



## Youth, gender, and perceptions of security in Norway

Nikolai George Lewis Holm, Linn-Marie Lillehaug Pedersen & Elisabeth Pettersen

To cite this article: Nikolai George Lewis Holm, Linn-Marie Lillehaug Pedersen & Elisabeth Pettersen (2019): Youth, gender, and perceptions of security in Norway, International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, DOI: [10.1080/02673843.2019.1669060](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1669060)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1669060>



© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 25 Sep 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 201



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Youth, gender, and perceptions of security in Norway

Nikolai George Lewis Holm , Linn-Marie Lillehaug Pedersen  and Elisabeth Pettersen

Faculty of Social Sciences, Nord University, Bodø, Norway

### ABSTRACT

This article examines how and where issues of gender emerged in Norwegian youths' self-defined constructions of security. Previous work has focused on security in relation to generational gaps and gendered perspectives, but there remains a need for further empirical research of an integrated perspective of security, gender and youth. Drawing on data collected from 21 interviews, this study provides insight into how youth understand the concept of security, seeking to isolate how and where gender related issues emerge in those perspectives. The findings of the study indicate that youth definitions of security are broad and cannot sufficiently be described by any one theoretical perspective on security; however, the youth often related their concept of security to how insecurities are experienced by others. Thus, when discussions of gender or other factors of security disparity emerged, they did so with an understanding of their own privileged security perspective.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 August 2019  
Accepted 14 September 2019

### KEYWORDS

Youth; young people;  
insecurity; security; gender

## Introduction

Two historically neglected issues in discussions of security are those of youth and gender. In recognition of the first oversight, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2250 on 9 December 2015 (UNSC, 2015). Sponsored by Jordan, the resolution was the first ever such statement from the UN on youth peace and security from the international body. Reflecting on the importance of this development, Ahmad Alhendawi, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, describe it as '... a major breakthrough in our collective efforts to change the predominantly negative narrative on youth and recognize the significant role of young people in peacebuilding. Youth have for too long been cast away as either the perpetrators of violence or its victims' (Alhendawi, 2015). Indeed, society can unfairly label youth as perpetrators of crime, or push their concerns aside in favour of the elder statesmen of the world. Unfortunately, while Resolution 2250 was a breakthrough regarding youth, the text of the document scarcely touched upon the issue of gender. Even when Resolution 2250 did so, it addressed the gender only in the narrow context of sexual violence and 'gender-sensitive employment' (UNSC, 2015). As such, it repeated of the shortcomings from UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) which also adopted a narrow scope, focusing strictly on the role of women in conflict and peacebuilding, failing to embrace broader conceptualizations of gender or aspects of security beyond conflict. Moreover, UNSC 1325 lacked any references to youth beyond the occasional reference to 'girls'. This was inherently reductive, minimizing the importance of both gender and youth in security to narrow and tokenistic components.

As with youth, the absence of gender in discussions of security has not gone unnoticed. Numerous scholars have pointed towards the importance of including gender into security analysis, discourse, and practice (See: Hansen, 2000; Hoogensen & Rottem, 2004; Hudson, 2005).

Not only can failing to acknowledge gender perspectives limit the normative potential of analysis, it serves to mute the voices of many members of society from emerging in the greater discourse. This is particularly important when examining issues of crime or insecurity, as studies have indicated that gender reflexive analysis yields significant differences in results (Đurić & Popović-Ćitić, 2013; Franklin & Franklin, 2009; Smith & Torstensson, 1997). For example, Franklin and Franklin (2009) have shown that young women perceive security threats more acutely than their elder counterparts, indicating an interplay between age, gender, and perceptions of insecurity. Similarly, a study by Vornanen, Törrönen, and Niemelä (2009) on youth in Finland indicated that girls and boys tended to define insecurity differently. Girls focused more on social insecurities, whereas boys focused more on threats to integrity. These results demand further empirical investigation on perspectives from youth on issues of gender and security. It is increasingly clear that there is value in not only examining the subject of security in regards to gender and youth independently, but also in combination.

This article explores young people's perspectives on themes of security, with an emphasis on how gender-related security issues emerge in their conceptualizations of security. Drawing on interviews with youth from Norway, it seeks to highlight the scope of how these young people understand the concept of security and how, if at all, their perspectives are influenced by or reflect gendered themes. In doing so, it demonstrates how even youth in one of the world's safest and wealthiest countries have complex and reflective concerns regarding security and gender, thus highlighting the importance of these issues in any context.<sup>1</sup> The first section addresses the challenges of incorporating gender in security analysis. Then, it presents the methodological approaches, a description of the participant group, and relevant study limitations. The following section presents the research findings on youth and their notions of security. Finally, the article discusses and summarizes the findings. The article will thereby demonstrate that not only did participants have varied and nuanced conceptualizations of security, but they construct their notions of security in a way that is conscious of gender disparity and sympathetic in regards to how insecurities are experienced by others.

## Security and gender

Conceptually, security is an inherently contested notion that is subject to many approaches and definitions (Ayoob, 2002; Baldwin, 1997; Blanchard, 2003; Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998; Huysmans, 1998; Rothschild, 1995). Realists and neo-realists contend that security is the realm of the state, while proponents of human security argue that security starts at the individual level and extends upwards (Paris, 2001). Alternatively, there are those who argue that security is a socially constructed notion, sometimes deliberately, and a product of our social realities (Balzacq, 2010; Buzan et al., 1998; Huysmans, 2002). Security has been posited by Ken Booth (1991) to be an issue of emancipation. Others build on the work of Giddens and consider a form of ontological security, where actors seek to reconcile risks and uncertainties, positioning security as a sense of stability and continuity (Huysmans, 1998; McSweeney, 1999; Mitzen, 2006). There is no shortage of paths to security analysis, each with their own set of champions and critics; however, this research seeks to understand how individual young people understand security, not to impose an understanding upon them. Strict adherence to any such approach would inherently place restrictions and create limitations in the analysis that could potentially silence informant perspectives. As such, the work adopts a social constructivist perspective on security, while recognizing those same constructivist understandings of security may not apply, or may even be rejected by the participants.

Nevertheless, these issues mandate investigation, thus Liotta (2002, pp. 474–475) rightly suggests that security fundamentally boils down to three questions: Security from what? Security by whom? Security through which means? However, when gender is incorporated, this picture becomes more complicated. Regarding gendered understandings of security Hoogensen and Rottem (2004, p. 156) suggest that the question 'security for whom?' should be added to

discussions of security. Security and insecurity may not be experienced equally between groups. Factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and social position can result in different experiences of security (Fox, Nobles, & Piquero, 2009; Pain, 2001). Studies have shown that women are often the most at risk or most susceptible to insecurities, yet their voices are often excluded from discussions of security (Blanchard, 2003; Hansen, 2000; Woolnough, 2009). That being said, incorporating gender into security analysis means more than simply addressing the needs of women as a matter of rote.

Gender conscious analysis requires more than focusing exclusively on women's issues, while casting aside issues of masculinity and male perspectives (Romaniuk & Wasylciw, 2010). Neither should gender be construed as a polarity or contest between masculinity and femininity, as they can often overlap and blend with one another (Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Hooper, 2012). As noted by Cohn, Hill, and Ruddick (2005, p. 1) that '[g]ender is not only about individual identity or what a society teaches us a man or woman, boy or girl should be like. Gender is also a way of structuring relations of power'. The security needs of women, men, and indeed all gender identities are potentially – but not necessarily – very different. Security analyses need to be flexible around that possibility and the power dynamics that shape perspectives.

As such, this analysis investigates the scope of youth security perceptions and values while remaining cognizant of the interplay between gender and perceptions of security. It remains open to any definitions or constructions of security, taking care not to impose pre-conceived notions of security upon participants. Neither does it seek to coerce themes of gender out of participants. The aim is to encourage participants to sculpt their own definitions on the range and scope of security across personal, social scales and beyond.

## Methods

This research was conducted as part of a study on youth perspectives on global-to-local security in Norway between January and December of 2017.<sup>2</sup> While other parts of the project focused on sense of place and security, this component serves as a deliberate, gender-conscious analysis of a subset of the data collected. The thematic complexity of security and the potential range of responses suggested that qualitative methods – namely, interviews – should be employed to ensure greater detail and context regarding participants' perspectives (Coffey, Atkinson, & Omarzu, 1997; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Silverman, 2013). However, interviewing is an interpretive process and it is essential to keep in mind that empirical data collected through interviews is produced and mediated by the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). Thus, it is important to be cognizant of how relational factors can influence data production.

As the research investigates security perceptions of youth and young adults, it was first necessary to determine a definition of youth relevant to the given context in order to guide recruitment strategies. There is no universal definition of youth across countries or international organizations. UN resolution 2250 defines youth as being from 18 through 29 years of age; however, other UN agencies adopt alternative definitions, such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) which defines 'youth' as people between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNDESA, 2013; UNSC, 2015). The Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality has no strict definition of youth, instead reflecting on the economic and social role of individuals (Wolf et al., 2005). Youth is regarded as the age of transition from adolescence to adulthood, where students move to higher education and/or the labour market. In this phase of life, important issues play a role and shape their decisions concerning their future and how they relate to different security related issues, for example income and job security (Walther, 2006). Norway considers factors such as economic participation and consumption, suggesting a general range of individuals between the ages of 12 and 29 being classified as youth (Wolf et al., 2005). With these considerations in mind, the youth who volunteered for interviews ranged from 16 to 24 years of age. Out of the 21

interviewees, there were 12 males and 9 females participating. Nine of them were under the age of majority, with 12 being 18 years or older. Legal guardians for participants under the age of majority (18 years old) were contacted to obtain written permission to participate in the research.

Data collection occurred through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Given the target group, recruitment began at local educational institutions – specifically, high school and university levels. University participants were recruited through invitations during classes. High school participants were recruited through contact with teachers and parents. Additional interviews were solicited opportunistically using snowball sampling. Admittedly, this method of recruitment created a bias in that participants were overly representative of higher educated segments of the population. Interviews followed a basic guide developed by the authors, with the semi-structured approach allowing participants flexibility and space to reflect and define their own personalized security definitions and values. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. Participants were ethnic and gender reflective pseudonyms (see Table 1). All interviews were conducted by the authors in a one-on-one setting; however, some early interviews were conducted by two of the authorship team in order to harmonize interviewing strategies.

When preparing for the interview process, age, gender, and social position were considered as factors that could potentially affect the relation between the young person and the researcher, and therefore the results of the study (see: Kane & Macaulay, 1993; Longhofer, Floersch, & Hoy, 2012; Padfield & Procter, 1996). For a young person, sitting down in an office with an older researcher or someone of a different gender to discuss potentially sensitive questions might be uncomfortable or intimidating – there is an inherent power imbalance. As such, early stages of interviews were used to acclimatize the interviewee to the setting, procedure, motivation for research, and conveying importance of giving youth opportunities to voice perspectives on security. Interviewees were encouraged to ask questions or bring up any concerns they had.

Main interview questions began with questions intended to set the power of definition in the hands of the young people. For example, all interviewees were asked the questions such as ‘what does security mean for you?’ and ‘what does it mean to feel secure?’ as a way of encouraging interviewees to reflect on their conceptual, emotional, and ontological reflections of security. Similarly phrased inquiries into individual conceptualizations of security have successfully elicited unique and personalized definitions in other contexts, for example, Holm’s (2017) study of youth in Liberia, or as in the UN Development Programme’s (1994) report on human security. In seeking to

**Table 1.** Interview participants pseudonyms, age, and gender.

Interview Number and Pseudonym	Age	Self-Indicated Gender
1 – Heidi	16	F
2 – Inger	16	F
3 – Iselin	17	F
4 – Siv	17	F
5 – Nanna	18	F
6 – Tine	20	F
7 – Turid	20	F
8 – Terese	20	F
9 – Mia	23	F
10 – Anton	16	M
11 – Vidar	16	M
12 – Einar	16	M
13 – Odin	17	M
14 – Joakim	17	M
15 – Rolf	18	M
16 – Bent	20	M
17 – Aksel	21	M
18 – Torvald	21	M
19 – Eirik	22	M
20 – Mats	22	M
21 – Morten	24	M

define and scope their notions of security, other questions focused on security perspectives as related to their life, their community, international and global issues as well as other emergent topics based on previous responses.

The transcribed interviews were analysed using NVivo. Interviews were coded into predetermined and emergent thematic categories generated through multiple readings by the author team. Predetermined categories included gender specific concerns, research question responses by gender, and influences on youth perspective, such as the role of media in feelings of insecurity. Additionally, interviews were coded according to a heuristic framework based on Vornanen et al.'s (2009) 'Circles of Insecurity' (see Figure 1). The tool visualizes insecurities in three nested circles, each corresponding to a different level of insecurities: the inner circle relates to a person's emotions and experiences; the social circle involves a person's social needs, interactions, and relationships; and the outer circle addresses external realities and uncertainties. It should be noted that while the Vornanen et al. study focused on Finnish youths' perspectives on insecurity and the study presented here on Norwegian youths' perspectives, it does not impede the usefulness of the circles of (in)security as a way of organizing or categorizing participant responses.

This framework was selected as it provided an analytically relevant and efficient means for coding and categorizing the data while not imposing any definition of security onto the responses beyond a scoping/scaling mechanism. Additionally, the framework's validity for the particular sample group was demonstrated from its previous use on a comparable sample group – that is, youth from a peer-Nordic country



**Figure 1.** Circles of insecurity.

**Description:** Figure 1 illustrates the 'Circles of Insecurity' as described by Vornanen (2000) and applied in Vornanen et al. (2009). The figure represents a way of describing and categorizing perceptions, understandings, and experiences of insecurity across three levels: inner, social, and outer.

Source: Vornanen et al. (2009): 408. Original (in Finnish): Vornanen 2000: 296.

(Finland). These codes were centred on personal, social, and external (in)securities. It should be mentioned that in contrast to Vornanen et al, this study asked not ‘what is insecurity?’ but instead, ‘what is security?’ This inversion of the question, as will be discussed, potentially yielded different results.

## Data presentation

This section presents the study results in two segments: firstly, those results that relate to how youth conceptualized and reflected on security in general, non-gendered terms; secondly, those results that illustrate the areas in which gender materialized as relevant to their reflections on security. Additionally, each section is parsed across scopes and scales based on the circles of (in)security tool.

### General reflections on security

The young people who participated in this study expressed a broad range of concerns and conceptualizations regarding security. While some focused on issues of personal safety and others more on issues of internationally security, the general trend was that the youth expressed complex conceptualizations of security that spanned inner, social, and outer circles.

In regards to the inner circle of security – feelings of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, or the feeling of being threatened or unsafe – the majority of youth focused most strongly on issues connected to physical or personal safety [1,2,4–6,10–11,14,16–17,19,21], but more universally, the positive emotions generated by feelings of predictability [1–21]. Participants expressed these inner circle securities through both specific and abstract ways. A typical and often repeated concern was personal safety, particularly in regards to traffic [1,4,11,14,16–17,19–20]. Probing about where a sense of security came from revealed more nuance. For example, Anton stated that ‘[it] comes from feeling secure, for example ... that nothing happens at school. For example, I work with electricity a lot, so that you try to be very careful that you do not get any in you’ [10]. For him, having safe practices and routines he used while going about his day was a source of security.

Other participants addressed inner issues indirectly, connecting positive feelings of security and stability as rooted in perceptions of certainty in other circles. Terese pointed to the confidence that she would always have clean water, enough food, and feelings of safety going to bed without locking her door. Mats said ‘[security is] that I am safe. That society enables us to live a life without fear’ [20]. For him, feelings of personal safety were rooted in the nature of the society itself.

Participants also indicated perspectives that reflect social circle security concerns. These generally involved feelings of belonging, group membership, relationships with friends and family. Categories that typically emerged were security in relation to feeling of belonging and trust. Eleven interviewees mentioned feelings of belonging in various ways, with 7 referring to families as essential to feelings of security [1,2,4–5,11,13,15] with 6 of them defining friendships as a key factor [2,9,11–13,18]. For example ‘... that I have friends and family and people I am together with every day, that’s what is most important for me. That they are there, together with me, means a lot to my security’ [13]. Odin linked security with his family and friendships, defining the people closest to him as being the most important factors in his security. Vidar also mentioned family and friends, going further and explaining it with respect to his community:

That the city is quite all right to live in [is important]. A lot of opportunities for youth, like for example political parties and organizations, so that one can do something on one’s spare time. That is security ... [11]

Included within Vidar’s concept of belonging is the ability to associate freely in one’s spare time in formalized groups. Other participants, like Rolf, addressed feelings of belonging in relation to the experiences of immigrants in his community:

I think that I am in another group than many of the others that I go to school with. Those who come from other countries, those who live in [name of the city], go to school and what I am afraid of, or not so afraid, but worried about is that they can group up and split into groups, and that they become against our society, that they will not become part of us. Fall outside [society] ... [15]



While not an immigrant himself, he points to polarization and division in society as a source of insecurity, and the lack of belonging to the majority group as a concern – expressing this with the phrase: ‘Fall outside [society] ...’ Both Rolf and Morten reflected on notions of ‘us and them’ in their thoughts around immigration and security. However, Morten, in contrast to Rolf, reflected critically on the concept: ‘We have this concept, them against us [...] who are “us” and who are “them”? This is interesting. Is it us against them? Is it Christians against Muslims?’ [21]. Flipping the terms from ‘them against us’ to ‘us against them’ he challenges expectations of who is made insecure by a lack of belonging. He further dwelled on the question of how it must feel to be new in a country and that immigrant culture is pushed aside in favour of the culture in Norway. As he formulates it, ‘... that they can’t keep their own culture one can say’ [21]. Relations between societal groups was also an issue for Mia – a member of a visible minority – who worried about racial tension as a source of insecurity. She noted, ‘I experienced a significant change after the refugee crisis. The atmosphere in society is different. I notice what people write and what they say. It is more racist now than before ... just a couple of years ago it was better’ [9].

A recurrent topic in many of the interviews was trust in relation to security, with many interviewees mentioning trust in the state institutions such as the police or democracy [2–7,9–10,12–14,16–18]. Trust, or lack of trust, in politicians, authorities, police, military, or the governance system was highlighted when the participants talked about authorities. The young men and women made similar reflections concerning the authorities at a systematic level. The trust in that they ‘work’ for the population, was repeated often. As Anton answered when asked about trust in the Norwegian police: ‘I hope they work for me. There is perhaps a small chance they don’t, but in general, I think that they do. It could be that they also discover things, that for safety [reasons] are important or they have access to all information’ [10]. Trust, particularly connected to the principal of equality before the law and fair rule, was key to security. More specifically, having a belief that the system, or state, is working for the populations’ interest.

Interestingly, Nanna was an exception to her peers, recounting an episode that disrupted feelings of trust. She said, ‘I think about this with security that before I trusted the police, and now I am not quite there, now I can’t trust them completely’ [5]. She witnessed police behaviour that ran contrary to her expectations. As a result, she indicated a degree of scepticism regarding trust in treatment before the law or law enforcement. These results echo a study from Saarikkomäki (2018), where Finnish youth relayed higher degrees of trust in police services as a result of perceived professionalism, but also personal experiences and encounters. This is perhaps an indicator of fragility in perceived social circle securities.

At the outer circle – those notions that relate to external realities, ranging from war, economic insecurity, crime, or other uncertainties – all participants voiced concerns of some kind [1–21]. In particular, participants’ referenced security issues around social welfare systems, terrorism, and environmental concerns amongst others.

Interstate conflict and war was a common theme across interviews [1–7, 9–14, 16–19, 21]; however, while the topic was often raised, it was downplayed in terms of likelihood. For example, despite raising the issue, Vidar was explicit in his lack of fear, saying, ‘I think that there is no danger of attacks against me or Norway today, so I am not afraid of that’ [11]. Numerous participants echoed similar sentiments [1, 3, 6–7, 9–11,13–17,19,21]. Risk of war was not seen as relevant in reality, suggesting that interstate conflict was viewed as a hypothetical concern rather than a real threat. Interestingly, Turid rejected the risk of war on Norwegian territory while simultaneously reflecting upon the role and responsibility of Norway in conflicts in other countries:

I am not personally worried about war, no. I feel that we live in a stable area of the world, right? But I do think it is sad if there is war in other parts of the world, and the consequences of war other places [...] and then I think that we, who also share part of the responsibility of the conflicts in the world, do not take the responsibility for those parts of [the conflicts]. [7]

Her concerns were less about risks for herself and instead about her country’s role contributing to insecurity in other parts of the world.



Awareness of global interconnectedness also surfaced in regards to media consumption and their understandings of security and insecurity. For example, if topics touched on conflict, informants referred to reading in newspapers or the internet, either tangentially or as the main point of their remarks. Odin and Siv put it thusly:

I read newspapers. I think about the security as the global market [...] that is what makes us connected with the rest of the world and that we can live so well and safe here. So, military security is important. [13]

I think about Putin, and Trump and that guy in North Korea [...] I don't remember his name, but other places with violence, but it doesn't concern me every much in my everyday life really, only when I watch news. [4]

Both participants acknowledged the role of media in shaping their views of security, but to different degrees. Odin noted how media has informed his understanding of the interconnected nature of security; however, Siv perceived the issue of violence as something she considers only when watching the news, almost distant to her reality. Over all, participants generally expressed feelings of sympathy with those experiencing insecurity more than they felt it in their own personal experience.

These responses represent a description of the interviewees' general understanding of security. The next section presents the ways in which gender or gendered issues emerged during the interview process.

### ***Gender and reflections on security***

Areas where gender emerged as relevant to conceptualizations of security spanned inner, social, and outer circles of security. Many interviewees raised and connected the topic of gender to a number of security related issues, producing some clear examples of where they identified gendered issues [3–5,7,9,12,15,19,21]; however, the majority of interviewees did not [1–2,6,8,10–11,13–14,16–18,20]. Those with gender-cognizant perspectives expressed views typical to contemporary discussions of gender, but some produced more unique and surprising reflections.

Discussions of inner circle themes were generally devoid of gendered aspects, except in two cases. Iselin and Einar described a concern for inner circle insecurities experienced by men: namely, higher male suicide rates and expectations of masculinity. Iselin noted the gendered nature of this problem as follows:

There are many in our age group that commit suicide, and this I think really is a big threat. There are many whom we don't know how they are doing [...]. Yes, boys, it is difficult for them to ask for help, but I feel that boys have such high pressure on them. They are supposed to be so tough and not show any emotions [3]

She expressed concerns that society encouraged young men to repress emotions and avoid expression of feelings or insecurities. Einar expressed a similar sentiment:

There are higher suicide rates for men, because they feel that they can't talk with other men about feelings and such things as an example because one has to be so big and strong, right? And not be able to have feelings. So I feel that just by having people around me that I trust really makes feel more safe [12]

Both informants connected the issue of suicide rates for men and boys to issues of emotional expression, the lack of social support, and the presence of social pressures. Moreover, both participants pointed towards social expectations of masculinity as contributing to the suicide rates in men and boys. Einar went further, addressing body image and stereotypes as they applied to young men, recounting the expectation that men '... should be big and strong, and not only strong, but physically fit and not in a bad shape. But, I feel that this is a problem in society that will come to change in the future' [12]. The notion of not being allowed to have feelings is clearly part of the inner circle as it focuses on emotions like fear or anxiety; however, the topic represents an issue that bridges both inner and middle circles in that it combines issues of insecurity and emotion with having appropriate social supports and relationships.

Interestingly, few other distinctions or reflections emerged in regards to the inner circle of security and gender. All informants appeared to exhibit similar range of thoughts on inner circle issues. Specifically, participants' personal feelings of security were usually connected to an ontological sense of security that emerges from issues linked better to social and outer circles.

At the social circle, significantly more interviewees pointed to problems with gendered themes. Two participants noted that gender stereotypes and expectations a common concern relating to bullying and social pressure [3, 12]. Another participant, Morten, had concerns about local politics being a boys club. He said, '[t]he first thing I heard when I came here to [the city] was about [this kind of] camaraderie. So, this affects the trust [one has] to the politicians governing fairly, so one has to watch out for that' [21]. Morten continued, expressing concern for gender imbalances in the system, which he viewed as a threat to democracy and social relations, saying, 'I think that democracy is important and that, yes, inequality is really what weakens democracy and then it is too late. We have to ensure that it is not just rich men governing here. These are things I think about when I think about security' [21]. Morten's comments show concern about the political system and gender equality in relation to security. He presented an argument that exclusion and discrimination of women and others with political capital weakens the trust people have in institutions, which in turn affects the notion of society being secure. Inequality and discrimination was also an issue for Turid, who reflected on its economic manifestation: 'When there is ... inequality, it is the women that are effected the most here in Norway. More women work part-time, and there is not equal payment and such things, yeah so ... It is important with a gender perspective on security I think' [7]. She viewed the tendency of many women to work part time or in jobs that are paid less as issues of discrimination in the Norwegian labour market and therefore of security.

Mia raised another social circle insecurity, expressing a concern relating to immigration and social integration. Specifically, that gendered security disparities in other countries could potentially be reproduced in Norway. She expressed concern for immigrant girls who might still be exposed to insecurity:

It is really important that the security for girls and women improve, that we [in our community] look after that immigrant girls are treated well and that they receive good schooling. Now it isn't easy for the boys either, but girls are exposed to so much in the world. Safety for girls is important. It is important for security. Girls are exposed. It worries me and girls have to think about this every weekend and every day. [9]

She was impacted by what she perceived as a higher risk of victimization for women and girls from other countries. She later extended those concerns to all Norwegian girls, noting that many girls make routinized safety considerations that do not exist in the same way for men and boys. Nanna also pointed towards other countries in terms of social circle insecurities, such as women's integration in society and access to education.

A number of participants discussed gender disparity in outer circle such as climate change, conflict, and sexual violence [4–5,7,9,15,21]. Turid expressed a concern that '... it is women and children that suffer most due to climate change and things like that. So, they are often more affected by [insecurities]' [7]. Women and children, from her perspective, bore the brunt of downturns in security conditions. However, she also reflected on the gender specific risks to both men and women in certain circumstances, continuing, '... in traditional conflicts, it is often the men that fight and die, but then women are also exposed. Rape and such. They lose their husbands who provide income as well' [7]. Also addressing sexual violence, Mia reflected on how the issue influenced how she thought about other countries and the risks of travel: 'I would certainly not travel to Dubai on vacation [...] where you are put in jail if you are raped' [9].

Similar to Turid and Mia, Terese also discussed sexual violence, but at the same time expressed a feeling of safety in her community. She noted feeling safe when she is '[...] able to walk home in the middle of the night without being worried that someone will attack me or abuse me' [8]. Terese focused on the feeling of safety in the environment where she lives made her feel physically secure, where by contrast, Turid and Mia noted that other women are exposed to serious existential risks.

The complex nature of sexual violence, security, and gender disparity was raised by Rolf, although he struggled to resolve certain aspects of the issue:

I think that rape of young girls, and that one talks about this, this is security we can say. There is talk about what one can do to avoid this, and it is not the girls' fault. There is also talk about who [rapes] [...] One has to be realistic. Girls can think a bit about what they wear. That can be a security measure, but I am not saying that it is their [the girls'] fault.[15]

He discussed rape and issue of victim blaming, first taking a clear stand about the crime not being the victim's fault; however, he also uses words like 'realistic' and 'security measure' arguing that there are practical sides to this debate that the victims can consider, namely how they dress. Rolf was alone amongst male participants to reflect on female specific issues.

## Discussion

In general descriptive terms, the interviewees had broad definitions of security which generally transected different circles of security. In their initial responses regarding definitions of security or what contributed to feeling secure, most youth focused primarily on outer circle issues, while a smaller share described a combination of both the outer and middle circles, with only two constructing definitions of security as something transected all three levels of the circle. The interviewees tended to focus on factors in which they have little direct control over, such as conflict, job security, the welfare system, environmental issues and war, to mention some. Interestingly, most informants described their notions of security in line of external realities, or the outer circle of Vornanen et al.'s (2009) model was a somewhat surprising result. Expectations based on the Finnish study suggested that middle and inner circle insecurities would emerge in youth descriptions of security, but that did not manifest in these qualitative interviews. While it is speculative, perhaps this difference could be explained by the nature of the question – that is, asking youth to define their concept of 'security' rather than their experiences of 'insecurity'. Alternatively, the use of face-to-face interview methods made it challenging for these young participants to feel comfortable discussing certain inner circle security issues like personal fears, anxiety, and self-esteem. As a result, external or social insecurities emerged rather than more personal inner circle issues.

In relation to theoretical approaches to security studies, interviewee perspectives crossed between different schools of thought. For example, a recurring references to inner circle issues, such as feeling safe and being able to 'live a life without fear' [20] indicate security as a sense of stability and continuity in line with an ontological concept of security. These feelings of security were bound (by some informants) to social circle issues like family and friends as a source of stability. Connections between inner and social circles are reminiscent of human security constructions of security, where security is understood both for the individual and the aggregate in relation to one another. Moreover, informant responses dealing with education, safety, and housing amongst others are often connected to the notion of human security. That being said, issues of equality and the social constraints on women in other countries suggest constructions inline with emancipatory security – youth perceive security as being connected to freedoms as opposed to control measures. Other reflections from youth on issues of belonging and in/out groups are reminiscent of the concept of societal security concept from the Copenhagen School, where identity and social belonging are key (see: Buzan, 2008; McSweeney, 1996; Wæver, Buzan, Kelstrup, & Lemaitre, 1993). Interestingly, some of the participants also defined security in traditional, realist terms, pointing towards security of the state. This emphasis was another key difference from Vornanen et al.'s study; however, this possibly emerged as a result from the charged political atmosphere at the time and the ubiquitous media coverage of USA/North Korea relations. Regardless, these observations indicates that security is understood by youth as inherently complex, with no singular theory sufficiently reflecting the diversity and complexity of

these individual perspectives; however, the main similarity could be the desire for predictability and an ontological sense of security.

While there were parallels between interviewees' initial constructions in terms of the scope of security, unique issues emerged when analysing the data for gendered issues. While the scope of security was broad for all informants regardless of gender, the emphasis placed on those themes appeared to shift scales between genders. Male interviewees touched on all circles in terms of scope, they emphasized their outer circle security concerns whilst minimizing inner circle discussions. Specifically, human security issues like experiencing personal violence and realist notions of interstate conflict and state based security were typical for the young men during the interview process. Female participants, by contrast, often weighed in on concerns across all circles in a balanced way, often connecting issues between circles. Thus, while the scope of personal constructions and definitions were similar, indications of differences in weight and focus were noted between participants of different genders; however, this is largely anecdotal given the small-N nature of the study.

Other interesting findings were identified in those places where gender emerged as security theme in itself; although, it should be noted that only a handful of our interviewees connected issues of security in terms of gender at all. It is worth noting that only one male and one female interviewee reflected on security issues that directly affected a gender other than their own: Rolf when reflecting on violence against women, and Iselin when expressing concerns around male suicide. This was somewhat unexpected, given the timing of the interviews overlapped with the emergence of the #metoo across the media.

Regarding inner circle concerns, gender emerged in some participants' constructions of security in relation to insecurities of self and feelings of inadequacy in relation to gender norms and expectations. Feelings of inadequacy in this regard were simultaneously tied to social circle insecurities – that is, bullying and a lack of social supports. Iselin and Einar both constructed very similar accounts to how these interrelated insecurities manifested for both young men and young women. Other social circle concerns raised by interviewees focused more strictly on women and insecurities that disproportionately affect women. When other social circle security issues were raised, they were presented in terms of gender disparity. More specifically, some interviewees pointed to economic and political inequality as areas where gender security disparity existed in Norway.

Interestingly, many interviewees framed their security concepts not in terms of how it impacted themselves, but in relation to how insecurity was experienced by others. It was in this way that gender usually emerged. Concern for the security of others emerged at all three circles; the inner circle where Iselin addressed high suicide rates among men; the middle circle where Vidar, Rolf and Mia reflect upon immigrants' situation in Norway; the outer circle where Turid discussed consequences of war in other countries, especially women and girls, and Rolf about sexual violence. Similarly, Morten's reflections on unequal access to the political sphere – dominated by 'rich men' as he put it – showed an understanding of the insecurities of others. Regarding violence, almost all participants expressed that they had little fear of experiencing such problems in Norway; however, they often drew on examples of how others experienced such insecurities abroad. This is reminiscent of Hoogensen and Rottem (2004, p. 156) argument that one asks the question 'security for whom' whenever discussing security. And the youth in this study repeatedly expressed concerns of security on behalf of others, as well as themselves. This is perhaps due to the sample reflecting a somewhat privileged group within global society, but worth noting as they were explicitly conscious of how others might have different experiences.

Outer circle securities were an area in which this reflection on security from afar was most evident, in particular with regards to the issue of sexual violence. Rolf and Mia's comments highlight how security issues are understood differently based on perspective. Mia talks about avoiding certain vacation destinations out of concern for her security as a woman, while Rolf raised the issue of men as the perpetrators of rape. While his comments on the issue reflected

the gendered nature sexual violence, his framing of it is somewhat indicative of his distance from the issue as understood and experienced by his female peers. Specifically, his remarks that women and girls should take precautions contrasted with Turid and Mia, who indicated that taking such precautions was already a fact of life for many women. Even though he clearly states it is not the victims fault, he suggests that women can take security measures. He struggles to resolve his understanding of the moral principle against victim blaming, despite it clearly contrasting with his position – thus, he makes assumptions regarding safety strategies. Similarly, Rolf's recognition of insecurity for women runs in a way parallel to Turid's reflection on Norway's role creating insecurities abroad – that is, security is both individual and collective.

Overall, the common thread between interviews was the way in which youth attempted to understand security via the insecurity of others. However, whether with Mia's point on women in developing countries, Morten's reflection on women in politics, or Iselin's reflection on social pressure and male suicide, the youth were often empathetic and included a recognition of their own privileged position. They repeatedly defined and scoped their understandings of security cognizant of the fact that while they may have secure lives, this is a privilege not afforded to everyone, especially in terms of gender.

## Concluding remarks

The aim of this research has been to explore how youth understand and relate to the concept of security, highlighting areas in which gender emerges thematically across interviewees' self-defined conceptualizations of security. The results of this study highlight how the security concerns of Norwegian youth are broad, yet are characterized a high degree of nuance and empathy, particularly in regards to how others experience insecurity. Participants in this study were able to craft definitions and scope of security as they understood it, expressing a high degree of ontological security. That being said, they pointed out that other persons may not exist in the same state of privilege. Several participants' highlighted gender as one of the main lines where these security disparities occur, pointing to issues like male suicide, women's political empowerment, and gender pay disparities. In terms of theory, the interviewees at times meandered, through realist, emancipatory, ontological, and human security perspectives. Thus, the use of Vornanan et al.'s circles of insecurity proved to be a helpful heuristic tool in breaking down the results; however, participant responses rarely held themselves to one layer, instead broaching all three circles, sometimes simultaneously. These qualitative explorations of individual youths' perspective of security highlight the importance of in depth and detailed considerations when seeking to involve youth in the pursuit of security.

The results of this study illustrate that youth perspectives on security are rich and worthy of deeper exploration and recognition. Future research could include a quantitative study to identify any differences in the perception of insecurities along gender lines, or a more specific study on how youth understand the security or insecurity as a sympathetic response to the experiences of others. Similarly, further investigation into the role of other non-national identities such as sexual orientation or visible minority status could provide greater insight into minority youth relations to experiences of security.

## Notes

1. Norway continually ranks among the safest and most developed countries in the world according to numerous indexes. See, for example, the Human Development Reports (UNDP, 2018), or the Global Peace Index (IEP, 2018).
2. Results from the primary study are available within the Norwegian language document (Holm & Pettersen, 2018).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

**Nikolai George Lewis Holm** PhD in sociology. Faculty of Social Sciences, Nord University.

**Linn-Marie Lillehaug Pedersen** PhD fellow in sociology. Faculty of Social Sciences, Nord University.

**Elisabeth Pettersen** is an Associate Professor. Faculty of Social Sciences, Nord University.

## ORCID

Nikolai George Lewis Holm  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3835-3269>

Linn-Marie Lillehaug Pedersen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3059-0876>

## References

- Alhendawi, A. (2015). UN security council adopts historic resolution on youth, peace and security [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/12/un-security-council-adopts-historic-resolution-on-youth-peace-and-security/>
- Ayoob, M. (2002). Defining security: A subaltern realist perspective. In K. Krause & M. C. Williams (Eds.), *Critical security studies* (pp. 121–146). New York: Routledge.
- Baldwin, D. A. (1997). The concept of security. *Review of International Studies*, 23(1), 5–26.
- Balzacq, T. (2010). Constructivism and securitization studies. In M. D. Cavelty & V. Mauer (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of security studies* (pp. 56–72). London: Routledge.
- Blanchard, E. M. (2003). Gender, international relations, and the development of feminist security theory. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(4), 1289–1312.
- Booth, K. (1991). Security and emancipation. *Review of International Studies*, 17(4), 313–326.
- Brod, H., & Kaufman, M. (1994). *Theorizing masculinities* (Vol. 5). Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications.
- Buzan, B. (2008). *People, states & fear: An agenda for international security studies in the post-cold war era*. Colchester, United Kingdom: Ecp Press.
- Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & De Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Coffey, A., Atkinson, P., & Omarzu, J. (1997). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications.
- Cohn, C., Hill, F., & Ruddick, S. (2005). *The relevance of gender for eliminating weapons of mass destruction* (pp. 38). Stockholm, Sweden: Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission.
- Đurić, S., & Popović-Citić, B. (2013). Fear of crime, gender differences in risk perception. *Sociološki Pregled*, 47(4), 537–554.
- Fox, K. A., Nobles, M. R., & Piquero, A. R. (2009). Gender, crime victimization and fear of crime. *Security Journal*, 22(1), 24–39.
- Franklin, C. A., & Franklin, T. W. (2009). Predicting fear of crime: Considering differences across gender. *Feminist Criminology*, 4(1), 83–106.
- Hansen, L. (2000). The Little Mermaid's silent security dilemma and the absence of gender in the Copenhagen school. *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 29(2), 285–306.
- Holm, N. G. L. (2017). Local actor strategies for achieving human security functionings. *Journal of Human Security*, 13(1), 22–33.
- Holm, N. G. L., & Pettersen, E. (2018). Nærhet og distanse – En studie av Bodø-ungdoms oppfatning av sikkerhet og sikkerhetsutfordringer. In B. Skorstad, E. Pettersen, & G. Wollan (Eds.), *Vårt lille Land: Små samfunn, store utfordringer* (pp. 109–134). Oslo: Orkana Forlag.
- Hoogensen, G., & Rottem, S. V. (2004). Gender identity and the subject of security. *Security Dialogue*, 35(2), 155–171.
- Hooper, C. (2012). *Manly states: Masculinities, international relations, and gender politics*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Hudson, H. (2005). 'Doing' security as though humans matter: A feminist perspective on gender and the politics of human security. *Security Dialogue*, 36(2), 155–174.
- Huysmans, J. (1998). Security! What do you mean? From concept to thick signifier. *European Journal of International Relations*, 4(2), 226–255.



- Huysmans, J. (2002). Defining social constructivism in security studies: The normative Dilemma of writing security. *Alternatives*, 27(1\_suppl), 41–62.
- IEP. (2018, June). *Global peace index 2018: Measuring peace in a complex World*. Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace.
- Kane, E. W., & Macaulay, L. J. (1993). Interviewer gender and gender attitudes. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 57(1), 1–28.
- Liotta, P. H. (2002). Boomerang effect: The convergence of National and Human Security. *Security Dialogue*, 33(4), 473–488.
- Longhofer, J., Floersch, J., & Hoy, J. (2012). *Qualitative methods for practice research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McSweeney, B. (1996). Identity and security: Buzan and the copenhagen school. *Review of International Studies*, 22(1), 81–93.
- McSweeney, B. (1999). *Security, identity and interests: A sociology of international relations (Vol. 69)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitzen, J. (2006). Ontological security in World politics: State identity and the security dilemma. *European Journal of International Relations*, 12(3), 341–370.
- Padfield, M., & Procter, I. (1996). The effect of interviewer's gender on the interviewing process: A comparative enquiry. *Sociology*, 30(2), 355–366.
- Pain, R. (2001). Gender, race, age and fear in the city. *Urban Studies*, 38(5–6), 899–913.
- Paris, R. (2001). Human security: Paradigm shift or hot air? *International Security*, 26(2), 87–102.
- Romaniuk, S. N., & Wasylciw, J. K. (2010). 'Gender'Includes Men Too! Recognizing masculinity in security studies and international relations. *Perspectives: Central European Review of International Affairs*, 18(1), 23–40.
- Rothschild, E. (1995). What is security? *Daedalus*, 124(3), 53–98.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications.
- Saarikomäki, E. (2018). Young people's conceptions of trust and confidence in the crime control system: Differences between public and private policing. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 18(2), 156–172.
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications Limited.
- Smith, W. R., & Torstensson, M. (1997). Gender differences in risk perception and neutralizing fear of crime: Toward resolving the paradoxes. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 37(4), 608–634.
- UNDESA. (2013). *Definition of youth*. United Nations. New York: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>
- UNDP. (1994). *Human development report*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- UNDP. (2018). Human development index trends, 1990-2017. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/trends>
- UNSC. (2000). *Security council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security*. New York, NY: UN Security Council.
- UNSC. (2015). Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) [on youth, peace and security]. UN Security Council.
- Vornanen, R. (2000). *Turvallisuus elämän kysymyksenä. 13-17-vuotiaiden nuorten turvallisuus ja turvattomuuden aiheet* [Security as an essential concern of life. Security and insecurity among 13–17 year old adolescents]. Finland: Kuopio University Publications.
- Vornanen, R., Törrönen, M., & Niemelä, P. (2009). Insecurity of young people: The meaning of insecurity as defined by 13–17-year-old Finns. *Young*, 17(4), 399–419.
- Wæver, O., Buzan, B., Kelstrup, M., & Lemaitre, P. (1993). *Identity migration and the new security agenda in Europe*. London: Pinter Publishers.
- Walther, A. (2006). Regimes of youth transitions: Choice, flexibility and security in young people's experiences across different european contexts. *Young*, 14(2), 119–139.
- Wolf, M., Blomquist, C., Huq, R., Kovacs, E., Williamson, H., & Lauritzen, P. (2005). *Youth policy in Norway*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing/Cedex.
- Woolnough, A. D. (2009). Fear of crime on campus: Gender differences in use of self-protective behaviours at an Urban University. *Security Journal*, 22(1), 40–55.
- Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (2015). *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*. New York: Routledge.