

Women in Journalism

‘Hoodies or Altar Boys?’

What is media stereotyping doing to our British boys?

Report by Fiona Bawdon, WiJ deputy chair
Research conducted by Echo

**A Women in Journalism/British Library Summit
British Library Conference Centre
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www.womeninjournalism.co.uk
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1. How the media sees teen boys...

Yobs turn street into no-go zone at night

‘Gangs of teenagers are turning what is a popular market street by day into a no-go area at night.’

Islington Gazette, 25 February 2009

‘White working class boys are turning their backs on university even if they do well enough at school, a study revealed yesterday.’ Daily Mail, 19 June 2008

Tories promise 21st century clip round the ear for youth crime

Guardian, 24 February 2009

Juvenile delinquency

‘It is a strange anomaly, that in a country boasting to be the most civilized in the world, no effective machinery exists for checking the growth of vice in young offenders. Our gaols, as reformatories, are worse than useless.’ Morning Chronicle, 22 October 1842

‘We are a group of 14-year-old boys from the Reclaim project; since the project started, we have been approached by so many different newspapers, magazines and TV companies, most of who want to talk to us about guns and knives and gangs. We keep trying to explain that we are not involved in gangs and crime; we’re doing positive things in this area – and then journalists go away, as they tell us that’s not the story people are interested in...’ Open letter from Manchester-based Reclaim, published in Guardian, 25 August 2008.

Enforced conscription is the answer to sick yobs

Sue Carroll, Mirror, 2 March 2009

‘What word other than “feral” better describes the swarms of hooligans abandoned to their own devices by slattern mothers and absentee “babyfathers”? No one crosses the road if they spot a crocodile of Boy Scouts coming in the other direction. But nor does anyone in their right mind risk walking through a scrum of hoodies hogging the pavement – not unless they fancy a knife in their ribs.’ Richard Littlejohn, Daily Mail, 18 November 2008

Sick vid posted by Rhys gangs

‘A street gang with links to the murder of schoolboy Rhys Jones have posted a sickening video glorifying violence. Footage shows an unidentified youngster who has apparently been kidnapped by violent thugs (see multimedia links, right)....’ Sun, 7 January 2009

‘If Obama gets in, I’m moving to America’

Young black British men on the role models that give them hope

Moboshir Ali, 19, currently looking for work: ‘Lewis Hamilton? Brilliant. Brilliant. Brilliant. Now he’s in the history books. It was so good. I don’t care about Obama, though. I give up on politics.’

Joshua Ellison, 17, student: ‘Hackney is my hometown, it’s easy to blend in – but if Obama gets in, I’m moving to America, bwoy! I’m excited about Lewis Hamilton, too, and really happy for him.’

Julius Soares, 19, engineering student: ‘A black man being president! It makes me feel in the future I can be whatever I want to be. He’s inspired me, definitely.’

Guardian, 4 November 2008 (the day after Lewis Hamilton won Grand Prix and the day before US elections)

‘Boy dad Alfie Patten yesterday admitted he does not know how much nappies cost – but said: “I think it’s a lot.” Baby-faced Alfie, who is 13 but looks more like eight, became a father four days ago...’ Sun, 13 February 2009

‘Heartless hoodies have snatched a cherished pet chicken from a Barnstable home... A gang of youths broke into the shed, stole several eggs, and tried to make off with a large white rooster, before setting for the small friendly bantam. The youths were then spotted the following day, chasing the chicken around Pilton. PC [Andy] Greenslade said: ‘...We won’t tolerate an innocent and friendly animal being tormented by a group of terrifying hoodies.’ 25 February 2009, This is North Devon

‘Police are appealing for witnesses after a lone have-a-go-hero was hospitalized by hooded Croydon thugs. The man, in his 50s, saw two men throwing snowballs at a stationary 197 bus parked in Morland Road about 6pm on February 4. He told them to stop and the two men turned their attention on him, becoming abusive.’ Croydon Guardian, 26 February 2009

Hoodies may be told to ‘show your face or leave’

‘Hoodies could soon be challenged in every Bodmin store in a bid to catch more criminals who have been covering their faces.’ This is Cornwall, 25 February 2009

Hoodies help out OAPs

‘College students are challenging the stereotype of hoodie-wearing teenagers being anti-social troublemakers by wearing theirs to carry out charity work, conservation and even shopping for the elderly.’ Lakeland Echo, 26 February 2009

Teenager given life sentence for stabbing over Xbox

Boy boasted 'I'm the man' as victim lay dying

Times, 21 February 2009

'A battling Women's Institute member was handed a criminal record yesterday for clipping a teenage vandal round the head with a roll of papers.' Sun, 25 February 2009

Hoodies can sometimes be goodies too

'...when I called to collect a vindaloo from the take-away..., I was wary when I discovered it was filled with a group of youngsters. The shop area was small and two lounged in chairs and two others crowded the doorway, wearing hoods and blank expressions...I wondered whether to give them a hard stare or avoid eye contact altogether. It was three steps up to the shop doorway and as I reached it, one of those sitting moved his legs, opened the door for me and told his mate to move. They politely got out of my way so I could collect my waiting meal and opened the door for me again as I left...' 'Denis', Huddersfield Daily Examiner, 23 February 2009

'A war veteran has been left housebound after vandals stole his £1,200 mobility scooter – and TORCHED it...Great-grandad Reginald [Hopton, 89], who served in Belgium, Holland, Egypt, Sri Lanka and India during the Second World War, wants the yobs to have a spell in the Army.' Sun, 3 March 2009

2. Background and introduction

How Women in Journalism's 'Hoodies or Altar Boys?' summit came about

In 2007, Women in Journalism staged its first ever summit looking at the impact of the media on the ambitions and aspirations of the next generation of young women.

'Am I bovvered? What are teenage girls *really* thinking?' was a great success, tapping into genuine and deep concern about what, if anything, may be going wrong with today's young women. The event, chaired with great aplomb by Cherie Blair (and also staged with the help of the British Library), generated a great deal of media coverage and the debate about the issues raised continues to this day.

WiJ had intended the 2007 summit to be a one-off but, after having time to draw breath, we knew it was an experience we wanted to repeat. Having focused on teenage girls, the obvious topic for WiJ's next summit was one close to many of our hearts: teen boys and the media. A number of us on the committee are mothers of sons and so have a strong personal as well as professional interest in the way boys are portrayed. There was a clear feeling that the reality of our boys' lives and those of boys we know is entirely absent from much of the press.

When a photo of a group of perfectly ordinary lads, just standing around wearing hooded tops, has become visual shorthand for urban menace, or even the breakdown of society, it's clear that teenage boys have a serious image problem.

We wanted to look at why the teen boys' 'brand' has become so toxic and, crucially, what impact this may be having on them, their view of themselves and their place in the world.

For all WiJ's enthusiasm, this important event would not have taken place without the collaboration of the British Library, which was keen to be involved as part of its learning programme. The Library has provided the venue for today and other invaluable

resources, including using its existing contacts with schools to make sure that young people are well represented in the debate today.

We also need to thank Echo for conducting the research pro bono and supporting us throughout the preparation and planning of this event. We are grateful for the vision of Echo's group chief executive, Sandra MacLeod, who immediately saw the importance of what WiJ was hoping to do; and for the enthusiasm (and patience) of her team, in particular, David Holmes, Zareena Asad, Matt Painter and Lexie Cameron.

Also huge thanks to the WiJ organising team, Sue Matthias (WiJ chair), Rowenna Davis, Maureen Paton and Angela Neustatter. As ever, the biggest debt of thanks goes to WiJ's administrator, Kate McMillan, who has done more than anyone to make this event happen.

3. Good news is no news

Do teenage boys get a raw deal from the media?

Teen boys themselves certainly seem to think so. According to the survey of 13-19 year olds commissioned by Women in Journalism, some 85% think newspapers give them a bad press. Just 6% of boys surveyed thought newspapers portrayed them fairly.

The independent research company Echo* surveyed 1,000 teenage boys across five UK regions. The findings showed that new media fared a little better than newspapers, with 31% of respondents saying the likes of BBC online or Sky News online portrayed teen boys in a good or neutral light. However, reality TV shows were seen as representing them most fairly, with 44% of boys surveyed saying programmes like X-Factor and Britain's Got Talent portrayed them in a good light.

*Before pictures of baby-faced
13-year-old Alfie Patten emerged,
teenage fathers barely featured
on the media's radar*

The research also tracked newspaper stories about teen boys across the national and regional press over the last year. They found coverage was unrelentingly negative and focused disproportionately on crime. Teenagers were referred to variously (in descending order of frequency) as yobs, thugs, sick, feral, hoodie, louts, heartless, evil, frightening, scum, monsters, inhuman and threatening. There were very few positive stories involving teens to balance the bad ones.

After news that 13-year-old Alfie Patten had apparently fathered a child, newspapers in recent weeks have been filled with tales of

teenage dads. However, before pictures of baby-faced Alfie emerged, teenage fathers barely featured on the media's radar. In the previous 12 months, stories about crime have dwarfed all other coverage of teenagers.

In the newspapers surveyed, researchers identified 8,269 stories involving teenage boys. More than half of these, 4,374, were about crime (split fairly evenly between burglary/robbery, knife crime, gun crime and murders). All other categories, such as education, sport, health or entertainment, accounted for just 3,895 stories.

*Only 24% of stories about teens
and sport were positive;
only 16% of stories about them
and entertainment were positive*

One of Women in Journalism's most striking findings was how much teen boys are influenced by the bad press they get. It seems that the endless diet of media reports about yobs and feral youths is making them fearful of other teens. Nearly a third said they are 'always' or 'often' wary of teenage boys they don't know; nearly three-quarters have changed their behaviour to avoid other teens. The most popular reason for their wariness, cited by 51%, was 'media stories about teen boys', compared with 40% who said their wariness was based on their own or friends' bad experiences of other teens.

For all the coverage about teenagers, boys voices are rarely heard directly in the press. A 2005 study found that fewer than one in 10 articles about young people actually quoted young people, or included their perspectives in the debate.

For much of the press, there is no such thing as a good news story about teenagers. Stories about sport and entertainment, which might have balanced other negative coverage, also often took a critical line. Echo analysed a representative sample of stories on a range of topics to see whether teen boys were portrayed positively, negatively or neutrally: only 16% of stories about teens and

entertainment were positive; only 24% about teens and sport were positive. For example, one story about teenagers and the Olympics worried that yobs and hoodies will tarnish Britain's image during the 2012 Games.

A photo of perfectly ordinary lads standing around wearing hooded tops is used by the press as visual shorthand for menace, or even the breakdown of society. Clearly, the teen boys' 'brand' has become toxic: if teen boys were a chemical company they'd be Union Carbide; worse, if they were a banker, they'd be Fred Goodwin.

*The teen boys' 'brand' is toxic:
if teen boys were a banker,
they'd be Fred Goodwin*

However, Jonathan Bottomley, head of planning at ad agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty thinks it's the newspapers not the teens that need a makeover. His company has a strong incentive to know what teens are really like, so BBH can market to them effectively. If teens really were all knife-wielding hoodies, companies like his would rapidly go out of business, he concedes.

Far from being identikit yobs, teenage boys have never had such a broad and disparate range of interests and characteristics – not least because of an increasingly fragmented media which can serve these different teen audiences.

While real teens are being demonised in the adult press, adults in their 30s and 40s have fetishised the good bits of being a teen, says Bottomley. 'People in ad agencies like this ours, will come into work in trainers, with angular haircuts and wearing Bathing Ape clothes.' Teenage behaviour is only acceptable if you're over 30, it seems.

We did, however, find some news coverage where teen boys were described in glowing terms - 'model student', 'angel', 'altar boy', or 'every mother's perfect son'. But sadly, these descriptions were reserved for teenage boys who had met a violent and untimely death during the course of 2008.

Fiona Bawdon, March 2009

** Echo Research is an independent reputation and communication research specialist with a twenty-year track record in undertaking stakeholder studies and media content analysis. Echo provides support to clients in the private and public sectors, universities, regulators and NGOs as well as to more than one quarter of FTSE and Fortune 100 quoted companies. www.echoresearch.com*

4. Research findings



WOMEN IN JOURNALISM TEENAGE BOYS AND THE MEDIA

Report of findings
March 2009

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echo
GLOBAL RESEARCH PROTECTING BRANDS AND REPUTATION

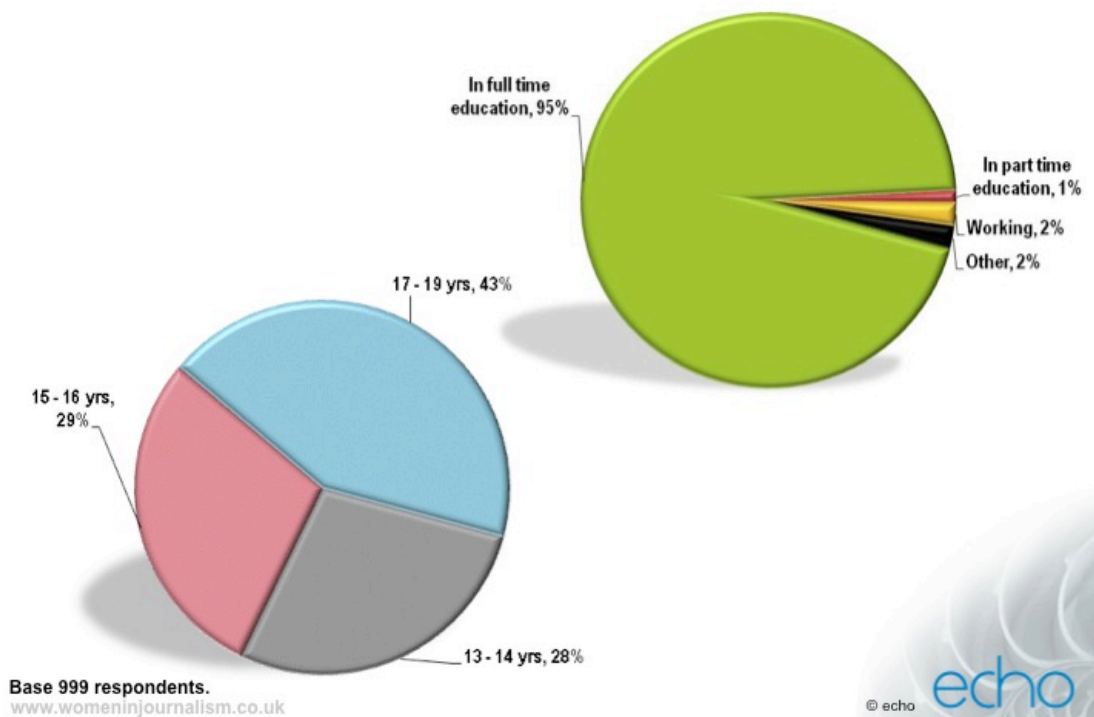
Report Summary

- This report looks at the impact that negative media coverage has on teenage boys and their day-to-day lives.
- This was done by an online omnibus survey carried out in January 2009 of a representative sample of 1,000 teenage boys from 5 different UK regions.

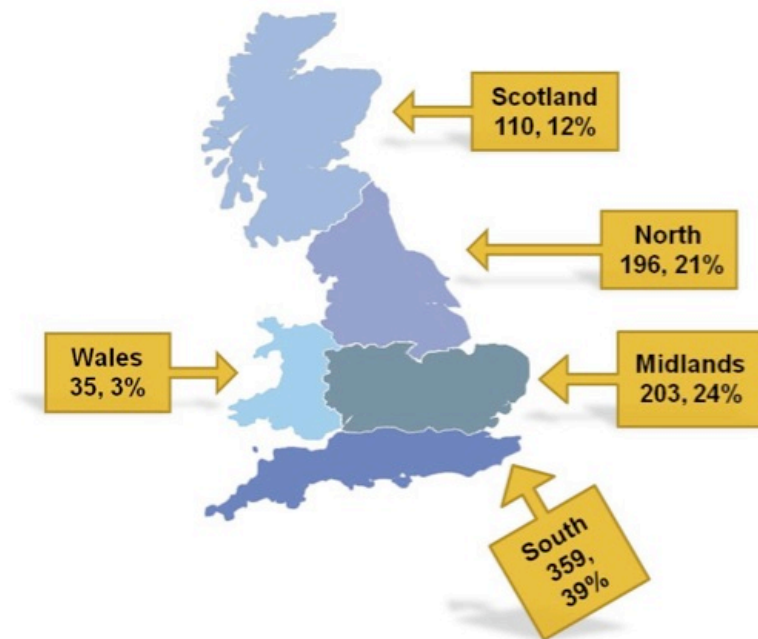
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Breakdown of omnibus sample



Geographical representation of sample

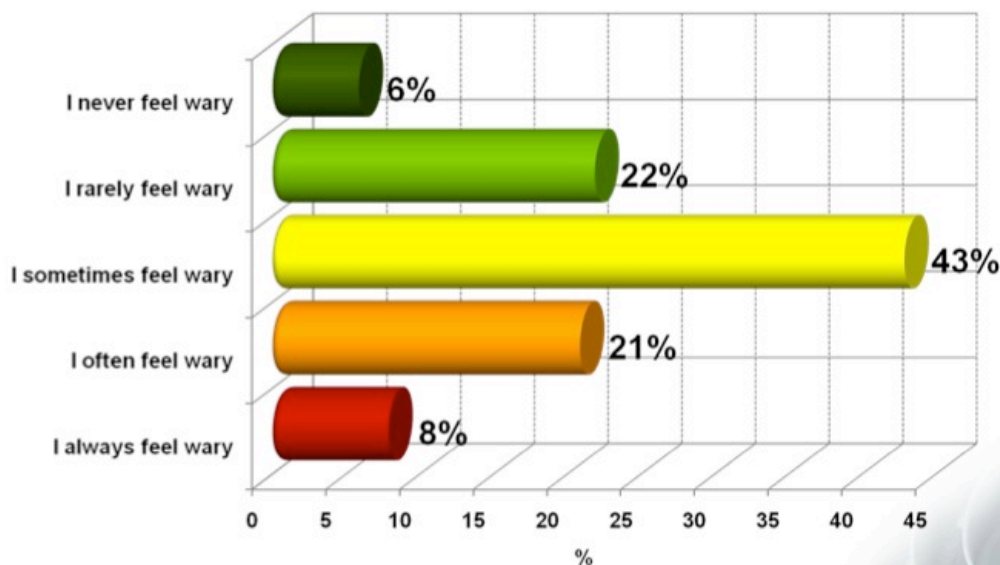


Base: 906 Respondents. Excluding 'Not Stated' (93).
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Nearly 30% of teenage boys are 'always' or 'often' wary when they see other teenage boys they don't know.

Q1. When you're out on the street and you come across teenage boys that you don't know, do you feel wary ?

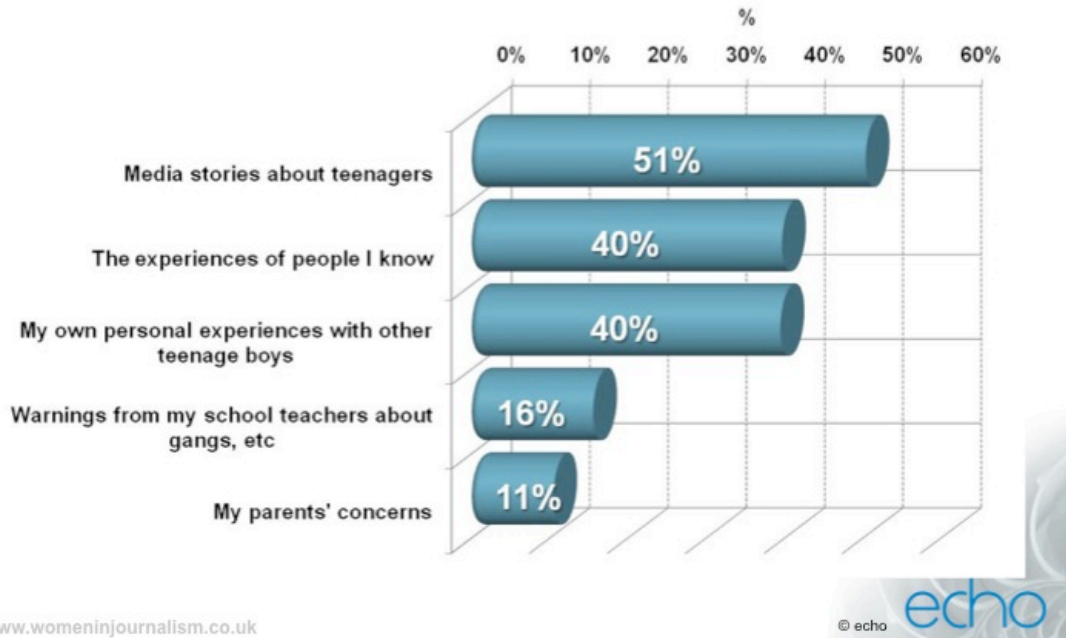


Base 999 respondents.
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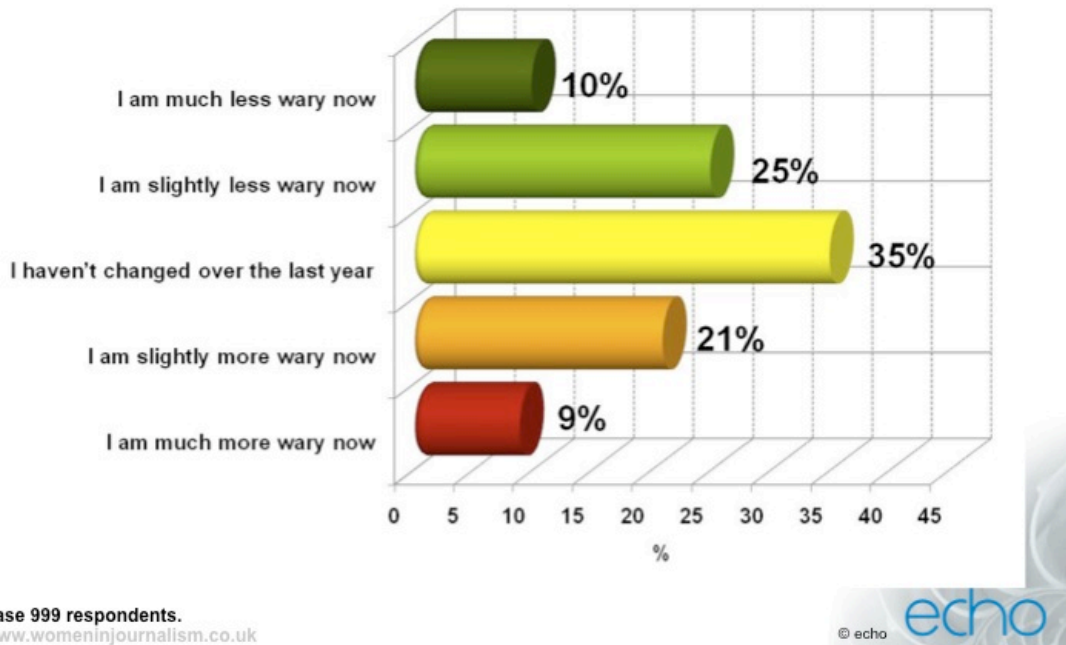
The media has more of an impact on teenage boys' wariness than their own personal experiences.

Q2. What are the main reasons for wariness? Base: 935 Respondents – all those who answered 'Wary' in Question 1.



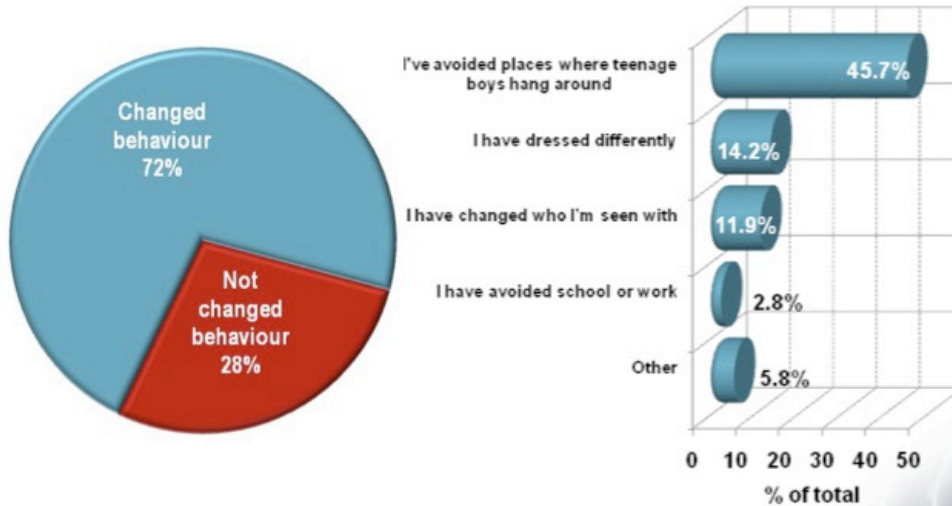
The degree of wariness that teen boys feel hasn't changed over the past year.

Q3. Have you become more or less wary of other teenage boys since around this time last year?



72% of teenage boys have changed their behaviour because of their wariness.

Q4. Have you changed your behaviour over the last year because of wariness of other teenage boys?

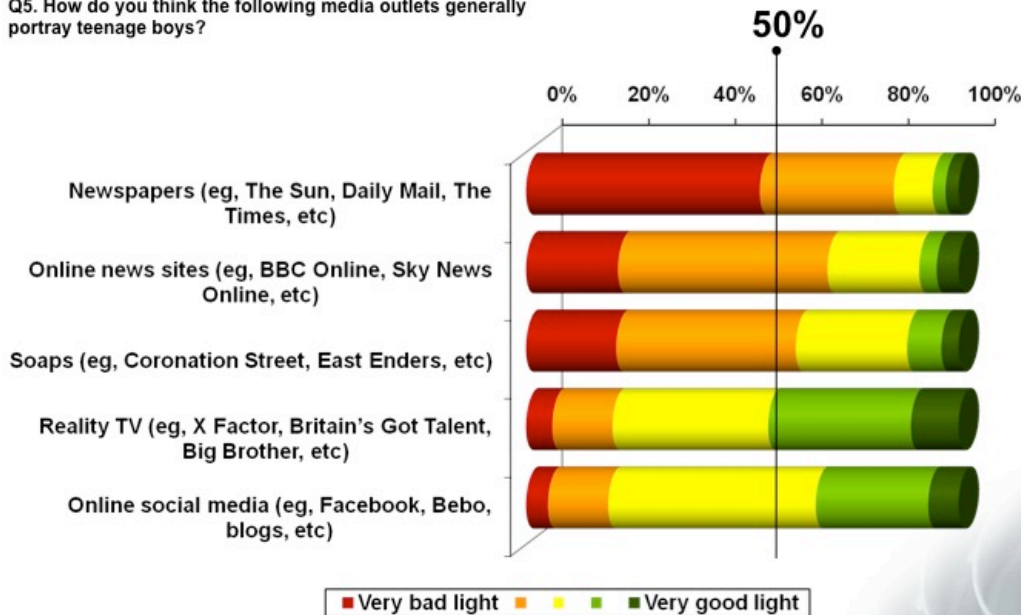


Base 999 respondents.
Respondents can choose more than one.
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Some 85% of teen boys think the press portrays them in a bad light

Q5. How do you think the following media outlets generally portray teenage boys?

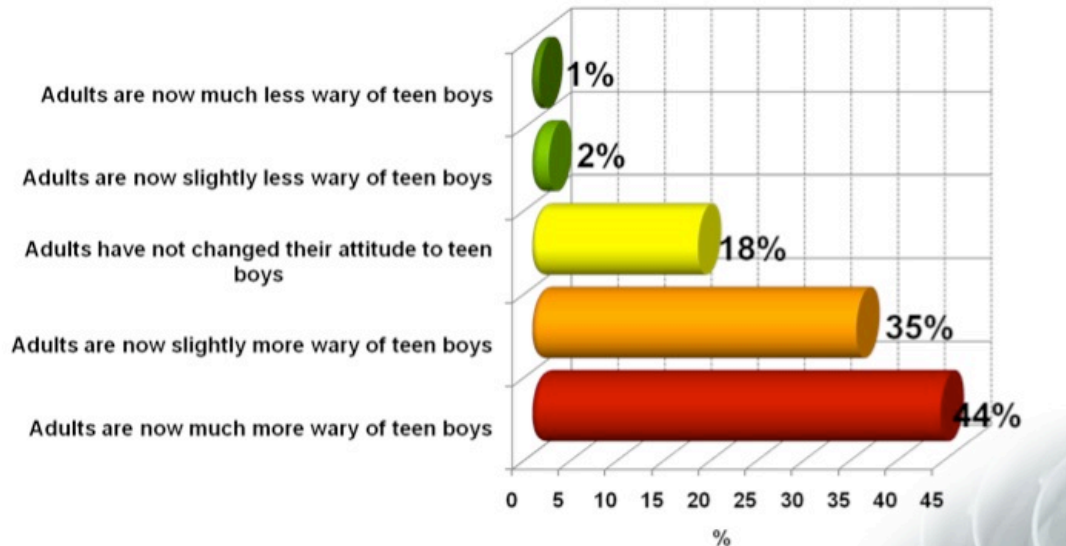


Base: 999 Respondents
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Nearly 80% think that adults are more wary now of teen boys than they were a year ago.

Q6. Do you think adults in general have changed their attitude towards teenage boys since around this time last year?

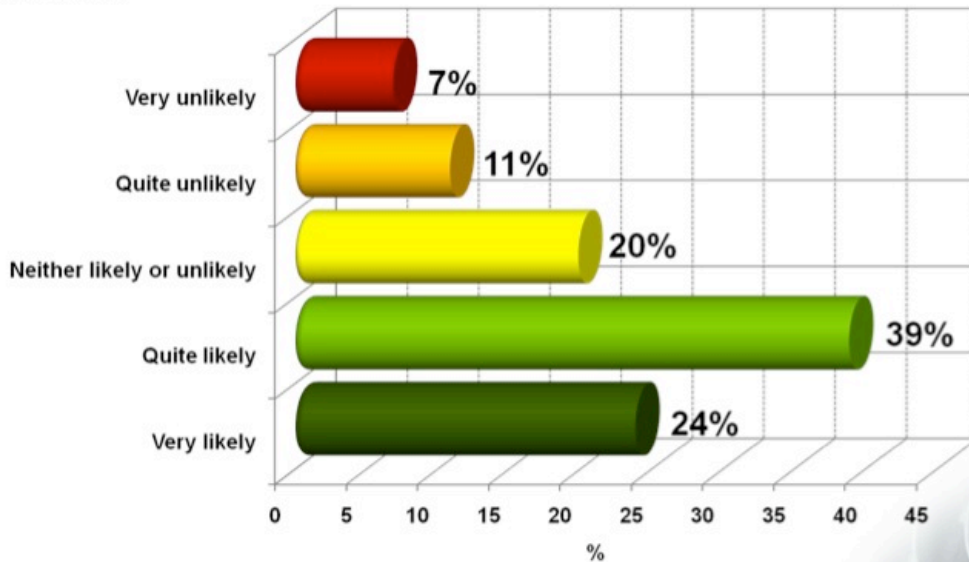


Base: 999 Respondents, excluding 'Other' (603 responses)
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Over 60% of teen boys would be likely to ask an adult they didn't know for directions

Q7. If you were out on your own and needed directions, how likely is that you would approach an adult you didn't know for help?



Base 999 respondents.
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Report Summary

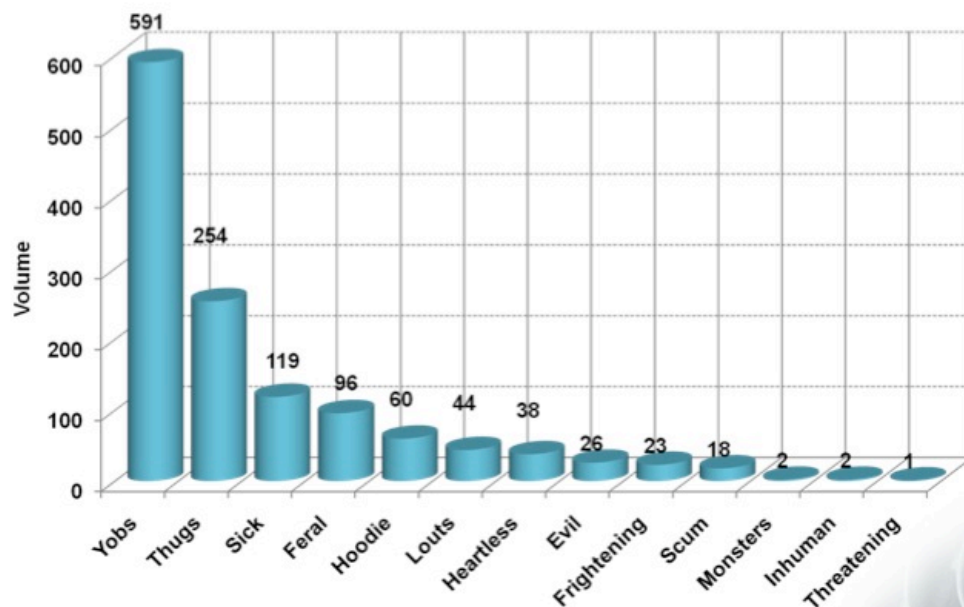
- Echo Sonar tracked UK national and regional newspaper coverage of teenage boys over the past year.
- Findings were broken down by subject matter; and a representative sample was analysed for tone - ie, whether the stories portrayed teen boys in a positive, negative or neutral light.



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Terms used in stories about teen boys

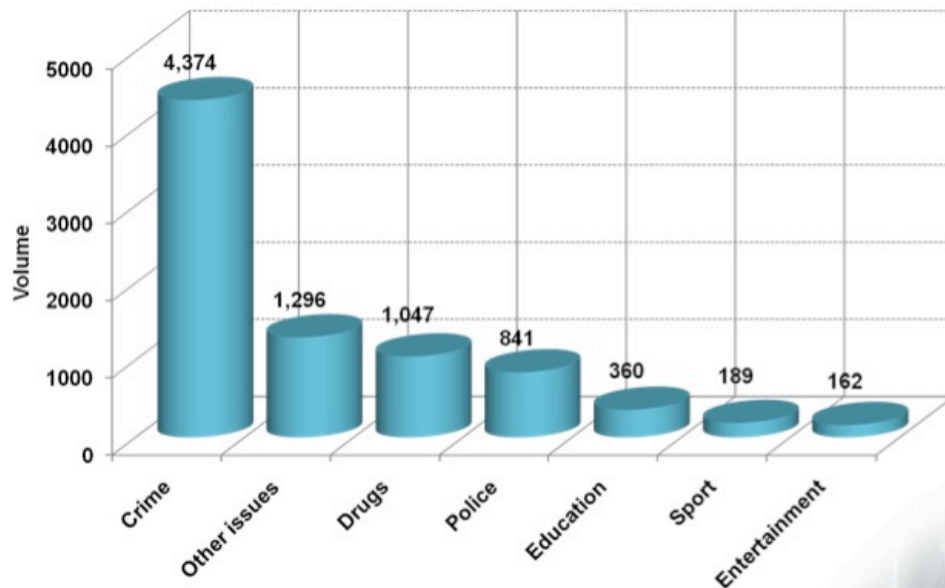


Top descriptors of teenage boys, (figures are indicative only).
Base: one year to date.

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Volume of coverage for Teenage boys - UK

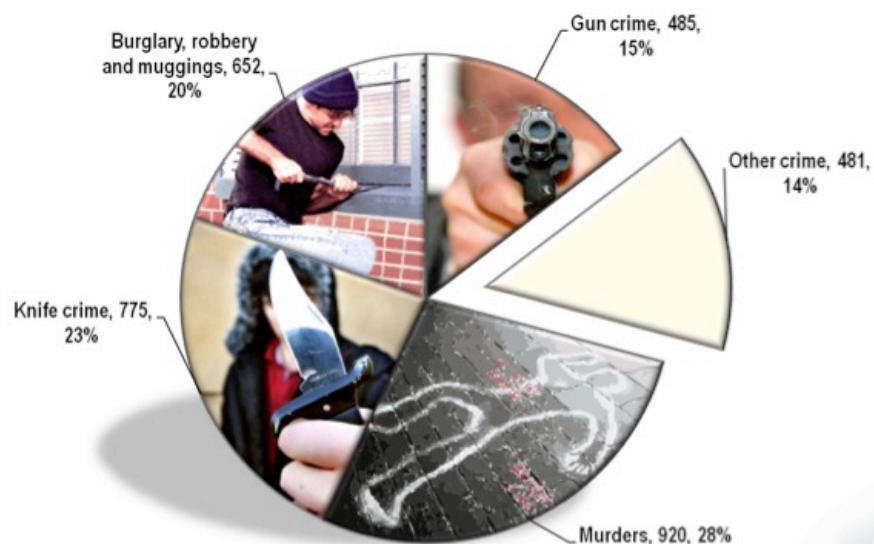


Base: one year to date.
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Volume of coverage for Teenage boys

by Issue group **Crime** - UK

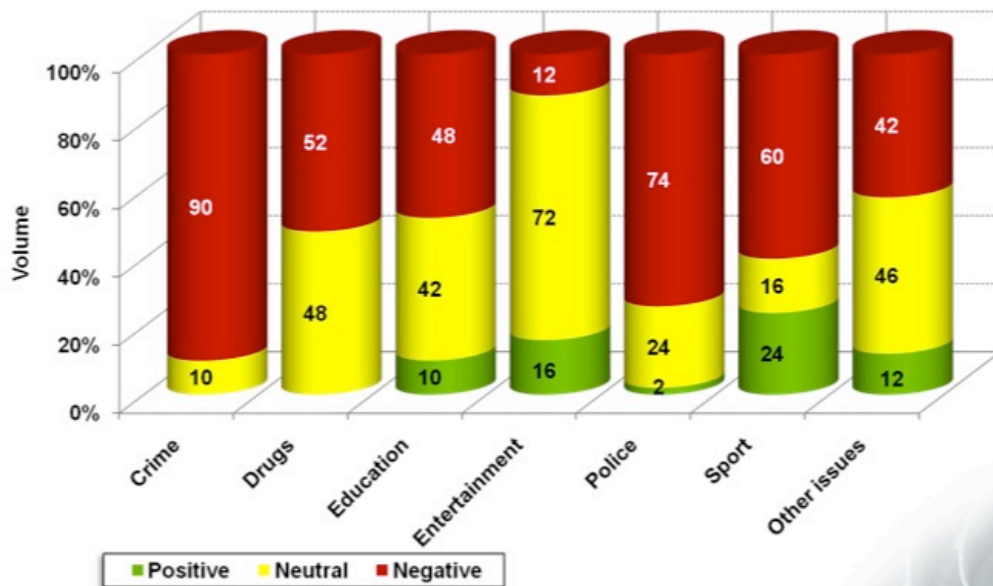


Top issues per category.
 Base: one year to date.
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Volume of coverage for Teenage boys

by issue - UK



Based on representative sample of 50 articles per issue category.
Base: one year to date.

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5. What is Women in Journalism?

Women in Journalism was founded in 1995 as a networking, campaigning, training and social organisation for women journalists who work across all the written and new media. We have over 530 members, including many of the most senior women in the industry. Unlike other media organisations, we welcome both magazine and newspaper journalists, attracting both staff and freelancers, prominent editors and more junior writers. We currently have a 55/ 45 split between freelance and staff members.

WIJ seminars

The sharing of experience and knowledge is one of the fundamental aims of the organisation. WIJ seminars are unique in being able to draw on the expertise of so many leading journalists and editors from a wide range of newspapers and magazines, all of whom recognise the value of encouraging talented women. We cover subjects close to every journalist's heart. Leading journalists, authors and social commentators usually make up the panel.

We run a programme of six seminars each year which are attended by 70 to 100 writers. Typical or regular seminars include:

- * **Writing that book** (with major UK publishers and agents);
- * **The art of the interview**, where some of the most famous interviewers in the national press have shared the tricks of their trade.
- * **From sub-editor to editor**
- * **The great features debate**
- * **'What do you want to be when you grow up? Career development for journalists.**
- * **From magazine to web**
- * **Perfect pitch – what commissioning editors really want**
- * **"Use it or lose it"**, based around WIJ research into ageism

In September 2007, WiJ staged its first summit: 'Am I Bovered?; What are teenage girls *really* thinking?' What is media stereotyping doing to the ambitions and aspirations of the next generation of young women?

Research

We regularly conduct research on subjects close to our members' hearts, and our findings generally attract widespread media coverage. Recent research papers have included: Chaps of both sexes; The hidden sex; Women in the news; The cheaper sex.

WIJ and government

We have also run joint seminars with the Cabinet Office, to encourage women to apply for public appointments, and we regularly hold networking events at the party conferences.

WIJ website

Our website remains the essential link to the Women in Journalism community: it's the medium through which we communicate with our members (through newsletters, bulletin boards, jobs vacancies, events listings); and it is also our shop window to the wider world.

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Women in Journalism's founders' lunch

Women in Journalism's founders' lunch is an occasional "big name" event specifically designed for those women who supported the organisation when it began 11 years ago, plus specially invited guests from the media.

Previous speakers have included US Vogue's ultra-chic editor-in-chief Anna Wintour, the Daily Mail's best-known columnist, the late Lynda Lee Potter, and CNN's redoubtable foreign correspondent Christiane Amanpour.

Maureen Dowd, the New York Times columnist who floors with almost every punch, spoke at the fourth WiJ founders' lunch in spring 2006 with an audience of women from the highest levels in publishing.

Wij parties

We hold parties twice a year, in summer and at Christmas, for our members, plus specially invited guests, including leading figures from the publishing world. These events are an ideal opportunity for women journalists to network and share experiences.

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