruno et al., 2020, p. 150). According to the founder Katz (2018, p. 1767) there is no "one size fits all" solution to the problems of gender violence prevention and the MVP program is flexible enough to incorporate cultural competence and sensitivity to its training and learning modules. It is also encouraged that MVP trainers apply the concept of (organic) intersectionality whenever possible. Local adjustments pertaining to the addition of the topic racism for instance is an example of how this has been done in the school and municipality at large.

It is evident that there is a lack of communication between the professionals since not all key persons were aware of how the recruitment process was being conducted. The lack of communication can pose a hindering factor to the achievement of sustainable and effective long-term work. Since three of the respondents, who all happen to not have been a part of the recruitment process, only have worked at the school for 1-2 years, staff turnover is a factor. Due to this there is a need for continuous knowledge-raising concerning the recruitment process as well. In the earlier literature it is also stated that the MVP programme targets all students, including those who may behave poorly and have problem behaviours. However, it seems as though allowing students who have problem behaviours to be recruited as MVP mentors in practice may do more harm than good according to respondents who were not a part of the recruitment process. This calls for further revision of the work conducted with MVP.

5.2.2 The challenges for the MVP mentees

While there are difficulties in relation to working with youth in a school setting, the respondents are very deliberate about mentioning the positives in regards to working with the MVP-programme. When speaking of the contents of the MVP-programme respondent 4 states that most students accept it. Respondent 2 reflects on how many students are good at discussing difficult topics during the MVP sessions. A third respondent stated how there is a lot of civil courage in the school: *"Very good things happen at school too ... you still notice a lot of civil courage and that many students as soon as something happens, there are many who are very brave and step in."* [R3]. Considering the difficulties previously expressed, the students seem to be good at intervening when necessary.

Despite that a lot of the respondents highlight the positives with the work, additional difficulties with conducting the MVP-programme in relation to the MVP mentees were expressed as well.

Unfortunately, we have had a lot of people in year six who had a very boring attitude to MVP and it is a bit difficult to sift through the students who think it is positive, those who are neutral and do not have a real opinion, and those who are very negative but loud. For we have had some individuals who have screamed - This is boring! Waste of time! and everything. Then the question is whether it is the content itself or if it is some kind of disappointment on those who are MVP mentors in year nine or if it is the very content of MVP that is, so to speak, boring. [R2]

When it comes to the students in year six it is apparent that some of them tend to have a hard time with MVP according to the respondents. It may be linked to the MVP session not being dynamic as previously mentioned. Additionally, respondents state that MVP mentees may feel shy, scared and do not dare actively participate and talk during the MVP sessions. According to one respondent it seems to be more common for students to speak on certain topics outside of the MVP sessions: *"Most students do not dare to bring up such things during the group sessions and I understand that. So most often it has been one on one, or they maybe bring their bestie in a small group."* [R4]. Turning to a trusted adult is for some MVP mentees preferred than to speak during the MVP sessions that are held by the MVP mentors.

While it may be difficult to know exactly what makes it hard for the MVP mentees, whether it is unfit MVP mentors or that the contents of MVP are boring, one respondent states that the

sixth graders tend to simply have a hard time comprehending the contents, which another respondent exemplifies,

Even if men are the main perpetrators of violence in some way, for some guys I think it's very difficult to get that information. I think they take it very personally and then they have a hard time moving on in any way and get a little caught up in negative behaviour." [R2].

Some male students are understood to have a difficult time understanding the information conveyed during the MVP sessions which can result in them acting out. Failing to productively engage male students during MVP sessions could be attributed to different things; the manuals, environment etc. For a couple of respondents' maturity is a factor,

I actually think it's very far behind, you somehow have a maturity in individuals. You can have a student who is very messy according to the school's standards who has a hard time adapting to the school's rules and requirements etc. but who may become fantastic individuals as adults for various reasons and then maybe it's just some form of maturity simply and not that it was something that was foundationally missing really. [R2]

Two respondents state that a lot of the difficulty behind working with a programme such as MVP in an elementary school setting could be attributed to maturity. The student's degree of maturity is understood to affect how the contents of the MVP-programme is perceived. One respondent states how insights are not very big at that age. Said respondent goes on to state how they imagine a lot will happen after the students enter high school as they recall an instance with a student who had stated the similar: *"I remember I sat in the subway with him and another, he just longed to get into high school as if he could finally get to feel a little more chill with himself."* [R3]. The difficulties of conducting the MVP-programme according to the respondents, both in relation to the MVP mentees and MVP mentors, has to be understood in relation to the fact that this particular version of the MVP-programme is conducted in an elementary school setting.

The existence of a lot of civil courage in the school can be reflected in an evaluation previously done on both versions of MVP. According to Gottzén et al. (2021, p. 134) one could see greater positive change in relation to gender norms in the school with the second version compared to schools with the first version of MVP. Nonetheless, such a result has to, according to Gottzén

et al. (2021, p. 135), be put in relation to the schools initial positioning before the implementation of the MVP-programme. Schools that have implemented the second version, similarly to the municipality in question, tend to be further away from MVP's objectives with a higher degree of reported violations prior to the implementation of MVP (Gottzén et al., 2021, pp. 6, 128-129).

Some of the students being good at talking about difficult matters is something that is in accordance with the goal of the MVP-programme. In previous literature it is emphasised that the goal of the MVP-programme is to have open dialogue about violence and the bystander and gender perspective (Bruno et al., 2020, p. 5). This open dialogue is however not something that is always taking place. Since the contents of MVP include information about how men are the main perpetrators of violence the information can meet resistance by male students. Even though it is stated in previous literature how the unconventional approach to violence prevention through the bystander approach in MVP is supposed to engage men more productively (Katz, 2018, pp. 1755-1756, 1760; Katz, Heisterkamp & Fleming, 2011, pp. 684-685), in practice it seems as if it is no guarantee.

5.3 The key persons own positioning

5.3.1 MVP training for professionals

The professionals that work as key persons attend a two-day-training on the MVP-programme.

We as teachers are so damn swamped, during an MVP session we should partly keep track of the technology and run this PowerPoint and I can honestly say that in the beginning it felt like I was not aware of that responsibility. Neither me nor my colleague. Even though we had gone through two days of training on MVP, it was not so obvious. We thought that these MVP mentors would tell us to take care of the computer but they said nothing, but they did it on the board instead. [R3]

Respondent 3 mentioned how the practical aspects of how key persons should aid during the MVP sessions were not properly conveyed during the two-day-training. This is a further indication of the lack of communication between professionals who act as key persons.

However, despite the short training all respondents consider themselves agreeing with and already being knowledgeable of its contents.

I am who I always am, I always advocate for others, for me it does not matter much that I am a key person, so it's just good that I am in that case because I am the one who gets involved when I encounter things. [R1]

The respondents equate the MVP-programme with being able to stand up for people and intervene when necessary, which is in line with the bystander perspective. Respondent 3 associates the programme with ethics and morality while another understands it to be a matter of equality: *“I think it is very easy to stand behind the values in MVP... I somehow think that on a personal level it is very easy to stand for everyone's equality.”* [R2]. The respondents speak of the overall contents of MVP in quite broad terms, which makes it relatively easy to agree on. The fourth respondent connects the understanding of the contents of MVP, i.e. what gender means and such, with having a certain academic background, such as social work and similar. When speaking about the contents of the MVP-programme more in-depth the respondents tend to speak on its various aspects going hand in hand. Respondent 4 states that the bystander approach can work as an entry point *“to basically everything”*, meaning honour-related violence and oppression, racism and LGBTQ+, which is echoed by another respondent,

You cannot have one without having the other. You cannot understand, you cannot know where it starts from and then improve, it is almost impossible. It is usually said that the one who is offended is the one who decides and then I think that there are still many who are offended in very many different ways and therefore we have not achieved what we should have achieved as a society. Then it can be very different on an individual level as well. If I am talking structure, you can have opposing structures that belong to a certain religion that can affect how you consider certain groups and so on, but sometimes it is easy to assume too much there. If someone belongs to a certain religious affiliation, then maybe you think automatically then they probably think this way. That is also wrong, I think. [R2]

Respondent 2 reflects on how the different aspects of the MVP-programme are all important and interconnected, as well as how the interpretative precedence of certain groups of people have to be considered in order to achieve change. Additionally, respondent 2 highlights the existence of social structures, such as religion, that can affect the achievement of MVP's objectives. Respondent 2 proceeds by stating: *“Maybe in some groups there are nuances that you would need to take advantage of, take up on the wallpaper maybe.”* [R2]. To keep in mind

that all people are different and may be in need of different things, which in this instance would entail perhaps a different approach, is something that respondent 4 has previously stated in relation to the addition of for example the topic of racism to the programme. This addition was made as a result of its need and the students and municipalities wishes, which also could be understood through the lens of interpretative precedence, meaning that the students themselves who may experience racism know best in regard to what affects them in their everyday life.

One respondent however spoke of the different aspects of MVP more separately: *“I think everything is very good but my school in particular, I think this with violence is one of the most important things we need to work with because gender is so far away in some way right now.”* [R3]. While Respondent 3 in the same statement recognises that gender is a part of violence, they separate the two as if they can be separated. Such a statement could be perceived to go against the very essence of the MVP-programme.

Having all the respondents consider themselves to be in agreement with the contents of MVP is based on previous literature not always the case. Based on an evaluation done on the first version of MVP it appears that adult leaders of MVP are hesitant and uncomfortable with MVP’s theoretical approach (Eriksson et al., 2018, pp. 7, 75). According to Eriksson et al. (2018, p. 79), the adults not being rooted in the programmes' theoretical starting points poses a risk for MVP’s intentions not being fulfilled. This however does not seem to be the case with the interviewed professionals, meaning their own perceived agreement of MVP’s perspectives should rather be a promoting factor. Expressing that “you cannot have one without the other” as well as religion being a structure that impacts individuals is in line with how different social structures, such as race and class, are constantly intersecting with each other (Connell, 2005, pp. 75-76). The emphasis on that the one who is offended has interpretive precedence is something reflected in Connell’s theory on masculinity, where Connell (2005, p. 239) emphasises the importance of curricular justice where the point of view of the least advantaged is in focus. Stating how specific nuances may need to be added to MVP for certain groups is in line with previous research where according to Katz (2018, p. 1767) is encouraged to apply (organic) intersectionality whenever possible. This points to how there is no “one size fits all” solution to the problems of gender violence prevention.

The separation of gender and violence could be understood as if the respondent’s intention was to convey how tackling violence in the environment that the school finds itself in may have to

be done in a way that gender is not a direct focal point, similarly to how another respondent stated how the bystander approach can be a more suitable entry point. However, it may risk conveying a message that social structures are not always intersecting with each other (Connell, 2005, pp. 75-76). While the respondents deem themselves to be aware of how social structures intersect, it seems as though it is not always reflected in their statements, particularly the individualising sentiments expressed in theme 1. This, including the lack of knowledge relating to the practical aspects of an MVP session, is an indication on how the two-day-training for key persons may not suffice. Since three out of four respondents have worked at the school for 1-2 years the knowledge-raising aspect need to be improved in order for the key persons to be on the same page, which would constitute for a more efficient and sustainable prevention work. As stated in previous literature, in order to be able to address the complexity regarding the intersections of different social structures one would have to receive rigorous training (Katz, 2018, p. 1774), which is not the case for the interviewed professionals. However, Katz (2018, p. 1774) also acknowledges that rigorous training may not always be provided due to structural obstacles or lack of funding.

5.3.2 The execution of MVP

Three of the respondents who as previously mentioned agree with MVP's contents however express how they do not necessarily find the MVP-programmes' pedagogical model with mentors and mentees to be the ideal approach and execution: *"I think the whole MVP-programme is fantastic, it's really good information, it's just who is going to present this information."* [R3]. Respondent 3 elaborates further by stating that since a lot of MVP mentors are not able to be good role models the key persons might as well hold the MVP sessions. Respondent 2 states that they might achieve better results from the MVP sessions if the key persons gained more responsibility and led certain MVP sessions or part of certain MVP sessions, allowing for the MVP mentors to be able to: *"...fail in a positive way"* [R2]. Having the key persons take on more responsibility could provide the MVP mentors with more leeway that would not be at the expense of the MVP mentees. One respondent provides additional options on how the MVP session can be executed,

Those who have been MVP mentors before started an organisation and they are like in high school or 20 years old. If they came and maybe conveyed this information maybe it would have been better I think, where maybe you can create

young role models. It might be great if someone comes from outside like that and someone who is a little more mature and has a little more experience. [R3]

Moreover, respondent 3 also suggests that the MVP mentors could be swapped between schools. Meaning that ninth grade mentors from one school mentors sixth grade students from another school. Respondent 3 stated that the reasoning behind this alternative execution approach was that if the MVP mentors are from another school the MVP mentees will not be able to see when they may behave badly outside of the MVP sessions in the corridors or towards teachers. The fourth respondent however agrees with the mentor and mentee pedagogical model of the MVP-programme stating that there is a large generational and relational gap between the students and the professionals who act as key persons that could affect how the information is being received. Respondent 4 further explains how key persons have a tendency to take over during MVP sessions: *“Sometimes it can be the case that you as a teacher, or key person as it is called, that you take over. The idea is not that you should take over, the idea is that you should be there for support.”* [R4]. Some of the respondents' strong will in regard to how the MVP sessions should be carried out risks going against the established approach in practice.

Respondents opposing the mentor and mentee pedagogical approach to MVP based on some MVP mentors' poor behaviour, and that it therefore is considered too much of a responsibility for the ninth graders to have such a role, is something that may be related to the short training they receive. As previously stated in theme 2, some respondents tend to think that the MVP mentors are supposed to be general role models, and not only role models pertaining to violence. This therefore raises the question of whether it is the programme itself that is too much to bear, or if it is the respondents understanding of the role as MVP mentor that is excessive. Having young adults as mentors that facilitate the sessions is something that Katz (2018, p. 1768) accounts for in earlier literature. While it applies to high school and college settings, the optimal co-facilitators of MVP sessions are only slightly older students, which in an elementary school setting would entail ninth graders. The reason for this is that group members tend to be influenced by fellow group members (Williams & Neville, 2017, p. 214). Such sentiments coincide with what Butler (2004, p. 2) emphasises, which is that people are constituted as socially viable beings through recognition by others. Precisely this is of significance since Butler (2004, p. 2) elaborates on how the terms for recognition are

changeable and the premise of the MVP-programme is to establish a positive hegemony (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 853).

The MVP-programme can however also be executed with MVP trainers, namely teachers, which is the case for the first version of MVP, which three of the respondents seem to agree with more. While the first version of MVP does not employ the mentor and mentee pedagogical model it is still reflected in the earlier literature how teachers have a tendency to opt for a more conventional pedagogical approach that is not in line with MVP's unconventional approach, which was understood to be a hindering factor according to Gottzén et al. (2021, p. 83). In the earlier literature another mentoring initiative was accounted for, the BBBSA who provide one-to-one mentoring for economically disadvantaged, at-risk youth. While Williams and Neville (2017, p. 214) account for how slightly older peers are the optimal approach for promoting behavioural change, evaluation done on BBBSA shows how students receiving mentoring, despite them performing better academically etc., showed no improvement when it came to effect on rates of problem behaviour (Park, Liao & Crosby, 2017, p. 60). Working preventatively and wanting to establish a positive hegemony that rejects violence is something that is stated to be very difficult in practice (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 853), which the evaluation of BBBSA and the respondents accounts affirm.

5.3.3 Proximity to MVP's objectives

The benchmark for some students regarding gender norms and stereotypes can according to respondents be quite outdated,

Sometimes if we talk about gender, for example what the role of women is and what a man's role is in society, then we can have sixth graders who think that the task of a woman is just to give birth and be at home and cook and take care of the children, the family. [R4]

During discussions at the MVP session some MVP mentees can make statements about gender roles that are constraining. Respondent 4 however seems to have an understanding of the benchmark of the students: *"It may feel very basic but it is not basic for them."* [R4]. While statements from the MVP mentees concerning stereotypical gender roles could be considered old-fashioned, respondent 4 is adamant about the fact that what may be fundamental to some may not be to the youth who are the target group of MVP, concluding that people have different

starting points and that one needs to adapt accordingly. Furthermore, respondent 4 states how the topics that contribute to most debate during an MVP session are LGBTQ+, racism and honour-related violence and oppression. The students tend to have the most thoughts and opinions about these topics according to the respondent. However, whether the debates are positive or negative respondent 4 considers it to be a first step in achieving any change. As previously mentioned in theme 1, there have been examples of how in some cases the dialogue that is sprung has led to a realisation that coincides with MVP's objectives.

The three other respondents however express frustration because of the distance students have to MVP's objectives. Respondents have expressed how the students tend to have a hard time accepting people with differing sexual orientations and gender identities from the norm for example. An additional aspect that may affect the proximity to MVP's objectives is how the school has a high percentage of newly arrived immigrant students. Respondent 1 experiences that newly arrived immigrant students may not feel comfortable discussing certain topics during the MVP sessions: *"Many who just came from abroad, for some may not dare to say what they think either, in front of the others, inhibitions and so on."* [R1]. Respondent 1 considers this to be due to the newly arrived immigrant students to be more reserved pertaining to the topics discussed in the MVP-programme. The same respondent mentions during the interview that it would be interesting to have a programme like MVP in a school setting with predominantly ethnic swedes, which however already exists through the first version of the MVP-programme which the respondent seem to be unaware of.

That the students at the school have less of a proximity to the MVP-programmes objectives is dependent on the schools initial positioning prior to implementation. Schools that have implemented the second version of MVP is according to previous literature further away from MVP's objectives, with a higher degree of reported violations compared to that of the schools that have implemented the first version of MVP (Gottzén et al., 2021, pp. 128-129, 135). However, the very incentive of the MVP-programme is to challenge stereotypical gender norms that are limiting (Bruno et al., 2020, p. 5), which also is in alignment with Butler's (2004, p. 3) understanding of the need for capacity in doing so, through the articulation of alternative norms that one can act according to.

Newly arrived immigrant students are experienced differently to that of other students, with more reservations. Katz (2018, p. 1767) emphasises that it does not exist a "one size fits all"

solution to the problems of gender violence prevention, and how the MVP-programme is flexible enough to incorporate cultural competence and sensitivity to its training and learning modules, the professionals ought to rather consider how to make the MVP manual and sessions more suitable for newcomers as well. This would also be in line with the (organic) intersectionality that should be applied when necessary. However, as previously stated, this would necessitate more resources concerning the training for key persons in order for (organic) intersectionality to be applied effectively (Katz, 2018, p. 1774). Wanting the students to already be in agreement with the objectives of the MVP-programme, which also is reflected in wanting the MVP-programme to be conducted in a school setting with less newly arrived immigrant students, also raises the question of what the point is to have such a preventative programme. One would think that schools who are already close to the objectives of MVP are not in the same need of such a programme.

5.3.4 Role of key persons non-negotiable

Respondents express the difficulties for them as professionals to work with a programme like MVP: *“It has been tough and heavy, not because it's boring or because it's a difficult person, but I know you wear yourself out because it's so tough.”* [R1]. Respondent 1 emphasises that even though the MVP-programme is good and interesting to work with, they do recognise how the professionals working with the programme get worn out. Taking on the role as key person is also not something you get to choose.

You do not choose to become a key person, you do not choose to be involved in the MVP-programme as well, you only get it as an extra responsibility in addition to being a teacher and I think it's a shame... and I think that if MVP is now so important and such a good thing why do we not have it as a subject in school. [R3]

To be assigned the role of key person is expressed to be an added responsibility, in that the key person has to keep track of their own class in addition to keeping an extra eye on the MVP mentors outside of the MVP sessions, pertaining to their behaviour. Respondent 3 consider it to be too much of a responsibility, and expresses the desire to have MVP as a subject instead. Respondent 3 proceeds with elaborating on how the process of reporting violations in the school is extensive: *“We must report the violation via our system, this violation report takes a very long time to do and you have to call home to both the perpetrator and the victim's parents*

so it is quite a lot of work.” [R3]. Respondent 3 proceeds by recalling during the interview how they and another colleague had to stay an hour after work one time in order to finish two reports of violation. While there is a special educator in the café who reads the reports and the principal tries to solve issues, according to respondent 3 there are not enough resources for them to constantly report and follow-up incidents, adding staff that primarily work with these matters would be needed.

The frustration expressed seems to relate back to an existing lack of resources in the school, which has previously been reflected in the short training for MVP key persons. Besides the reporting of violations being time consuming, the same respondent further elaborates on other tasks that have become de-prioritised as a result of their role as key person. Respondent 3 explains how she also is in charge of a whole class of students that she is a mentor to, not connected to MVP. According to Respondent 3 MVP sessions collide with their mentoring time with their class. The respondent states that mentoring time that is not connected to MVP means that one or two teachers are mainly responsible for the class they have been assigned. The responsibility involves whether the students reach the goals in the subjects, sick leave as well as student council. Students have MVP every other week and mentoring time every other week. The week before the MVP session key persons also have to provide guidance to the MVP mentors. The respondent states that this has resulted in the students not receiving continuous information, with them only being able to see their mentoring class every three weeks. This prevents respondent 3 from being able to establish and build relationships with their mentoring students. Supporting the MVP-programme becomes difficult according to respondent 3 when it results in them not having time for their other areas of responsibility.

Respondent 3 also mentions how colleagues who have worked at the school for many years tend to express their frustration during work team meetings relating to them experiencing that no improvement is happening, which is echoed by another respondent,

I care very much, I think it's important, then maybe it's so that I fit then as a key person, but if you just see it as a task “okay I have to do this” then maybe it shines through and does not have the effect it should have. I do not know if this is the case for colleagues right now, but I have sometimes got the impression from even colleagues that they have not had such a positive attitude towards MVP. But then maybe they are also very exhausted because they may have done it many times and feel that not much happens. And then it can be that you say that not much happens but you may not notice that it happens so much. [R2]

Respondent 2 however seems to be critical of statements indicating that no improvement is being done and suggests that such sentiments may be a result of teachers being worn out after having done MVP for so long. Respondent 2 also noted how some colleagues may not have a positive attitude towards MVP, which can be reflected in previous statements expressed by respondents. Key persons having negative attitudes towards MVP could impact how both the MVP mentors and mentees perceive their participation in the programme, the same way it was expressed in theme 2 regarding how MVP mentors who do not take their task seriously may negatively impact how the MVP mentees experience the programme. Important to note however, as previously mentioned in theme 2, there are constantly new sets of students who participate in MVP while it at the same time is difficult for students to change in a matter of an MVP year.

Respondent 4 emphasises that while MVP in theory is great, it can in practice, as seen throughout the themes, not always go as planned. The importance of conducting the MVP-programme is however a sentiment echoed by all respondents: *“It is very important that it exists, even though it may be difficult for them.”* [R1]. Respondent 2 states that while MVP may need to be developed in different ways, regardless of how ‘boring’ a student or a teacher may think it is, that it is better to have MVP than to not have it at all, undoubtedly, and that they like to work to make it better.

One respondent stated that MVP could become a subject in school, insinuating that a programme does not carry as much weight. The sentiment of wanting MVP as a subject in school is something reflected in earlier literature. In an evaluation done on the first version of MVP Gottzén et al. (2021, p. 83) identified how teaching experience can become a hindering factor. The message MVP wants to convey requires an unconventional approach. Gottzén et al. (2021, p. 83) found however that teachers working with the first version tended to return to conventional pedagogy. The returning to conventional pedagogy is also reflected in the respondent’s sentiment, meaning it can also be the case for teachers working with the second version of MVP as well.

The municipality in question has made a concerted effort to implement the MVP-programme within the framework of the regular work in the school. The reason for this is that the municipality previously have been subjected to short-term projects and with MVP strived to

achieve long-term and strategic work. Having violence prevention work as a part of the regular work has seemingly successfully contributed to the decrease in violence. Based on the experience of one respondent however it seems as though including the work of MVP within the regular work is not optimal in practice. Tasks that key persons have may risk not being properly fulfilled, compared to for instance schools that have not implemented MVP or other programmes for that matter. Early intervention in schools for children and adolescents, particularly in socio-economically challenged areas, is essential when wanting to prevent norm-breaking behaviour, crime and exposure to crime (Skolverket, 2022; Socialstyrelsen, 2021). While it seems as though all respondents see the value and importance of the prevention work they are conducting, they are not united around the ideal execution. Lack of resources is a prominent factor, which in turn can affect the key persons' opinions and attitudes towards the MVP-programme negatively, which risks affecting the impact that the programme could have.

6 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to gain insights as to how the prevention work with MVP is understood and experienced by the professionals working with MVP whom are staff at a school. As a means to do so there was an emphasis on the gender theoretical starting points and structural perspective of the MVP-programme. The research sought out to answer the following questions; (1) How do the professionals understand the need for the MVP-programme in the municipality? (2) How do the professionals experience the mentor and mentee pedagogical approach of the MVP-programme? and (3) How is the professionals' positioning relating to MVP's gender theoretical starting points and structural perspective expressed?

The respondents of this study consisted of four staff at the school who work as key persons. Based on the key persons interviewed it is apparent that the municipality is in great need of preventive measures due to the negative development in Swedish society today, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, pertaining to an increase in violent and criminal behaviours. It is apparent how violence in one context affects the occurrence of violence in another. The need for proactive bystanders was something emphasised by the respondents, as a means to counteract the negative development. The respondents proclaim that the school experience a lot of bystander action from students, which is reflected in the previous literature (Gottzén et al. 2021, p. 133).

However, being a proactive bystander comes with risks, such as being threatened, for anyone who intervenes in a violent situation. Hence, respondents emphasised the need for proper support when intervening, which is done through the collective articulation of alternative ways of acting (Butler, 2004, p. 3). Beyond this it became evident that the forms of social interaction, whether bridging or bonding, play a vital role in whether or not trust and cooperation between people is promoted (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 442). Experiences of respondents indicated that the municipality is somewhat segregated which has resulted in an animosity between people from the municipality with immigrant backgrounds and people outside of the municipality whom are ethnic swedes.

The stereotypical notions of gender that the MVP-programme tries to counteract goes against the existing macho culture that exists in the school. The pursuit of hegemonic masculinity,

obtaining a higher rank in the patriarchal gender order (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 834), could be seen for boys as well as girls. The pursuit of hegemony takes shape through fun quarrels and name calling. The main recipients of said name calling are often students of the LGBTQ+ community (or the words are associated with said community) and newly arrived immigrant students. This indicates the existence of multiple masculinities and how sexuality, race and nationality play a role in the subordination of certain groups (Connell, 2005, pp. 75-76, 78).

What has also been recurring is the role that the family and the parents play in the prevention work. It was evident that the majority of the respondents are not aware of, or at least do not consider, the existing initiatives that are available to the family and parents at the relationship level of the socio-ecological model. Overall, there is a lack of knowledge and consideration of the intersection between social structures among the majority of respondents. Both in relation to the students struggling with accepting people of different sexualities and gender identities and the role the family play, which becomes evident in the comparison to other students and families in the city centre. As the founder of the MVP-programme, Katz (2018, p. 1774) has emphasised the need for thorough training in order to be able to apply (organic) intersectionality when called for. How existing social inequalities affect gender violence, and the prevention of it, need to be acknowledged. While the second version of MVP may have done this with the inclusion of topics such as racism and honour-related violence and oppression, it does not always seem to be the case in practice based on the respondents' own accounts, that tended to be rather individualising. While the respondents claim they agree with the gender theoretical starting points of the MVP-programme, the intersectional aspect needs to be further established. The short two-day training for key persons seems to not suffice, a lot is dependent on the professionals' previous knowledge and experience.

A lack of resources in relation to conducting the prevention work was highlighted. The lack of resources is reflected in the inability to have a more thorough training for key persons. In addition to this, having the prevention work a part of the regular work framework was considered by the majority of respondents to be an ineffective way of working. Despite an existence of high manual fidelity in the school, which in the previous literature was highlighted as a promoting factor, a majority of the respondents found it to be rather unenthusiastic because it did not promote the engagement of the MVP mentees in a dynamic discussion. The arguments against the current way the work with MVP is conducted is that teachers gain extra

responsibility of keeping track of MVP mentors, making sure they act accordingly to their role. Reporting violent incidents in the school is a long process that takes time away from other responsibilities the teachers have. Among the responsibilities the teachers have is being a mentor to a class and teachers who have been appointed key persons cannot have continued contact and contribute with continues information to their students.

Partly based on the above, as well as some MVP mentors not being able to take the responsibility seriously and executing the MVP sessions productively according to respondents, the majority of respondents agreed that the key persons ought to gain more responsibility and play a bigger role in the execution of the MVP sessions. Another suggestion made that young adults ought to hold the sessions. Some also implied that it may be better to have MVP as a subject in the school rather. The alternative ways of executing MVP expressed could be understood in relation to the short training afforded to key persons, since respondents had a tendency to speak of the role of MVP mentors as general role models pertaining to everything, which could have resulted in them not being given an honest chance based on their ages and capabilities. Such sentiments, that MVP mentors should not hold the MVP sessions, go against the very essence of MVP, which is the mentor and mentee pedagogical model (Katz, 2018, p. 1768). Teachers having a tendency to revert to a conventional pedagogy, as in suggesting to have MVP as a subject in school, is also reflected in the previous literature (Gottzén et al., 2021, p. 83).

Since the majority of the respondents only had worked with MVP for a short period of time problematic weaknesses identified in the study point to how the continuous knowledge-raising, that is necessary in order to conduct long-term work with the socio-ecological model, does not appear to have occurred in the extent needed. However, in an effort to further gain an understanding of the professionals own understanding of the MVP-programme, how that understanding unfolds in practice, and how the youth themselves experience the work, it would be of interest to conduct an ethnographical study. Interviewing more respondents, both key persons, especially those with more experience, as well as the youth, in addition to observing the MVP sessions and the school environment as a whole, could contribute to more in-depth insights into the work with MVP in an effort to improve the violence prevention work even further.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1a: Informationsbrev

Deltagande av en studie

Hej,

Jag är masterstudent och bedriver just nu ett forskningsprojekt som är en del av min utbildning på det Internationella Masterprogrammet i Socialt Arbete vid Göteborgs Universitet. Syftet med studien är att utforska och analysera hur professionella, som implementerar och arbetar med MVP-programmet, positionerar sig i förhållande till programmets genusteoretiska utgångspunkter och strukturella perspektiv. Studien kommer med hjälp av tidigare forskning inom området samt genom intervjuer svara på studiens forskningsfrågor. Det skulle därav vara av stort värde för studien om du vill delta i en intervju, då du arbetar med MVP-programmet.

De insamlade uppgifterna kommer att hanteras konfidentiellt och förvaras på ett sådant sätt att ingen obehörig person kan se eller komma åt den. Intervjun kommer att spelas in då detta gör det lättare för mig att dokumentera vad som sägs under intervjun och även hjälper mig i det fortsatta arbetet med projektet. I min analys kan viss data att komma att ändras så att ingen intervjuperson kommer att kännas igen. Efter avslutat projekt kommer data att förstöras. Den data jag samlar in kommer endast att användas i detta projekt. Du har rätt att tacka nej till att svara på frågor eller avbryta intervjun utan att ge en förklaring.

Du är välkommen att kontakta mig eller min handledare om du har några frågor (e-postadresser nedan).

Student namn & e-post

Meron Temesgen

gustemme@gmail.com

Handledarens namn & e-post

Björn Jonsson

bjorn.jonsson@socwork.gu.se

8.2 Appendix 1b: Information letter

Participation in a study

Hello,

I am a master student and I am currently conducting a research project that is a part of my education in the International Master's program in Social Work at the University of Gothenburg. The purpose of the study is to explore and analyse how professionals', that implement and work with the MVP-programme, position themselves in relation to the gender theoretical starting points and structural perspective of the program. The study will with the help of previous research in the field as well as through interviews answer the study's research questions. It would therefore be of great value for the study if you would participate in an interview, as you work with the MVP-program.

The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorised person can view or access it. The interview will be recorded as this makes it easier for me to document what is said during the interview and also helps me in the continuing work with the project. In my analysis some data may be changed so that no interviewee will be recognized. After finishing the project the data will be destroyed. The data I collect will only be used in this project. You have the right to decline answering any questions, or terminate the interview without giving an explanation.

You are welcome to contact me or my supervisor in case you have any questions (e-mail addresses below).

Student name & e-mail

Meron Temesgen

gustemme@gmail.com

Supervisor name & e-mail

Björn Jonsson

bjorn.jonsson@socwork.gu.se

8.3 Appendix 2a: Intervjuguide

Intervjuguide

Introduktion

- Ge en kort presentation av dig själv?
 - Hur gammal är du och vad är din könstillhörighet?
 - Vad har du för utbildningsbakgrund?
 - Vilket är ditt nuvarande yrke och vilka är dina arbetsuppgifter?
- Hur bekant är du med [X] som stadsdel?
 - Har du tidigare erfarenhet som är användbar i [X]?
- Hur länge har du jobbat med MVP?
 - Hur såg din introduktion till och utbildning till MVP-programmet ut?

Deras positionering och dess uttryck

- Hur förstår du MVP-programmets genus-, åskådars- och strukturperspektiv?
 - Anser du att dessa perspektiv/förklaringsmodeller är nödvändiga komponenter i det förebyggande arbetet?
 - Tycker du att det finns andra delar av våldsprevention som är viktiga?
- Kan du ge ett positivt exempel på när stereotypa föreställningar om kön utmanades med hjälp av din vägledning inom MVP-sessionerna?
 - Kan du ge ett ofördelaktigt exempel på när stereotypa föreställningar om kön utmanades med hjälp av din vägledning inom MVP-sessionerna?
- Kan du ge ett positivt exempel på när stereotypa föreställningar om kön utmanades med hjälp av din vägledning utanför MVP-sessionerna?
 - Kan du ge ett ofördelaktigt exempel på när stereotypa föreställningar om kön utmanades med hjälp av din vägledning utanför MVP-sessionerna?

Avslut

- Vilka aspekter av MVP-programmet tycker du är viktigast?
- Vad skulle du vilja förändra eller förbättra med MVP-programmet?
- Finns det något mer du skulle vilja tillägga?

8.4 Appendix 2b: Interview guide

Interview guide

Introduction

- Give a short introduction of yourself?
 - How old are you and what is your gender?
 - What is your educational background?
 - What is your current profession and what are your tasks?
- How familiar are you with [X] as a district?
 - Do you have previous experience which is useful in [X]?
- How long have you worked with MVP?
 - What was your introduction to and education for the MVP-programme like?

Their positioning and its expression

- How do you understand the gender, bystander and structural perspectives of the MVP-programme?
 - Do you think these perspectives/explanation-models are necessary components of prevention work?
 - Do you find there to be other components of violence prevention to be of importance?
- Could you give a positive example of when stereotypical notions of gender were challenged with the help of your guidance within the MVP sessions?
 - Could you give an adverse example of when stereotypical notions of gender were challenged with the help of your guidance within the MVP sessions?
- Could you give a positive example of when stereotypical notions of gender were challenged with the help of your guidance outside of the MVP sessions?
 - Could you give an adverse example of when stereotypical notions of gender were challenged with the help of your guidance outside of the MVP sessions?

Ending

- What aspects of the MVP-programme do you find to be of most importance?
- What would you like to change or improve with the MVP-programme?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?