Nancy Lombard's book is based on her doctoral research in which she gained the detailed insights of 89 children aged 11–12 years in five primary schools in Glasgow regarding their views on men's violence against women. Her work both complements earlier seminal work (in particular that of Mullender and colleagues, 2002) that details the accounts of young children who have experienced domestically violent situations and the impact on them, and builds on this work by exploring the developing attitudes of children more generally.

Her focus on the attitudes of children about men's violence towards women is important because it is known that a significant number of school pupils in their dating relationships have either reported or experienced domestic violence (Fox, Corr, Gadd and Butler, 2014); that some young people condone the use of violence in certain situations (Burman and Cartmel, 2005); and that, with the growing focus on domestic abuse prevention education programmes that are delivered in school settings, a developed and theoretically informed understanding of the nature and content of pupils' attitudes is imperative. Importantly, Nancy Lombard's work takes our understanding one step further in that she focuses on children aged 11–12 years rather than those in their middle teenage years. This in itself was challenging in that of the 99 schools approached, 20 replied and of those only six were positive. Five then became involved in the study.

The book is divided into eight chapters, the first two of which explore definitional, conceptual and theoretical issues regarding violence and childhoods. Chapter Three provides an outline of the research methodology which involved the use of a seven-page questionnaire with 21 questions completed in schools followed by group discussions (self-selected friendship groups of four to five pupils each) in which some vignettes were used as the basis of further discussion (Lombard, 2013). Chapters Four through to Seven outline the findings and Chapter Eight reflects on some of the key findings and their implications. Nancy Lombard’s book confirms unequivocally that children aged 11–12 years are able to articulate a range of attitudes regarding men's violence towards women. Whilst about half were not familiar with the term “domestic violence”, her work challenges the view that this group of young people are “too young to know” and illustrates how and in what ways children construct their understanding of violence through gender, childhood, space and time.

In summarising the findings, she identifies two cross cutting themes: naturalisation and normalisation; that provide the basis through which children's
attitudes can begin to be explored and understood. In this study she found that children constructed violence as a biological (and therefore natural) difference between men and women. This construction enabled boys, on the one hand, to distance themselves from violence – it being the mark of male adulthood – and yet, on the other hand, the process of naturalising violence alluded to the inevitability that as boys transitioned to adult males, violence was a normal part of that experience. The process of normalisation, in which violence was constructed as part of the “normalised” gender order (page 181), resulted in it being primarily perceived as an individualised occurrence rather than as a reflection of the broader structural norms of male dominance. Furthermore, the closer they were to these individual acts of violence and to situations named as violent, the less likely they were to perceive these (or name them) as violent.

Nancy Lombard’s work also illustrates that attitudes towards violence have spatial and temporal aspects to them as well as gendered aspects. Hence violence was understood as “real violence” if it involved men (gender), if it involved physical acts of violence in an outside setting between others (time and space) and if it involved some form of consequence. This is juxtaposed with the children’s own reality, which is that their knowledge and experience, which might involve violent encounters, do not fit with their reasoning around violence being associated with male adulthood. Such constructions of violence, what it means to be violent, limit opportunities for girls to have their own experiences of violence by (young) male peers at school validated and/or acknowledged – Nancy Lombard refers to this as “unreal violence” (pages 131–132). Whilst the girls might name these actions as violence, these are portrayed as less serious, or not violent at all, by boys and some teachers. Lombard argues that these processes then make it difficult for girls explicitly to name actions as violent and that this may have a spatial component as well – so that for actions that occur in some school locations, these are even less likely to be named as violence by girls than the ones that might occur in other school locations. By way of explanation, Nancy Lombard argues that ‘young people anticipated power in heterosexual relationships and used their acceptance and understanding of it, to justify violence occurring within them […] that is, violence used by men against women is judged to be an anticipated consequence of gendered inequality...’ (page 174).

When Lombard discusses implications for policy and practice, she suggests that first, space needs to be created for the naming of violent acts as violent so that they can be validated as such and labelled as wrong by children from an early age. Second, she suggests that more work on equality is needed within schools to tackle gender stereotypes which shape children’s experiences and understandings of violence. Third, schools should give attention to the