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Exploring young adults' views of the #AmINext movement in South Africa

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Exploring young adults' views of the #AmINext movement in South Africa

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive problem in South Africa and has significant impacts on a person's physical, psychological, and sexual health. Moreover, as technology advances in the world, social media becomes increasingly available and 'hashtag activism' has become an increasingly important tool in challenging social injustices such as GBV. A notable example of online movements is the #AmINext movement. Thus, this study aimed to develop an understanding of how young adults in South Africa experienced the #AmINext movement and how it served to conscientise and shape their ideas about GBV. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five male and five female participants and thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview material. The findings of the study revealed a unified understanding of the #AmINext movement to exist as a result of the murder and rape of Uyinene Mrwetyana. The movement was understood to raise consciousness on GBV, encourage action against GBV, challenge rape culture and create a sense of community among victims and those engaging in the movement. The movement was experienced not only as unifying but the online space was also experienced as negative and exclusionary and where harmful narratives were perpetuated. The movement resulted in a deeper understanding of GBV and an increased willingness to engage against GBV further highlighting how the movement shaped ideas around GBV. Therefore, the #AmINext movement reflected many of the advantages and disadvantages of hashtag activism but was perceived to result in conscientisation around GBV.

***Keywords*:** Gender-based violence, hashtag activism, patriarchy, social media, #AmINext

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. All the sources that I have used have been referenced. It has not been submitted before for any other examination or degree at this university or any other university.



Signed: Nicole Smith

Date: 14 February 2023

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On the 24th of August 2019, during the month that South Africa celebrates *Women's Month*, a young woman succumbed to gender-based violence (GBV) adding to the high prevalence permeating the country. Uyinene Mrwetyana, a 19 year-old University of Cape Town (UCT) student was raped and murdered in Cape Town, South Africa, while collecting a parcel from the post office in broad daylight (Staff Reporter, 2019; Lischka, 2019). Uyinene's rape and murder ignited several days of protest initially in Cape Town and later across other provinces of South Africa: highlighting the alarming rates of femicide. Moreover, hundreds of protestors took to the streets with #AmINext posters to emphasise that all women in South Africa are unsafe and to acknowledge their fear and outrage at the violence experienced by women in country, and in doing so, protestors also expressed frustration at the ineptitude of law enforcement and government to deal with the prevailing GBV occurrences (Lischka, 2019; Sicetsha, 2019). This led to the viral hashtag #AmINext on social media which encouraged the subsequent sharing of #AmINext that sparked an online movement which initially started on *Twitter* and soon spread to other social media platforms such as *Instagram* and *Facebook* (Staff Reporter, 2019; Morshedi, 2020).

Social media is an online sharing network that exists within society that is fast-growing and ever-changing (Poushter et al., 2018). With the rise in the use of, and engagement with social media, one can see how social media has been used to highlight and challenge various social injustices that exist within society (Datiri, 2020). These include issues such as racism and importantly for the context of this study, GBV, which is a problem that is predominantly faced by women- both in South Africa and worldwide. These issues have been raised on various social media platforms and often using trending hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #AmINext. Therefore, social media and hashtag activism have become increasingly important tools in raising awareness on issues of social injustice by challenging the social norms that underlie social injustices and changing laws (Bogen et al., 2019; Eagle, 2015; Lokot, 2018; Miller, 2017; O'Donnell & Sweetman, 2018; Rauschnabel et al., 2019; Williams, 2015).

Further, social media has allowed for issues and information to be presented to internet users in a way that is both abundant and easily accessible (Datiri, 2020). Additionally, as the availability and access to social media have increased for users, the

public maintains a low risk associated with engaging in online movements and requires little effort is to engage in social issues (Lim, 2015; Miller, 2017; Shirky, 2011; Valenzuela, 2013). Therefore, social media has created an easily accessible space that encourages debate and engagement on social injustices (O'Donnell & Sweetman, 2018). It also provides a platform for people who may have been previously alienated or marginalised to become increasingly connected and vocal about issues (O'Donnell & Sweetman, 2018). The extensive reach of social media further allows for mobilisation and collective action at a more extensive level and therefore enables engagement that is potentially worldwide and far reaching (Miller, 2017; Schradie, 2018; Valenzuela, 2013). In this sense, there is a creation of a broader community that also provides an element of support to victims and families (Eagle, 2015; Khoia-Moolii, 2015). Thus, social media has the ability to build solidarity among users for common causes; to allow for the consistent exposure to ideas that resonate with the user; to encourage and enhance offline mobilisation; while creating a space for individuals to express ideas in their own words and contexts which enhance and reflect their own experiences (Kangere et al., 2017).

It is also important to consider the potential pitfalls of social media and social media activism. The minimal effort required in social media activism has brought into question the effectiveness of online movements in bringing about change (Miller, 2017; Valenzuela, 2013). Although social media may challenge inequalities that exist within society and allow for the creation of counter-narratives, it may also perpetuate these inequalities (Fischer, 2016; Lokot, 2018; Russo & Pirlott, 2006; Salter, 2013). For example, social media pushes misogynistic and sexist narratives which include that of rape culture and victim-blaming (Turley & Fisher, 2018). Social media is understood to also have less censorship which means greater freedom of expression and greater access to a variety of information (Lim, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013). This may be considered a benefit to social media; however, it is important to consider that decreased censorship may also equate to "internet trolls" and therefore enables online bullying, harassment, and the spread of false information (Miller, 2017). Furthermore, social media activism has been argued to be biased to certain types of movements (Lim, 2015). While GBV being an everyday occurrence, especially within South Africa, only certain cases attain news coverage and fewer start online movements. Therefore, only those cases that are considered more extreme or elicit a stronger emotional response for sensationalized news are more likely to become public and trigger an online social movement (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Further, the relationship between feminism and social media activism is important to note in what has become known as the fourth wave of feminism (Linabary et al., 2020; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). Feminism and feminist activism are concerned with the fight for women's rights which includes political rights, reproductive rights, protection from GBV, workplace rights, protection from social and cultural discrimination etc. (Datiri, 2020). Fourth wave feminism utilises technology and social media to continue to build women's movements online while maintaining a presence on the ground (Zimmerman, 2017). The reliance of social media in fourth wave feminism is therefore to cross national and cultural boarders in order to create a greater community (Looft, 2017). Thus, social media and social networking sites have become increasingly important tools for feminists to challenge issues related to patriarchy, sexism, GBV and inequality (Datiri, 2020; Kangere et al., 2017; Turley & Fisher, 2018). Feminism online has also been labeled hashtag feminism which involves using hashtags on social media platforms to further share feminist ideas online (Baer, 2016; Chen et al., 2018; Mendes et al., 2018). Evidently, the use of hashtags and hashtag activism has become a powerful form of protests for feminists, as well as other social activists (Datiri, 2020). Therefore, the #AmINext movement can be considered an act of hashtag feminism as a part of fourth wave feminism.

1.1 Defining Gender-Based Violence

GBV is defined in many ways and is a term that has been used to express the violence that occurs as a result of normative gender roles and the unequal power relations, within society, that exists between genders (Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; Russo & Pirlott, 2006; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). An important part of the definition regarding violence against women is that the acts are performed specifically due to a victim's gender and, in this context, these acts are specifically targeted against women (Heise et al., 2002; The General Assembly, 1993). Singh and Myende (2017) and Gouws (2016) further state that violence against women is an act of discrimination that infringes upon women's rights, safety, and dignity and denies their common humanity purely due to the fact that they are female. In this sense, violence against women is often referred to as GBV and these terms are often used interchangeably (Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005). In the context of this study, the term GBV is used to depict violent acts perpetrated against women.

GBV is a far-reaching phenomenon that is prevalent world-wide. It is something that occurs regardless of culture, class, race, or the social economic status (SES) of a country and

its citizens. The United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines GBV as any act that causes or is likely to cause sexual, physical and/or psychological harm or suffering to women (The General Assembly, 1993). These acts extend to threats, coercion, or any limitation of freedom (The General Assembly, 1993). The violent acts, whether physical, sexual and/or psychological, that are referred to in the definition of GBV include, but are not limited to, battery, assault, rape, marital rape, sexual abuse against children, dowry-related violence, traditional practices that may be harmful to women, female genital mutilation, violence in non-married and married couples, violence related to exploitation, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual harassment and intimidation at work or educational institutions, trafficking of women, and forced prostitution (The General Assembly, 1993). The definition includes any of these acts perpetrated or condoned by the State (The General Assembly, 1993). Thus, GBV includes any form of violence or abuse that is targeted at women of any age by any other person (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Moreover, the definition of GBV includes any of the above acts that are performed in both public and private spaces such as communal living spaces within families, within the community, at schools or any place of education, and in an individual's place of work (Reed at al., 2010; The General Assembly, 1993).

Moreover, GBV has significant impacts on an individual's physical, psychological, and sexual health for example, injuries and death, depression and substance abuse, as well as the increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), among others (McCloskey, 2016; Russo & Pirlott, 2006; Thobejane, 2019). The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women asserts that women are entitled to the protection of all human rights and freedoms, as well as the enjoyment of these rights in all areas including political, economic, social, and cultural (The General Assembly, 1993). Some of these rights include the right to life, equality, security, freedom, protection under the law, freedom from discrimination, fair and positive work conditions, the right to the highest standard of physical and mental health attainable, as well as the right to not be exposed or subjected to harm and inhumane or degrading treatment (The General Assembly, 1993). The declaration further highlights the responsibility and role of the government and governmental institutions in combating and eliminating GBV which includes; not invoking custom, traditional or religious reasons to avoid such responsibilities; the implementation of national plans and preventative measures which may include the modification of social and cultural practices; refraining from engaging in GBV; ensuring that all acts of GBV are punished and redressed; ensuring the

availability of resources including those needed to assist victims and funds in the addressing and elimination of GBV; ensuring all necessary personnel are responsible for the implementation of policies and programs and are adequately trained (The General Assembly, 1993).

1.2 Rationale

GBV is a significant and pervasive issue in South Africa with significant consequences for its people and communities. GBV can be challenged through activism and one particular type of activism that has gained increasing popularity is known as hashtag activism which involves the use of social media and hashtags (#) to challenge social injustices (Bogen et al., 2019; Gouws, 2018). Moreover, activism around GBV is typically meant to bring the social issue to the forefront of society and initiate change. This includes policy changes and changes relating to societal norms underlying GBV. The #AmINext movement has been identified as one of the ways in which GBV has been challenged in South Africa.

The #AmINext movement took over social media in 2019 and was initiated in response to the high levels of GBV that women face in South Africa. News of Uyinene's death was followed by the report of the kidnapping of a six-year-old girl and the murder of Jesse Hess, Nolunde Vumsindo, and Meghan Cremer during the same period (Sicetsha, 2019). According to police statistics, one woman is murdered every three hours in South Africa and women are murdered at a rate six times higher than the global average (Dlamini, 2021; Gordon & Collins, 2013). Moreover, South Africa is believed to be the rape capital of the world with there being 41 695 rape cases reported between April 2021 and March 2022 (SAPS, 2021a; SAPS, 2021b; SAPS, 2021c; SAPS, 2022a; SAPS, 2022b). Although these numbers shed some light on the extent of GBV in South Africa, the impact of underreporting of violent crimes against women should be noted when considering these statistics (Gordon & Collins, 2013).

Universities are understood to reflect societal experiences relating to GBV and South African universities are experiencing an increase in the prevalence of GBV on and around campuses (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021; Mutinta, 2022). Moreover, the underreporting of GBV that occurs on university campuses is a significant barrier in perceiving GBV as an issue to be addressed; however, the increase in protests targeting GBV on university campuses may offer some insight into the extent of the prevalence of GBV at South African

universities (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021; Mutinta, 2022). According to the South African Police Service (SAPS), women between the ages of 20 to 29 years are most at risk for GBV (SAPS, 2019). This is important to note as this age rage encompasses young adults and students. Furthermore, Finchilescu and Dugard (2021) conducted a study to assess the prevalence of GBV at the University of the Witwatersrand. The study found that 26.9% of the student participants had experienced some form of GBV of which the majority were women (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021). Another study conducted by Mutinta (2022) to assess GBV among female university students in the Eastern Cape found that 57.8% of respondents had experienced some form of GBV. In addition, previous research states that the youth of South Africa are the most vulnerable to violence but are also likely to be perpetrators of this violence (Morrow et al., 2005). These statistics, along with the fact that Uyinene herself was a young woman and student, assist in forming a better understanding of the relevance of this study towards young people.

Historically, South African youth have played a significant role in activism during anti-apartheid movements where schools and universities were often places in which these protests and political action occurred (Bosch, 2013). More recently, arguments have been made that the youth across the world and within South Africa are less politically engaged; however, studies have shown that young people remain involved in social issues but are engaged in a different way that involves protests, activism, and volunteering including the use of social media and online activism (Bosch, 2013; Earl et al., 2017). The youth within South Africa have started many movements in recent history such as #FeesMustFall, #RUReferenceList, #RhodesMustFall, #EndRapeCulture, as well as and most importantly for this study, the #AmINext movement. Studies have also shown that in contexts where GBV is prevalent against young women, activism is likely to occur (Moletsane, 2018). Therefore, in the context of South Africa where young women are more likely to be victims of GBV, it is likely that activism will occur.

Further, individuals within these age groups also form part of the larger age cohorts who are considered to be the main social media users in South Africa and across the world. According to Duffett and Wakeham (2016), those who form part of Generation Z and Generation Y comprise the majority of *Facebook* users in South Africa and three quarters of Generation Y have access to social media. The age group of 20 to 29 years is comprised of people from both Generation Y and Generation Z. Social media acts as a space which allows for increased access to resources and, therefore, greater access to educational resources which

may explain the higher engagement and use of social media by young people (Cho et al., 2020). In this way young adults are also able to remain informed on the happenings in their environments, including various issues and social injustices like GBV (Cho et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to further understand the importance that social media and social media activism play for youth in South Africa and whether it is an educational tool which is used for advocacy and raising awareness, and a space to share experiences or whether it is a space characterised by bullying and the further perpetuation of harmful narratives (Miller, 2017). Moreover, various support systems are available to students such as facilities to report these crimes as well as access to various resources such as psychological services. It is however important to understand other areas of support that is offered by social media that extend beyond this and are considered valuable to social media users as social media is often deemed to be a platform in which victims may be more comfortable in sharing their experiences, such as reflected by the #BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag (Puente et al., 2021). Social media and social media activism have also been argued to create a greater sense of community with those with shared experiences as well as offer a greater support structure to victims and communities (Eagle, 2015; Khoia-Moolii, 2015).

As GBV is a human rights violation (Fatusi & Oyeledun, 2002; Krantz, 2002; Sanjel, 2013), it is important to consider how victims' rights are protected within South Africa. The South African constitution ensures that all citizens are equal (Hills, 2015). The policies, legislation, and programs in South Africa have been argued to be among the most extensive and forward-thinking in the world (Meyiwa et al., 2017). However, this progressiveness is in contradiction to the reality experienced by women in South Africa, which include harmful behaviours towards them in the form of oppression and unequal access to protection, education, and resources (Hills, 2015). Therefore, the constitution may deem all people equal but the norms and values that exist within South Africa's society still have an impact on women's basic human rights (Hills, 2015). Moreover, these acts and policies fall short in providing ways in which to challenge the social norms which perpetuate GBV and therefore ensure that women remain vulnerable to violence (Meyiwa et al., 2017; Mogale et al., 2012).

It is further important to understand the gap between the progressiveness of the policies within South Africa and the experiences of women. The protection of human rights is not guaranteed through progressive policies and adequate educational programs, but also through the implementation of these and the challenging of underlying societal norms. The acts and policies fall short in some regard but it may also be important to consider the lack of

implementation of relevant policies and the impact this has on the prevalence of GBV (Mosavel et al., 2012; Mukanangana et al., 2014). An example of the failed implementation of the Gender-based Violence and Femicide National Strategic Plan (GBVF-NSP) (2020) established by the Interim Steering Committee (2020) was as a result of and in response to demands made by women during #TheTotalShutdown movement which occurred in August 2018 to highlight the high levels of GBV and femicide in South Africa. This plan was developed to guide government as well as non-governmental agencies in addressing GBV and femicide through the establishment of prevention programs, as well as access and responses to victims and survivors (Dlamini, 2021; Interim Steering Committee, 2020). The failure of the government to effectively implement the GBVF-NSP was for a range of reasons such as insufficient funds and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the implementation and funding of various programs (Morshedi, 2020).

In response, the #AmINext movement was advocating for the increased allocation of further resources and the further development of solutions against GBV (Pagel, 2021). Therefore, this movement was putting pressure on the South African government to not only develop further solutions but to also ensure follow-through on the implementation plans thereof (Pagel, 2021). The campaign was also aimed to engage the South African government as well as the judicial system within South Africa to remain accountable in their respective roles in the prevalence of GBV including the implementation of policies and holding perpetrators accountable as a way of protecting the rights of victims (Pagel, 2021). Moreover, the #AmINext movement initiated many conversations and public debate around GBV which was significant in breaking the silence that exists around GBV and therefore, raising awareness. Evidently, the overall goal of social movements may be to achieve broader, societal level changes which include changing the conversation and the narrative on the relevant issue (Freelon et al., 2018). It is however important to note that different movements have different goals; for example #bringbackourgirls was trying to locate missing girls (therefore it was time sensitive) whereas #yesallwomen was targeting systematic misogyny (Dadas, 2017). Thus, it is important to explore whether young adults understanding of the #AmINext movement reflected this and whether perceptions of GBV were changed or not.

Moreover, GBV in South Africa needs to be understood within the context of how maleness and femaleness are perceived as well as how sexual assault may be understood socially. This may aid in understanding where the gaps in policies and legislation to protect women against GBV exist. Young women in South Africa are made to believe that certain

acts of sexual assault to be a way in which love and affection is expressed; for example, coercion is understood as an expression of desire (Wood et al., 2007). Similarly, violence within romantic relationships has been constructed as an acceptable expression of possessiveness and jealousy, as well as way to maintain power and control (Bhana & Pattman, 2009; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Jewkes et al., 2011). In their study, Bhana et al. (2009) found that violent and forceful sexual interactions were understood as a form of maintaining control and were exhibited by "real men". Gender inequalities and power imbalances in relationships also render women as subordinate and obedient, resulting in society's association and perception of women being vulnerable to instances of sexual assault (van Staden & Badenhorst, 2009). These gender dynamics also impact the way in which women are perceived and are expected be to sexually submissive such as remaining modest and having limited control when making decisions regarding sexual engagement (O'Sullivan et al., 2006). These are merely some examples of societal norms underlying GBV, which the #AmINext movement was believed to be challenging. It is therefore important to study the influence the movement had on the various facets of GBV.

1.3 Research Aims

It is important to consider the impact that GBV has on people and society in general. Women suffer many consequences from GBV, which may vary dependent on context, and has an immediate and long-term consequences on their physical, mental, and behavioural health (Russo & Pirlott, 2006; Thobejane, 2019). Some examples include injuries and death; the contraction of STIs; the psychological impacts of trauma such as depression and substance abuse; as well as engaging in unsafe sexual practices (Mukanangana et al., 2014; McCloskey, 2016; Thobejane, 2019). Notably, the effects of GBV also extend beyond the individual to families, communities, and societies. This is demonstrated by the impact of decreased productivity and low income as a result of GBV on a country's economy (Kampete, 2019; Morrison et al., 2007). GBV also has a significant cost for countries' human, social, and economic development and has been identified by the UN as a global health and developmental issue (Gouws, 2016; Morrison et al., 2007; Russo & Pirlott, 2006). The significant impact and far-reaching consequences of GBV further highlights the importance of activism and understanding the effectiveness of various types of activism in challenging and bringing about change in relation to GBV.

Therefore, activism is significant in bringing about change in relation to various social injustices, including GBV. Social media activism and campaigns such as #AmINext have become an increasingly popular and significant form of activism, especially among the youth. It is therefore important to understand how these movements are perceived by those who engage online and what these online movements mean for them. Not only are the youth in South Africa active on social media but are also at risk when it comes to the exposure of GBV. This along with the ability of young adults to identify with Uyinene, highlights the importance of focusing on this vulnerable population group. Thus, this study aimed to develop an understanding of how young adults in South Africa experienced the #AmINext movement and how it served to conscientise and shape their ideas around GBV.

1.4 Research Questions

The study aims were achieved by examining the following research questions:

- How do young adults understand and make sense of the #AmINext movement? Are there different ways in which males and females speak about the movement and GBV?
- How did the #AmINext movement shape the way in which young adults speak about and make sense of GBV?

1.5 Structure of the Report

This report is comprised of six chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction chapter which provided an introduction to the topic of this report. It also provided the aims and research questions that this research was centered around as well as providing a rationale for the study. The second chapter was the Literature Review which provided the structural framework of the study and also gave an overview of the relevant literature relating to GBV and social media protests on an international and local scale. The third chapter includes the Methods chapter. This chapter provided an overview of the methods used in this study which includes details on the nature and design of the study, the participants, the instruments used, the procedure that was followed, the approach and method used to interpret the findings, as well as a section on ethical considerations, reflexivity, and trustworthiness of the research. The fourth chapter provided an outline of the Findings based on the analysis of the data. The findings were structured in a way that addressed the research questions. The penultimate and final chapters were the Discussion and Conclusions, respectively. The discussion involved an

interpretation of the findings from the previous chapter as well as integrating these findings with the theoretical framework and the literature relevant to this study. This final chapter provided limitations of the study and future recommendations as well as a brief conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The rates of GBV in South Africa have always been frightening but only gain occasional attention from the media following brutal rapes and murders. GBV is a violation of human rights with many significant consequences for individuals, families, communities, and societies; and translates into significant costs for countries and impacts on its human, social, and economic development. Moreover, with the continuous rise in use of technology, such as social media platforms like *Twitter*, *Facebook,* and *Instagram,* have been increasingly used by women all over the world as a tool for activism against GBV and a call for policies and resources to support and protect victims. The following chapter reviewed the existing literature relating to GBV and hashtag activism by presenting various scholars' works on the possible drivers of the high rates of GBV in South Africa and the intersectionality with social media and hashtag activism.

2.1 Violence in South Africa

It has been argued that there is a link between South Africa's history of apartheid and GBV (Meyiwa et al., 2017). The high level of violence throughout this period has led to the normalisation of violence; thus, producing a culture of violence within the country (Glaser, 2008; Posel, 2005; Thomas et al., 2013). Evidently, the violence during apartheid targeted racial divide which later became violence based on gender due to the patriarchy within society which is also understood to be a driver of GBV in present day society (Gqola, 2007; Moffett, 2006; Mukanangana et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2013). During the apartheid era there was violence and hostility towards women, specifically towards Black women (Gouws, 2016). Moreover, research has shown that there has been an increase in GBV during political democracy as a continued form of control (Gqola, 2007; Moffett, 2006; Thomas et al., 2013). This history of violence in South Africa has impacted not only the way in which gendered identities are lived but also the way in which unequal power relations are moulded (Thomas et al., 2013). GBV is therefore a complicated social and public health problem in South Africa that extends beyond race, class, and ethnicity and is perpetrated by both men and women (Gqola, 2007; Mills et al., 2015; Moffett, 2006).

Due to the commonality and normalisation of GBV it has become a normal, accepted part of society that it is ignored rather than challenged (Gqola, 2007; Posel, 2005). Gqola

(2007, p.114) refers to GBV as a "constant companion" which is something that many South Africans live within their everyday lives and is merely accepted and silenced. In addition, Moffett (2006, p.155) refers to GBV in South Africa as an "unacknowledged gender civil war". Furthermore, the prevalence of GBV can be partly attributed to the culture of silence that exists and in order to bring about change and decrease the amount of GBV in South Africa, more conversations on the topic in public spaces are necessary (Gqola, 2007; Heise et al., 2002). This highlights the importance of activism in raising awareness and starting conversations and dialogue on the realities of GBV.

Moreover, GBV is underreported therefore statistics may provide an inaccurate depiction of the true extent of GBV in South Africa (Meth, 2017). Evidently, the SAPS estimate that only 1 in 36 rapes are actually reported (Gordon & Collins, 2013). The reasons for this under reporting may vary and have been attributed to lack of trust in the justice system in terms of action being taken against the perpetrator and as a result, low conviction rates (Mills et al., 2015; Nareadi, 2013). In addition, fear associated with insensitive reactions from police when reporting sexual offences as well as lack of trust in authorities, have been cited as barriers towards reporting (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021; Nareadi, 2013). Another deterrent to reporting and appropriate help seeking by victims is the stigma and shame they may experience (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). The underreporting of GBV may also be attributed to cultural understandings of rape and sexual assault as a shameful and private matter (Gevers et al., 2013; Moore, 2005; Shai & Sikweyiya, 2015). Lack of resources available and poverty may also have an impact of the reporting of crimes such as difficulty in accessing police stations, hospitals, and other relevant services (Nareadi, 2013). This may be in the form of transport costs as well as the lack of services and resources available to the public (Nareadi, 2013).

2.2 The Effects of GBV

The harmful impacts of GBV are multifaceted, complicated, and interlinked with effects on individuals, communities, and countries. These impacts include those on physical health, mental health, and social development as well as developmental and economic impacts on a society as a whole. The significant impact that GBV has on an individual's physical and mental health may also result in outcomes like death, for example, homicide and suicide (Heise et al., 2002; Mosavel et al., 2012; Terry, 2004). The physical health effects of GBV includes injuries, disabilities, the development of chronic conditions such as chronic

pain syndrome and impacts on reproductive health such as unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion (Heise et al., 2002). Negative mental health effects may include stress and fear, as well as the development of mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and sexual dysfunction as well as significant impacts on a survivor's self-esteem (Duvvury et al., 2013; Heise et al., 2002; Terry, 2004). Moreover, the health impacts of GBV on women have been shown to be extensive and long-lasting and leads to negative health behaviours and impacts a person's social development; therefore, impacting their ability to participate in society (Terry, 2004). Women who experience GBV as children may also experience difficulty negotiating sexual relationships later in adulthood which may have an impact on their sexual behaviour later on, and may put them at further risk for experiencing GBV through sexual risk-taking (Heise et al., 2002; Mosavel et al., 2012; Terry, 2004). This includes engaging in unprotected sex, risk of contracting STIs including HIV, and risking unwanted pregnancies (Mosavel et al., 2012; Terry, 2004). Other negative health behaviours that may develop include smoking and substance abuse (Heise et al., 2002).

Additionally, the effects of GBV against women who are mothers also extend to their children and has been linked to infant mortality as well as behavioural and health problems in children who have witnessed or experienced violence (Duvvury et al., 2013; Terry, 2004). The impact on children includes adverse effects on cognitive functioning, social functioning, and the development of psychopathology (Duvvury et al., 2013). Other problems include weight morbidities or difficulty in school which impacts on a child's education and academic performance (Duvvury et al., 2013; Terry, 2004). Moreover, previous research highlights that the relationship between GBV and education is complex as lower education levels have been associated with a higher likelihood to perpetuate and experience GBV (Duvvury et al., 2013). GBV also has an impact on an individual's education due to the extent of GBV within schools that are perpetuated by both learners and teachers (Mosavel et al., 2012). According to Mosavel et al. (2012), teachers may threaten to fail a learner who does not engage in sexual acts with them and GBV in schools often goes ignored. The impact on education has further consequences on the development of a child and the country as this may impact a person's ability to contribute to society in a constructive way when they are adults (Duvvury et al., 2013; Terry, 2004).

It is important to further understand the impact that GBV has on a country. This is often understood from a monetary perspective by considering the direct and indirect monetary costs on a country's economy. Direct costs include costs of services such as police

services, judicial services, medical and psychological treatment (Morrison & Orlando, 2005; Mosavel et al., 2012; Raghavendra et al., 2017; Terry, 2004). Therefore, the more these services are required, the higher the cost (Terry, 2004). These costs include providing these services and resources as well as investing in programs to challenge GBV (Raghavendra et al., 2017). In turn, this leaves fewer resources for other important developmental areas especially within developing countries. More importantly, a higher prevalence of GBV has been associated with the increase in demand and use of these services (Duvvury et al., 2013). Moreover, the indirect costs to a country include decreased productivity and participation within the job market; lower earning and spending and, therefore, decreased participation within the economy (Morrison & Orlando, 2005; Raghavendra et al., 2017; Terry, 2004). Research also showed that GBV, and the associated mental and physical health effects, has an impact on a woman's productivity levels which impacts the ability to earn (Duvvury et al., 2013; Terry, 2004). GBV may also affect a person's ability to maintain employment and may result in increased absenteeism from work (Duvvury et al., 2013). Women may also not be afforded the opportunity to work or earn while in an abusive relationship as a form of the perpetrator maintaining control (Terry, 2004). Women may also experience GBV within the workplace which impacts their productivity or ability to work and earn an income (Terry, 2004). Subsequently, this may mean less tax for the government due to lower and fewer generated incomes (Raghavendra et al., 2017). Other indirect costs include increased mortality as this may impact a family's income and therefore, their contribution to the economy (Duvvury et al., 2013).

The relationship between poverty and GBV is another important concept to consider. As highlighted above, GBV may be considered a causal factor among women's poverty especially due to the effects of GBV on women- preventing them from living long, healthy lives (Terry, 2004). Therefore, GBV can both perpetuate and maintain poverty among victims (Terry, 2004). This should also be considered in terms of the costs to a country. Low-income areas experience many problems such as minimal employment, financial struggles, crime, dysfunctional schooling systems, and the lack of recreational spaces (Mosavel et al., 2012). This in turn has an impact on the development of young people and leads to the engagement of activities that have little developmental benefits (Mosavel et al., 2012). For example, the lack of recreational resources within poverty stricken areas has often been associated with higher levels of GBV (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; Mosavel et al., 2012; Serrano-Argüeso et al., 2021). This also results in low community cohesion which has further economic impacts

on local businesses (Mosavel et al., 2012; Raghavendra et al., 2017). Moreover, young women who experience destitute financial situations or poverty may feel pressured to engage in sexual acts with older men- known as "sugar daddies"- where sex is exchanged for money and gifts for themselves or their families (Mosavel et al., 2012). Therefore, within these transactional relationships, men feel that they are deserving of sex in exchange for giving gifts (Mosavel et al., 2012). The link between patriarchy and poverty is important to consider in the development of these transactional relationships where men are seen as powerful (Mosavel et al., 2012).

2.3 Patriarchy – A Driver of GBV

Patriarchy exists across the world, including South Africa (Mudau & Obadire, 2017) and has often been used as a construct to understand and explain the reason as to why GBV exists in multiple societies and contexts, and is also a significant concept in how feminists understand GBV (Brubaker, 2021). Walby (1990, p.20) defines patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women". The term patriarchy developed over time to explain the male dominance and disadvantaged position of women within society where maleness and masculine qualities are valued above femaleness and feminine qualities (Hadi, 2017; Mitchell, 2009; Skalli, 2014). Therefore, the relationship between gender and power are central when understanding patriarchy (Brubaker, 2021). Furthermore, patriarchy is understood to promote and uphold this male dominance and privilege (Mudau & Obadire, 2017). Patriarchy thus explains a hierarchy based on gender within society that has been a significant component in understanding gender inequalities that exist and, therefore, understanding the existence of GBV (Akgul, 2016; Mitchell, 2009; Singh et al., 2015; Walby, 1990). Arguably, it is gendered social hierarchies and power imbalances that feminists believe drive GBV (Brubaker, 2021; Hunnicutt, 2009; Mills et al., 2015). As a result, the power and status imbalance between men and women within society legitimize violence against women and allow for this violence to remain invisible (Russo & Pirlott, 2006).

Furthermore, the desire and obsession for control are considered to be central in how people live their lives (Mudau & Obadire, 2017). Within a patriarchal society, men have control and power over women both socially and culturally which subsists in a systemic environment (Hadi, 2017; Mitchell, 2009; Skalli, 2014). This power and control are also understood to exist over women's bodies and other areas within society such as social spaces,

families, relationships, and economically in order to ensure men's safety (Grose & Grabe, 2014). Moreover, the male desire and need for control may lead to violence against women as a way of maintaining control and further obtaining power over women (Reed at al., 2010). Notably, the oppression of women is not the focus of patriarchy, but rather the value and importance of masculinity over femininity which leads to the perception that women are mere objects that need to be controlled (Skalli, 2014). In addition, rape and GBV are utilised as political tools of violence to enforce and maintain control and power over women (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017). Patriarchy also affects the way in which a person may construct and understand their selfhood in relation to others as they may see themselves to be inferior or less than because they are female or less masculine, in turn this self-doubt maintains control over victims and further perpetuates male dominance in society (Akgul, 2016).

Another way in which men's control and power can be seen within a patriarchal society is within families. Patriarchy has risen from but is also perpetuated by the existence of male-headed households in which men have economic power and exhibit control over their family (Akgul, 2016). Additionally, the lack of a higher SES among women contributes to these power imbalances as men are more likely to have financial control over women in this context (Reed et al., 2010). The control and dominance within these families are also usually equated to love and intimacy (Akgul, 2016). Therefore, by providing for their families financially, men are understood to show their love and appreciation for their families whilst using this as a form of control and familial dominance. Moreover, this control may make it harder for women to leave their families because of their financial dependence on the men. Therefore, men have an authority that goes uncontested (Mudau & Obadire, 2017). The idea that men should hold this economic power within families may lead to conflict when they are unemployed, especially when women in the family are employed (Strebel et al., 2006). This leads to women being seen as having more power, disrupting the hierarchy and is often contested by men due to their perceived entitlement to this power (Strebel et al., 2006). One way in which men may contest this power discrepancy is through violence (Russo & Pirlott, 2006) and therefore, violence has become a way for men to attempt to reclaim power and portray dominance over women from a patriarchal standpoint.

Patriarchy and the normalised nature of GBV within the South African context have also led to what is known as rape culture (Skalli, 2014). Rape culture was a term introduced by feminists to challenge the mainstream understanding of rape and GBV where aggressive behaviour during sexual relations were understood as normal and natural (Bashonga &

Khuzwayo, 2017; Sills et al., 2016; Zaleski et al., 2016). Further, rape culture is stated to exist in pockets of society where GBV is perceived as inevitable and excusable in order to consider and encompass the behaviours and ideas of people that condone and normalise GBV (Keller et al., 2018; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). Therefore, rape culture is a scapegoat that reproduces, justifies, and excuses GBV (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Boux & Daum, 2015; Rentschler, 2014). Rape culture also has an impact on greater societal structures such as the criminal justice system which includes law enforcement and the legal system and impacts reactions to the allegation of GBV by not taking victims seriously when they come forward to report such crimes (Boux & Daum, 2015) which, subsequently, impacts the reporting of GBV to authorities and the conviction rate of perpetrators.

Further, rape culture may manifests through jokes about rape; sexual harassment; cat-calling; the policing of women's bodies including the way they dress and act; the lack of holding perpetrators accountable; disbelief of claims of GBV; slut shaming; and understanding aggressive male sexuality as normal or typical behaviour (Keller et al., 2018; Boux & Daum, 2015; Rentschler, 2014). The use of the word "rape" in everyday language also minimises rape as a violent act and desensitises people to the word and its meaning (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017). Moreover, victim-blaming is a further instance of rape culture and relates to the questioning of a victim's dress attire, intoxication levels, and attitude which may be believed to have resulted in their victimisation; therefore, in this context women are held responsible for the violent acts committed against them as well as controlling the sexual desires or urges of men (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Boux & Daum, 2015; Gqola, 2007; Jewkes et al., 2005; Moffett, 2006). In this sense, women are understood as deserving of GBV by provoking it or 'sending out signals' that they are seeking some form of sexual activity, irrespective of how much they may protest (Keller et al., 2018). These perceived signals include staying out late, drinking alcohol, flirting, wearing "provocative" clothes, or being sexually active (Keller et al., 2018). Therefore, rape culture substantiates a society where GBV perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions and excuses their sexual impulses as being too difficult to resist which are allowed and accepted (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Moreover, social media has become a space in which feminists can challenge rape culture, especially where mainstream media and broader society fails (Orth et al., 2021; Rentschler, 2014; Sills et al., 2016). However, although social media is a space in which rape culture is challenged it can also cultivate a space in which rape culture is perpetuated (Sills et al., 2016; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018; Zaleski et al., 2016). Hashtag feminism also raises

awareness on rape culture and therefore provides an educative space (Sills et al., 2016). Examples of online movements specifically challenging rape culture include #RapeCultureIsWhen and #SafetyTipsForLadies (Sills et al., 2016). Other such movements include #MeToo; #TimesUp; and #MenAreTrash (Orth et al., 2021).

In addition, there are various attitudes around GBV that also need to be understood within the South African context, alongside patriarchy. A study by Mosavel et al. (2012, p.327) found that GBV occurs "amidst cultural constructions of love, sex and entitlement to which girls are expected to submit, and highlight the need to critically engage young people about patriarchal gendered relations". Therefore, the effects of patriarchy on these attitudes and cultural understanding of GBV should be noted. Patriarchal norms promote the use of violence as acceptable and normal within relationships, especially as a way to resolve conflict and maintain control (Gevers et al., 2013; Shai & Sikweyiya, 2015). Young people in South Africa also believe that GBV is form of expressing love and is often viewed as "normal" behaviour by young men (Mosavel et al., 2012). Women who abstain from sex are also deemed to be at risk for social exclusion which means they may engage in unwanted sexual behaviour to avoid exclusion (Mosavel et al., 2012). Men have also been argued to have entitlement to having their sexual needs met (Hill & Fischer, 2001). Moreover, importance is placed on a young women's virginity, especially in more conservative communities, and when an individual is raped and 'loses' their virginity it may be perceived to bring shame upon the family and therefore the crime will not be disclosed which may further maintain the culture of silence, shame, and stigma that exists around GBV (Moore, 2005). However, one way in which patriarchy and relationship to GBV can be challenged, is through activism. Activism of different kinds (protests and online activism) challenges the dominant beliefs in society and sparks conversations that bring about change on social issues. Therefore, activism plays an important role within a healthy society that seeks social justice and change.

2.4 Activism in South Africa

In recent years there has been an increased engagement in activism among young people and significant examples of this include the #RhodesMustFall campaign and the #FeesMustFall protests (Bosch, 2017; Kirshner et al., 2020). Moreover, social media has allowed for citizenship for youth to be redefined by creating a different sense of belonging and community online and has also allowed for more individualised forms of activism (Bosch, 2017). Therefore, social media has afforded young people increased opportunities to

engage in activism that are different to previous forms of activism, due to high levels of engagement on social media within this population group (Bosch, 2017; Lim, 2015; Velasques & La Rose, 2015). Thus, highlighting that social media has led to activism within a private space that often leads to public activism (Bosch, 2013).

Activism and social movements exist in order to challenge dominant practices within society, such as patriarchy, by engaging with stakeholders (e.g., community members) in order to challenge and overturn the dominant, adverse societal narratives (Gouws, 2016). Collective activism is motivated by people experiencing a sense of injustice, as well as a sense of shared social identity- such as women (Postmes, 2007). This shared social identity refers to an individual's connection between themselves and the external world from which they develop a sense of self in relation to society and particular injustices that exist within it which pushes them toward social change (Brown et al., 2017). Social injustices identify the inequality and the perception (knowledge and feelings) of this imbalance, especially when compared to another group of people and this perception is what often leads to activism (Postmes, 2007).

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between online activism and offline protests as although these types of activism are closely connected, each provide unique opportunities (Greijdanus et al., 2020). Online activism cannot replace offline movements and rather offers supplementation (Tsatsou & Zhao, 2016). Often, online activism is used to initiate offline protests and marches due to social media's ability to disseminate information rapidly, with worldwide reach (Greijdanus et al., 2020; Tsatsou & Zhao, 2016). Similarly, offline action can also be shared on social media to further support a cause. However, offline protests may cause unrest and disruption in the physical areas that are targeted (Casquete, 2006). This may be different from unrest caused by online protest action as it is physical and may cause disruption in the ability of people to function, for example, the shutting down of university campuses during the #FeesMustFall protests. This may also mean that pressure gets added to government and policy makers to address the concerns of protestors. In addition, it is noted that both national and international women's movements (offline and online) have played significant roles in highlighting injustices as well as increasing the possibility for change within law and government, as well as an increase in the number of rights women have (Mill et al., 2015). These movements have also encouraged more people to take accountability for their actions as well as these injustices (Mills et al., 2015). Although activism has existed throughout history, the reason for activism is often changing and this is because societies do

not remain stagnant and inequalities shift (Britton & Fish, 2006; Meinjes, 2006). Moreover, the reason that activism for women's rights exists is due to the fact that women are not considered as men's equals within society due to existing gender norms and patriarchal beliefs (Singh & Myende, 2017; Walsh, 2006).

Throughout the years South African feminists have attempted to achieve equality by changing the power relations that exist, as well as challenging the inequality that women experience within society (Gouws, 2016). Women are free in the constitution due to activist approaches, but the same sentiment does not reflect within society (Britton & Fish, 2006; Gqola, 2007; Meinjes, 2006; Moffett, 2006). Thus, the progressive nature of policies, legislation, and programs for women and against GBV in South Africa is contrary to the experiences of women in the country (Hills, 2015; Mosavel et al., 2012). In this sense, women are not truly empowered and can only be considered free when society reflects the freedom of women as it is mirrored in the constitution (Gqola, 2007; Moffett, 2006). According to Gqola (2007, p,113), "many freedoms still need to be attained and defended". The act of violence and fear thereof that women experience in their daily lives, regardless of these policies, further highlights that women are not equal participants in society (Gordon & Collins, 2013; Moletsane & Theron, 2017; Skalli, 2014). Moreover, the prevalence of GBV may be attributed to the failure to implement these policies and programs (Mukanangana et al., 2014). An example of this is the failure of the government to implement the GBVF-NSP for a range of reasons such as insufficient funds and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the implementation and funding of various programs (Morshedi, 2020). Therefore, the problem is not a lack of policies or programs, but rather the failure to adequately implement them.

Furthermore, focus needs to be placed on attitudes of GBV and how gender identities are performed within society (Gevers et al., 2013). Due to this fact there has been a shift in women's activism within society as this type of activism is focused on challenging patriarchal, societal, and cultural norms that exist within society (Meinjes, 2006; Moffett, 2006). With an increase in feminist movements, women are now supported and encouraged to hold men accountable for the injustices brought upon them (Moffett, 2006). This is argued to be achieved through hashtag feminism which challenges the dominant narratives contributing to GBV, as well as allowing for the pursual of accountability outside of the legal system (Chen et al., 2018; Munro, 2013; Orth et al., 2021; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). Moreover, previous research by Posel (2005) also shows that there has been activism that has

targeted GBV in South Africa. The first ever protest against GBV in South Africa occurred in 1990 and was organised due to the rape of children in Soweto (Posel, 2005). This protest gained a lot of attention from mainstream media, but the impact of this protest did not endure for long and people eventually stopped taking about it (Posel, 2005). This is also evident for the #AmINext movement. The #AmINext was trending on social media for a time and gained a lot of attention from mainstream media, but shortly after the movement was no longer conversed on by the public. This raised the question about how much change these movements actually brought to the society of South Africa and whether understandings of GBV actually changed or how it is perceived.

It is at this point that social media and online activism may become useful as anyone can engage and start a movement without requiring other resources except social media, which is widely available across the world to many people (Higgs, 2015). It is also with the development of modern technology and the internet that have allowed the way in which collective activism occurs and has sanctioned online movements to take place (Postmes, 2007). Moreover, the #AmINext movement was started by a group of students with insufficient resources to start live protests, but with the resources to start an online movement. This movement was also, in turn, responsible for starting real-time, live protests and conversations around GBV which has been an important milestone for social change.

2.5 Social Media and Hashtag Activism

Activism on social media has become a place where people organise and partake in political protests all over the world (Schradie, 2018; Shirky, 2011). Social media plays a significant role in influencing how people engage with and understand political and social justice movements (Brown et al., 2017). Social media and online activism include posting links, sharing posts and "retweeting", using hashtags, joining online groups, and liking posts and is therefore a tool that encourages people to act and react collectively (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015; Miller, 2017). Furthermore, many different terms are used to explain activism on social media. It has been referred to as hashtag activism, online activism, social media activism, feminist activism, and has also been referred to as "clicktivism" or "microactivism" (Miller, 2017). Of particular interest to the current study, hashtag activism uses hashtags (#) on social media platforms in order to start conversations around problems within society (Bogen et al., 2019; Gouws, 2018). A hashtag is a tool that is used on social media that summarises information and groups information together which then makes it easy for users to find but

has also been shown to achieve other goals like inspiring people regarding topics of interest and raising awareness on social issues (Bogen et al., 2019; Lokot, 2018; Rauschnabel et al., 2019; Williams, 2015). Therefore, this study has specifically focused on hashtag activism around GBV which is becoming increasingly common (Bogen et al., 2019).

Hashtag activism is used very often by feminists in order to raise awareness and spread information on social justice issues, including GBV (Eagle, 2015; Miller, 2017). Hashtag activism is a more modern way of raising awareness regarding the violence women face on a global magnitude and is often aimed at advocating for the changing of laws as well as challenging societal norms that perpetuate social injustices (Eagle, 2015). Thus, ending issues such as GBV is an issue of social justice at a collective level (Gouws, 2016). Change and the potential for change is grounded in the coming together of people through activism and collective action, such as hashtag activism, in order to challenge social, political, and economic institutions (Mills et al., 2015). Moreover, hashtag activism is not only beneficial for victims and survivors of GBV, which is why hashtag activism has been considered useful and necessary as it allows more people and communities to become involved- which is necessary for broader, sustainable change (Gouws, 2016; Schradie, 2018). This collective action can be explained by the understanding of people's experiences, motivations, actions, values, and collective engagement and how these encourage unity to pursue positive social change (Mills et al., 2015). Thus, through collective activism, social identity and self-identification with a group may influence a person's readiness to mobilise social change on behalf of others (Postmes, 2007). Additionally, due to the extensive reach of social media, group identity can be constructed and encouraged at a greater level which is important for valuable activism which also means the engagement of a potential worldwide audience (Miller, 2017; Schradie, 2018; Valenzuela, 2013). Therefore, people may pursue change for a variety of reasons, but the importance is the pursuit of the same goal which is impactful positive social change, and in this case an end to GBV.

The #AmINext movement saw women sharing their own experiences and fears but also friends and loved ones expressing their fears regarding the safety of women in their lives (Mogoatlhe, 2019). Therefore, hashtag activism allows for a community to be created, and not only does this community engage in activism but it also offers a support system to those who are facing the consequences surrounding GBV (Eagle, 2015; Khoja-Moolji, 2015). This collective action also helps women to feel less alone and may serve as a reminder that GBV is a societal rather than an individual problem (Eagle, 2015; Mendes et al, 2018). Thus,

hashtag activism crosses national boarders but also crosses boarders of race and class, which therefore allows people of different backgrounds to act collectively. However, although online activism has redeeming effects it is also important to note that social media plays an important role in reinforcing and perpetuating inequalities that exist within society- including those based on gender (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Furthermore, hashtag activism allows one to challenge mainstream narratives that exist within society and allow for the creation of counter-narratives (Fischer, 2016, Lokot, 2018; Salter, 2013). These counter-narratives may challenge rape culture and the normalisation of GBV (Rentschler, 2015). Therefore, allowing women the opportunity to challenge the culture and beliefs around GBV through hashtag activism (Gouws, 2018). Albeit the fact that rape culture is often engaged in on social media it still exists as a place where it can be challenged (Sills et al., 2016). As a result, even though media and social media promotes and encourages sexualised views of women it can also be used as a tool for educating people on the widespread extent of GBV and the realities and effects thereof (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Social media can therefore be considered a social learning tool (Russo & Pirlott, 2006).

Hashtag activism also allows women to speak up and challenge what is reported and not reported in mainstream media (Fischer, 2016). The #AmINext movement gave women a chance to speak out against GBV in South Africa and allowed for conversations to start around a topic that is not spoken of, as well as raise awareness on the number of women affected by GBV in the country. The #AmINext movement was also able to draw the attention of mainstream media which led to an increase in reporting on the movement and subsequently highlighting the prevalence of GBV (Morshedi, 2020).

Moreover, there are many reasons as to why hashtag activism has been considered the better and easier form of activism. This type of activism has been utilised frequently as the availability and access to social media has increased around the world (Lim, 2015; Shirky, 2011). Social media may afford people, who may have previously been disengaged in other movements, the ability to join political and social movements by engaging online due to its minimal effort required (Miller, 2017; Valenzuela, 2013). Social media has also been understood to be low cost and low risk which may also encourage greater participation (Lim, 2015). It is also met by limited resistance and censorship as compared to that which may exist in person (Lim, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013). This allows for greater freedom of expression and greater freedom in what information is shared, which means there is greater independence, increased collaboration, and creativity (Lim, 2015). This also alludes to a greater access of

information, news, and opinions which may not be available elsewhere (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013). In addition, people may be more freely able to engage with, process, and reason with political contexts which is conducive for the development and growth of activism and political movements (Valenzuela, 2013). It therefore creates spaces that allow for the start of conversations on political matters with other people which may not have been previously possible, as well as conversations with people who differ socially and culturally – hopefully creating a more understanding and empathic society (Lim, 2015; Miller, 2017).

Moreover, traditional and hashtag activism can play a significant role when used together. A combination of these may lead to a greater amount of awareness and change. This is evident in #AmINext movement as it started protests all around South Africa in schools, universities, and other public spaces. The movement also gained large amount of interest from mainstream media. However, there has been no clear indication of whether this movement actually created any amount of effective social change as it soon stopped and was no longer in the public eye. It is for this reason that the current study has looked at how understandings of GBV among young people may have shifted due to the #AmINext movement in order to explore whether any change in thinking has occurred. Arguably, social media and hashtag activism has also been said to be biased towards and encourage certain types of movements (Lim, 2015). This may mean that not all movements are able to gain momentum to start conversations or even real-world action and therefore social change (Lim, 2015). This is because of what is consumed, shared, and promoted depends on users, essentially, the public and therefore, not all movements have the same reach and impact. Therefore, it may be important to understand what makes a viral or effective online movement. The more noticeable or important a message is and the more relevant it is to society the more likely it is to be shared and therefore goes viral (Wang et al., 2016). It has been shown that content that evokes and elicits some form of emotion, whether this is positive or negative, is more likely to go viral (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Therefore, hashtags should be used cognitively or affectively in order to be impactful (Rauschnabel et al., 2019).

Reportedly, a study conducted by Morshedi (2020) found that women who engaged with the #AmINext movement online expressed the personal and relatable feelings of the movement. The feelings of fear, shock, and anger were shared by participants especially since the rape and murder of Uyinene occurred while she was running a common errand which is

something relatable to many people (Morshedi, 2020). The hashtag itself also carried meaning for the participants in that it elicited fears around becoming the next victim (Morshedi, 2020). This may indicate some of the reasons as to why this movement went viral as the content, as well as the hashtags, elicited strong emotions from the public. The relevance of the movement may also be associated with the idea that this event happened in a month which South Africa celebrates as *Women's Month,* in addition to the known high prevalence of GBV.

Further, there have been debates around whether hashtag activism actually brings about any real-life changes within the underlying societal structures that cause the high levels of GBV in South Africa and globally, and does not activate any real-world actions (Lim, 2015; Mendes et al., 2018; Miller; 2017). Hashtag and online activism have also been referred to as "slacktivism" because of the minimal effort required and it only increases one's sense of personal validation or satisfaction (Miller, 2017; Valenzuela, 2013). It has also been argued that the minimal effort and limited action required to engage online does little to encourage further action from participants which has an impact on activism (Miller, 2017). There is also no definitive outcome for hashtag activism. It may therefore exacerbate the problem, help it, or change nothing at all, and it has therefore been questioned as to the extent to what this type of activism actually achieves (Fischer, 2018; Shirky, 2011). It is also important to consider the use of social media within various contexts including low-income contexts and those with limited access to technology (Lim, 2015). Therefore, although the cost of social media is low, the access to technology may be limited for a lot of people in South Africa. The hope has been that hashtag activism starts conversations around GBV in a society that refuses to acknowledge the problem. This type of activism has been said to create dialogue and debate and the exchange of information but carries the risk that opinions, not backed by research, are shared which can lead to the dissemination of false information (Miller, 2017).

Social media also played a significant role in student movements occurring across South Africa during 2015 and 2016 to challenge various injustices experienced on university campuses (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Gouws, 2016). These movements consisted of what became known as the 'Fallist Movements' (#RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall), and included other movements aimed at raising awareness on the issue of sexual assault and rape on university campuses in South Africa such as #RUReferenceList, #RapeAtJunction, #EndRapeCulture (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Gouws, 2018; Magudulela, 2017).

According to Bosch (2016), the #RhodesMustFall movement in 2015, called for the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue at UCT, as well as challenging institutional racism and calling for the decolonisation of the curriculum. This was followed by the #FeesMustFall movement during 2015 and 2016 which was aimed at raising awareness and initiating mass support and mobilisation against financial exclusionary and oppressive practices and policies within universities (Orth et al., 2020a). These movements served as a way for students to engage in political activism and a form of personal empowerment, as well as drawing the attention of mainstream media and initiating on-the-ground protests (Bosch, 2017). The #FeesMustFall movement was deemed successful in raising awareness about funding at universities in South Africa and successfully initiated discussions for online debates and within real world spaces (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Langa, 2017). Other positive results from this movement included renaming university buildings, curriculum transformation, the insourcing of general workers, as well as government initiations regarding the options of higher education funding (Langa, 2017).

Additionally, one of the movements targeting rape culture and GBV on university campuses was the #EndRapeCulture movement which took place at South African universities in 2016 (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Gouws, 2018; Orth et al., 2020a; Orth et al., 2021). A study by Orth et al. (2020b) found that the movement helped challenge rape culture and victim-blaming, but comments online also showed to perpetuate rape culture. This movement created awareness on rape culture and created the opportunity for students to engage productively on the topic and learn from others' experiences (Orth et al., 2020b; Orth et al., 2021). Other movements among student communities included the #RUReferenceList and #RapeAtJunction which were two campaigns instrumental in raising awareness on the extent of GBV at university campuses and students' dissatisfaction with university responses to claims and inadequate policies (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017). These movements led to calls to action for students, creating dialogue, drawing media attention, initiating physical protests as well as pressuring university management to take action and find a way forward (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017). The success of these movements has been argued to be because of the solidarity of the students as well as how aware the public became of these protests (Gouws, 2016). Although these movements were started with a single event, a collective group of individuals feeling a very strong set of emotions encouraged an activist movement supporting the masses (Gouws, 2016). In this way the #AmINext started where the

death of one woman led the start of an entire movement, but it also highlighted the extent of cases of GBV that occur daily within South Africa as her death did not occur in isolation.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The following study fell under a feminist framework and particular focus has been placed on fourth wave feminism. Feminism is understood as social, economic, and political movements and theories that are focused on gender inequalities and attainting equal rights for women (Jain, 2020). Moreover, fourth wave feminism utilises social media and technology to take on many of the same issues of feminism such as inequality and equal rights, access, and challenging greater social constructs that underlie the oppression of women (Looft, 2017; Zimmerman, 2017). A distinct feature of this wave is not only the use of social media and technology but also its focus on intersectionality within feminist spaces (Looft, 2017; Munro, 2013). In this context, intersectionality includes gender, race, sexuality, class, ability, and age to be considered when understanding the intersections of privilege and discrimination among society and women (Zimmerman, 2017).

The use of social media by feminists has led to the emergence of what has been labelled hashtag feminism which involves the use of hashtags in order to challenge feminist-based issues, including GBV (Linabary et al., 2020; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). This means an increased presence of online campaigns which result in real-world marches and protests (Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). Hashtag feminism and the development thereof has been significant for feminism, especially regarding young women (Sills et al., 2016). Social media is a space that especially encourages debates and discussions of feminist ideas among youth and allows for the easy access of these ideas due to the young peoples' frequent use of and engagement with social media (Flores et al., 2020). Online feminist activism has also been gaining momentum in South Africa to challenge the silence surrounding GBV with a significant example being The Total Shutdown (#TTS) movement which occurred in 2018 (Jean-Pierre, 2022). Further, the use of social media allows for global engagement and exposing and sharing personal experiences of injustices, sexism, misogyny, and GBV in order to achieve social and political change (Gleeson & Turner, 2019; Jean-Pierre, 2022; Linabary et al., 2020; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Turley & Fisher, 2018). Therefore, personal experiences become political. This is notably true for the #AmINext movement as a woman's personal experience was used in the initiation of a political movement. The #MeToo

movement also involved the sharing of personal experiences of GBV to highlight the extent thereof across a global scale.

Hashtag feminism is a form of hashtag activism and is therefore exposed to the same advantages and disadvantages associated with social media and hashtag activism. Hashtag feminism allows for the empowerment of women through the large-scale nature of this type of feminism (Chen et al., 2018; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Turley & Fisher, 2018). It allows for rapid, widespread activism and solidarity as events can be responded to in a real-time manner and reach more people and communities (Turley & Fisher, 2018; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Linabary et al., 2020; Zimmerman, 2017). In this context, women at a global level can support, connect, and engage with like-minded people which leads to an extended network that surpasses physical boundaries; thus, creating a global feminist community (Chen et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2018; Munro, 2013; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Turley & Fisher, 2018). Therefore, feminist spaces are broadened which further promotes feminist ideas (Chen et al., 2018; Turley & Fisher, 2018). The broadening of the feminist community has further resulted in new and different conversations due to the increased representation of a variety of experiences regarding women from different contexts- leading to renewed engagement (Baer, 2016). The development of this global community also results in mental and physical health benefits for victims of GBV (Jean-Pierre, 2022).

Moreover, social media activism allows for the challenging of dominant patriarchal narratives and societal norms contributing towards the normalisation of GBV on a larger scale which has been identified as “call-out culture” (Chen et al., 2018; Munro, 2013; Orth et al., 2021; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). This means that perpetrators of GBV are exposed and “called out” online along with instances of misogyny and sexism (Munro, 2013; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). This also necessitates that accountability can be pursued outside of the legal system, as well as allowing for the creation of counter-discourses and feminist narratives (Linabary et al., 2020; Orth et al., 2021; Sills et al., 2016). Furthermore, the call-out culture extends to the calling out of institutions, such as government and universities, which may initiate further changes such as policy amendments, initiatives, and increased protection for women (Turley & Fisher, 2018; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Linabary et al., 2020). It is also important to note that social media can equally expand the intents to which sexist and patriarchal ideas and narratives are spread that maintain the inequalities experienced by women (Turley & Fisher, 2018). This can occur as quickly and at as a scale as hashtag feminism and the dissemination of feminist ideas. This may be exhibited

specifically through the backlash, bullying, and trolling that women experience online (Turley & Fisher, 2018).

Hashtag feminism has also been used as a tool to raise awareness on GBV, patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny, as well as highlighting structural and large-scale inequalities women face (Gleeson & Turner, 2019; Orth et al., 2021; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Turley & Fisher, 2018). This can be understood to encompass a goal of feminist activism identified as consciousness-raising (Gleeson & Turner, 2019; Jean-Pierre, 2022). The extended reach of hashtag activism, however, enables consciousness-raising on a greater scale than more traditional activist approaches (Gleeson & Turner, 2019). Therefore, consciousness-raising shifts from taking place in private spaces to online, more public spaces (Gleeson & Turner, 2019). This could also help women understand oppression as a structural and societal issue rather than something that is personal (Mendes et al., 2018). This encourages women to therefore question and challenge any oppression that they may have experienced within their own environments that could have been normalised (Flores et al., 2020). Thus, social media and hashtag activism can be understood as a tool and space for feminist activism and feminist theory (Linabary et al., 2020). Social media and the use of hashtags has allowed for the evolution of feminist activism and enabled the larger scale dissemination of feminist ideas, greater awareness of feminist-based issues, and increased inclusivity and representation of women and their experiences.

2.7 Conclusion

Social media has become an increasingly popular method of challenging social injustices all over the world. This is especially true for feminism as seen with the rise of the fourth wave feminism. Moreover, hashtag activism acts as a way to raise awareness and for women to create communities of support; challenge the underlying drivers of GBV such as patriarchy; as well as a call for policy changes and the protection of potential victims and survivors. It is important to challenge GBV due to the pervasive and widespread effects thereof. Hastag activism has become increasingly popular in South Africa, especially among youth as seen with the rise of online movements- especially on university campuses. However, the valuable and long-lasting impact of hashtag activism is poorly understood. Therefore, it is of importance to understand how young people, as a major group of social media users, in South Africa may understand and perceive movements such as the #AmINext movement, as well as the impact thereof.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study made use of a qualitative approach and was exploratory in nature. This was due to the fact that the study explored the way in which young adults in South Africa understand the #AmINext movement and GBV. The use of a qualitative approach allowed for the collection of data which is richly descriptive and allowed for the exploration social issues more deeply (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research also allows for the researcher to be able to explore how the social context may influence how a person may experience or understand reality (Merriam, 2002). This links into the fact that this study fell under a social constructionist paradigm. Therefore, using a qualitative method allowed for a deeper exploration of the themes and discourses that arose in relation to the topic as well as the participants' opinions and experiences.

This study fell under the social constructionist paradigm and this was chosen as social constructionism does not assume that there is an objective reality but that knowledge is created by society (Galbin, 2014; van Niekerk, 2005). The focus is placed on how concepts are seen and understood rather than on the concepts themselves (Harper, 2011). The study did not assume that there is an objective reality but rather that the ways in which young adults understand the #AmINext movement and GBV is socially constructed and therefore, the focus was placed on how young adults understood the movement and GBV.

3.2 Participants

The participants were sourced using a non-probability, convenience sampling method as well as snowball sampling. This type of sampling includes those who fall within the target population and are easy or convenient to approach as well as willing to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). This type of sampling is advantageous in that it is less time consuming, as the participants are those who are readily available, as well as inexpensive (Etikan et al., 2016). Therefore, the sample included a target population via social media. Participants were also sought out using word-of-mouth. Snowball sampling involved obtaining participants from information provided by initial participants or respondents (Acharya et al., 2013). Therefore, further participants were obtained by initial respondents spreading the word of the study or providing information for others who may have been interested in participating. This type of

sampling is inexpensive and provided a way for the researcher to access more people who may have known about the movement (Acharya et al., 2013).

The participants for the study consisted of both male and female individuals between the ages of 20 and 29 years. In total there were 10 participants in the study of which 5 were males and 5 were females. All participants took part in the study on a volunteer basis and did so by their own choice. Participants were asked if they were aware of the #AmINext movement and only those who were aware were invited to participate. The exclusion criteria were used to ensure that discussions during the interviews were beneficial for the study as those who were not familiar with the movement may not have been able to hold the in-depth discussion on the movement that was needed for the study.

3.3 Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the study internal ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Committee (non-medical) (protocol number: MACC/20/012). The data used for this for this study was primary data and thus participants were sought out once clearance was obtained. This was done by making announcements of the study which included a broad outline of the study as well as the participation requirements on various social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *WhatsApp*. This included contact details for potential participants to make use of if they were interested in participating in the study. Those interested in participating contacted the researcher and the study was further discussed, and interviews were arranged with those interested. Interviews were conducted at a time and on an online platform that was most convenient for the participant and the researcher. Due to the global pandemic, non-contact forms of data collection were used. Interviews were conducted on various online platforms such as *WhatsApp* and *Zoom*. Once the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed, analysed (using thematic analysis) and written into a research report. All ethical requirements were adhered to.

3.4 Data Collection and Instruments

The study made use of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study as they allowed for some structure in terms of the interview and the topic of discussion as well as allowing the researcher to follow up and explore further on topics that were relevant to the study that arose during the interviews (DiCicco-Bloom &

Crabtree, 2006; Grossoehme, 2014). An interview guide was used to develop open-ended questions and follow-up question to assist in guiding the discussion (Grossoehme, 2014). The semi-structured interview guide was based on the broad literature and was constructed to achieve the aims of the study and was constructed in a manner relevant to addressing the research questions as outlined in chapter 1. This was done in order to allow for the discussion to be focused but also allowed for some freedom within these discussions. The interviews were structured in a way that allowed for the focus to be more on the individual and personal experiences and understandings the participants had of the #AmINext movement and GBV. The reason that the focus was on the #AmINext movement was because it was a recent and relevant movement in highlighting problems faced by women in South Africa. The #AmINext movement was also a very widespread movement as people from all over the country as well as those from other countries participated in the movement online. This movement also led to many on-the-ground protests against GBV.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data collection began in July 2020 and was completed in mid-August 2020. The data collected in this study was analysed using thematic analysis (TA) as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). TA is used to analyse qualitative data and identify patterns and themes that are present throughout the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2014). A theme is a pattern that emerges throughout the data that carries a specific meaning (Joffe, 2012). Therefore, TA was used in this study in order to identify emerging themes that were found in the interviews. The reason that TA was selected for this study is because it is a flexible and accessible form of analysis as it can be used to analyse a range of data and does not fall under a specific theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2014; Joffe, 2012). This study used the social constructionist framework and therefore the data was analysed in a way that allowed for the social and cultural contexts of an individual to be taken into consideration when the themes that emerged in the data were explained.

Therefore, due to this theoretical framework used by the study, the themes were identified at a latent level as this type of analysis falls under the constructionist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This means that identified themes went beyond what was merely said in the interviews. Instead, themes were identified in relation to underlying ideas or assumptions that can be said to influence what was said in the interviews and thus were identified using interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this study themes were identified

using a theoretical approach. This means that the analysis of the data was focused on the researcher's theoretical interest which in the context of this research is social constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of approach allowed for a more in-depth analysis of some aspects of the data and the important aspects were those which were used to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the data was coded in a way that identified themes in order to answer the specific research questions for this study.

The steps taken to analyse the data for this study were the six steps as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) for TA. The first step of TA is familiarizing yourself with the data and this involves the process of reading and rereading the transcripts (once transcribed) and taking note of any initial ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once this step was completed the second step was completed which involved the generation of initial codes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes are any parts of the data that stand out as interesting in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The third step that was followed involved searching for themes and this is where codes from the previous step are allocated into different themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Step four involved reviewing the themes which included refining the themes that were identified previously (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This means that some themes were merged together, and some removed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The idea was to develop themes that were clear and distinct (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The step that followed this was defining and naming themes and this was done in order to understand exactly what each theme is about and how it relates to the data and the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final step was developing the report by giving a final analysis of the themes and linking these themes back to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study made use of these steps in order to analyse the data and answer the research questions for the study.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study made use of primary data and there was, therefore, direct contact with participants. All participants were given a participant information sheet, prior to interviews, which provided them with details of the study. The study was classified as low risk as the only potential risk was that of discomfort for the participant in association with the topic and some sensitive questions that were asked about the #AmINext movement. Referral to free counselling services at Lifeline was provided in the participant information sheet for any participants that felt any distress because of the interview.

Written and verbal consent was obtained from participants prior to the interviews. The consent accounted for the participation as well as the audio-recording of the interviews. Consent was also obtained in order to gain permission to use direct quotes in the final research report as well as for transcripts to be kept in anonymous form by the university after the completion of the study for the potential use in future studies. Due to the fact that interviews were conducted through a video call platform such as *WhatsApp* and *Zoom*, there were certain ethical considerations to take note of. It was important to consider the level of access that people in South Africa may have to data and internet in order for these calls to take place. This may have excluded some potential participants. It was also more difficult to ensure privacy during the interviews as the researcher had no control over the participant's environment and whether or not they were in a secure and private environment. The researcher also had no control over how information is contained on the online platforms. The researcher encouraged participants to use earphones during the interview as well as tried to encourage the participant to be in a space that is as private as possible in order to ensure some level of privacy.

Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time. If at any point the participant wished to stop the interview was stopped and resumed later if the participant wished to do so. Participants were also welcomed to decline answering any question which they did not feel comfortable answering. For the interviews, confidentiality was guaranteed for every participant as only the researcher had direct contact with the participants and only the researcher and the supervisor had access to all recordings and transcripts of the interviews. Therefore, confidentiality was ensured in terms of protection of the content shared in the interviews and not contact with the participants. Due to the direct contact between the researcher and the participants during the interviews, anonymity could not be guaranteed. All data collected in the study including interview recordings and transcripts made use of codes which means that no identifying information was used. The final report also made use of codes; therefore, participants' identities have remained concealed. All audio-recordings and transcripts were kept on a password protected laptop. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor had access to the data. Moreover, no incentives were given for the participation in the study. Participants have been given an executive summary of the study if they requested one. Participants were also made aware that data from the study will be published in a final research report which may be published online or in an academic journal.

3.7 Trustworthiness

The process of ensuring trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative studies is different to that of quantitative studies but there are still measures that can be and have been put in place to ensure that the quality of the findings was upheld. This is done due to the potential of researcher bias and subjectivity in qualitative research (Carcary, 2009). This was done by ensuring the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research.

3.7.1 Credibility

The credibility of the study refers to the truth or trustworthiness of the data and how this is represented by the researcher (Cope, 2014). This is done through the researcher reflexivity as well as prolonged engagement with participants (Cope, 2014; Morrow, 2005). The credibility of the study was ensured by the researcher keeping a reflexive journal to ensure the researchers biases were kept in check and did not influence the study in any way. Another way to ensure credibility was the in-depth nature of the interviews. The researcher made sure to ask follow-up questions and seek clarification where necessary to make sure the participants' intended meaning was clear. Another way of ensuring the credibility of the research was through the use of supervision (Krefting, 1990; Morrow, 2005). This allowed for another unbiased view on the research. It also forced the researcher to be more aware of their subjectivity and biases.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings can be applied to other groups and whether one is able to generalise findings to their own contexts (Cope, 2014; Morrow, 2005). The transferability is ensured by providing a detailed description of the participants and the context of the research which was provided for this study (Krefting, 1990; Morrow, 2005). A detailed description of the research as well as the researcher's role was also provided. It is important to note that the nature of qualitative studies may not be generalisable to other populations or settings but sufficient information has been provided for one to be able to decide on how the information may be transferable to other groups or contexts (Morrow, 2005).

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the collection of data in similar conditions and is consistent over time as well as data collection techniques (Cope, 2014; Morrow; 2005). This is done by

ensuring consistency throughout the interviews as well as through the data analysis process (Krefting, 1990). Consistency during the interviews was ensured through the use of interview schedules. These ensured that a similar questioning process was followed for all participants and that the same topics were covered within all the interviews. The interpretation of the data also made use of the same process and theoretical framework throughout. One further method to ensure the dependability of the research findings that was done was the coding and re-coding of the data by the researcher in order to ensure consistency of the research findings (Krefting, 1990).

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the ability of the researcher to show that the research is a reflection of the participants' responses and not the researchers (Cope, 2014; Morrow, 2005). This was done through the use of a reflexive journal by the researcher. The use of audio-recordings of the interviews allowed for there to be a verbatim account of what the participants said. This has allowed for analysis to be done on the information that came directly from participants as opposed to only notes taken by the researcher during the interviews. Direct quotes were also used to illustrate participants' viewpoints.

3.8 Reflexivity

In qualitative research it is important to acknowledge the interaction between the researcher and the research subjects which has been done through reflexivity. Reflexivity allows us to understand how our actions influence and are influenced by the world by understanding the self-in-action and therefore, by understanding oneself within the research space and process (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). During qualitative research the researcher is not seen as objective and is understood to influence the collection, selection and interpretation of the data which is why reflexivity is important (Finlay, 2002). The researcher identifies as a female and this should be important to consider in terms of the nature of the study. This may have meant that the researcher was able to identify with what was being said by female participants. This may have been due to the researcher's own experiences as a woman as well as the alignment of various opinions and values. It was important to consider this potential bias and the ease that existed in staying more neutral with the male participants rather than female participants. This was something the researcher had to be constantly aware of as well as monitor throughout the interview process. This was also true for the researcher's position as a woman within a society that struggles with GBV.

Overall, the female participants seemed to engage more with the topic and the discussions as their interviews seemed to be longer overall. This may have been because there was more comfort in terms of discussion on the topic or that they had more insights to share but it is important to consider the researcher's potential role in this in terms of potentially more comfortability with the female participants. This was something that was considered and something the researcher did remain aware of throughout the process. The researcher found that there were moments in which the research topic proved to be distressing as well as frustrating due to the nature of the topic. This, at times, may have made it difficult for the researcher to engage with the topic. Certain emotions such as anger especially towards the existence and justification of GBV that were discussed during the interviews as well as the research process were echoed by the researcher. These emotions were kept in check by constant monitoring as well as attempting to remain objective in the analysis and reporting of the data.

Further, in line with reporting on the data collected, it was important for the researcher to be aware of her own values and opinions on the topic of GBV and ensure that the research was being reported as objectively as possible. This was something the researcher was aware of and tried to ensure that the results that were discussed were those that were brought by the participants rather than those which supported and confirmed the researcher's beliefs and values. This process was managed through internal reflections and journaling as well as discussions with colleagues and people considered close to the researcher.

Chapter 4: Findings

The #AmINext movement was considered to be part of a fourth wave feminist movement against GBV in South Africa. This study aimed to develop an understanding of how young adults in South Africa experienced the #AmINext movement and how it served to conscientise and shape their ideas around GBV. The study aims were achieved by examining; how young adults understood and made sense of the #AmINext movement and how the #AmINext movement shaped the way in which young adults spoke about and made sense of gender-based violence. Three main themes emerged; namely: 1) consciousness-raising; 2) challenging rape culture; 3) and feelings of unity. The following section outlined the perceived ability of the movement to raise awareness on GBV, how this was done, and why this was considered so important. Rape culture and victim-blaming were also discussed as central to the movement along with the sense of community as a result of the movement.

4.1 Consciousness-raising

A significant theme associated with the #AmINext movement was the understanding that the movement had the goal of raising awareness about GBV. Raising awareness is explained by fourth wave feminism as consciousness-raising and is associated with increasing one's understanding of political and social issues within society, such as GBV in this instance (Gleeson &Turner, 2019; Jean-Pierre, 2022).

> *"I really feel the movement is about awareness creation."* (Participant 2)

The participants understood consciousness-raising to be necessary in the acknowledgement of GBV as a significant problem in South Africa. Consciousness-raising results in a person being more mindful and responsive to social issues which is necessary for effective change. This therefore, creates empowerment and may encourage further feminist engagement. The existence of the movement in this regard highlighted the creation of awareness-raising groups which extended into public spaces and allowed for the dissemination of feminist ideals and the initiation of feminist engagement on a larger scale.

> *"We are trying to bring to the fore or open people's eyes about the fact that gender-based violence or violence against women, is an actual issue."* (Participant 7)

"I think the movement was specifically targeting society, in general, to wake up and realise that there is a problem." (Participant 9)

"I think for a lot of people the #AmINext movement probably was their sort of feminist awakening." (Participant 2)

Consciousness-raising was specifically associated with drawing attention to the extent and impact of GBV. This was reflected in how the participants understood the #AmINext movement and how they made sense of the phrase "Am I Next". It was understood to highlight the prevalence of GBV, regardless of race, gender, SES. Its pervasive reach across the South African landscape brought attention to how victims of GBV did not fit a particular profile therefore making anyone a victim. This logic was used to encourage greater involvement in the movement.

"It's highlighting the prevalence of how much or how the high frequency of these experiences and the fact that it can happen to anyone, by anyone." (Participant 1)

Furthermore, the meaning of this phrase was also compared to previous movements such as #MeToo. The understanding was that the #AmINext movement existed as an evolution from the previous movements in its drive to include people whether or not they have been victims of GBV as previous movements have only encouraged the participation of victims and survivors of GBV. These hastag movements also appeared to evolve depending on which social injustices were being focused upon in society at the time. In this way it seemed to conscientise young adults about fourth wave feminist goals and created larger feminist communities.

"Even just the hashtag like if we compare #MeToo to #AmINext not as movements just as hashtags, the rhetoric for #AmINext is a lot more pointed." (Participant 7)

"It sets an example for those who have not been victims and hopefully never will be victims, that they can set the precedent. They do not have to wait to have a story before they can join in." (Participant 3)

Further associated with the meaning behind the movement were feelings of fear. The understanding that the movement was aiming to be inclusive of not only victims of GBV was also exhibited in the further understanding of the meaning behind the "Am I Next" phrase. This was believed to be posing a question to the public asking "Will I be the next victim?"

"People are asking, who is the next victim? Who is the next one that the war is going to claim?" (Participant 9)

Women in South Africa live in a state of fear as they contemplate whether they too would be victims of GBV. The perceived state of fear in which women live may highlight the patriarchal nature of South African society. Within patriarchal societies, men have the power to control and manipulate women. Such objectification and control is often expressed through violence, which negatively impacts the human rights and safety of women.

"It's a constant fear, it's a constant agitation, that it's just this accepted norm" (Participant 3)

"We're just victims waiting to happen." (Participant 7)

Women were understood to have higher levels of consciousness when compared to male participants. The lack of awareness amongst male participants centred around lack of education and a defensiveness and disbelief about the extent of the problem. Male participants may have also struggled to have open conversations about GBV and how power is expressed in relationships.

"Women weren't in denial. I think that the men were." (Participant 8)

"There's a lot of ignorance from men." (Participant 4)

"If I think about men, I think they do not really engage with it because they do not think it is… they rarely see it and not even see it, they just do not know it is there. They do not know that it exists constantly as a thing, you know? I think they just live their lives and if they participate in things that propagate or perpetuate gender-based violence, they are not even aware of it." (Participant 7)

In association with consciousness-raising and a perceived lack of mindfulness associated with men, the participants noted that one of the targets of the #AmINext movement was men. This was specifically tied to education and therefore attempting to increase the responsiveness of men to such social injustices.

"Men. In essence it is something to educate men." (Participant 6)

Men were also understood to be targets of the movement due to the understanding that they are more often the perpetrators of GBV. The understanding of men as perpetrators of GBV may be associated with strong patriarchal values especially in child rearing and

socialization. Therefore, targeting men in this regard may have been associated rather with a plea for men to stop perpetuating GBV. This may be associated with the call-out culture associated with fourth wave feminism which aims to highlight injustices and call-out perpetrators publicly with the goal of accountability (Linabary et al., 2020; Orth et al., 2021; Sills et al., 2016).

> *"I think it is hard to talk about a movement like this, like gender-based violence or just #AmINext or like the general umbrella of gender-based violence without having to call out a larger portion of a certain sex - which is men. Like it is a fact that [gender-based violence] mostly comes from men."* (Participant 7)

> *"I think it was targeting more, like, more the perpetrators if anything to say like, yes, what you guys are doing is wrong, but then you should definitely know it's wrong as well."* (Participant 10)

Social media activism against GBV, specifically the #AmINext movement while serving an awareness raising role left some men feeling attacked as it may have been construed as labeling all men as perpetrators. This may have been associated with the understanding that men were among the targets of this movement and resulted in feelings of defensiveness and an unwillingness and hesitancy of male participants to engage with the movement.

> *"I think again being the privileged white male you sometimes feel like you are being misrepresented as the perpetrator."* (Participant 2)

> *"Men tend to defend themselves."* (Participant 8)

This unwillingness and hesitancy to engage in the movement was evident, not only in the negative associations with social media (as discussed later), but also in how conversations on the topic of GBV were perceived. These conversations were perceived as challenging and difficult by male participants. This difficulty may have been associated with feelings of discomfort due to fear of being called out or challenged within these conversations. This may bring into question the effectiveness of engaging men in this way to aid in challenging the patriarchal narrative and to support GBV movements.

> *"If I can describe the conversations in one word it is daunting."* (Participant 2)

"It's very hard to speak. As I always say, as a gent, it's hard for you to talk because you're going to get bashed anyway." (Participant 5)

"They are scared to be vocal because they probably had those thoughts running in their head and it is probably a little bit of guilt." (Participant 1)

"On the topic, I think women are more open to discussing the topic than men. I think the topic makes men uncomfortable. For one of two reasons; one: either it's because they feel like society's always saying that men are the abusers and not victims, two: they might not be comfortable admitting the fact that they have been abused before in their lives." (Participant 9)

Although these conversations were perceived as difficult, it was something male participants felt they were able to do especially within their own social circles. Male participants highlighted that engaging in the movement for them meant having conversations with friends and colleagues. Therefore, there may have been a greater sense of comfort when engaging with and challenging people in their own social circles rather than with strangers online. Participants may have been more comfortable in such environments and viewed it as a space of lesser judgement with people who shared values.

"I've had a lot of conversations with my peers and colleagues about it." (Participant 4)

"What I have done, it's always having a conversation. I don't believe in arguing and making it a fight but having a conversation with someone and if the topic comes up then talking to someone on a one-on-one basis." (Participant 8)

"I would rather call up my friends and be like hey guys have you seen this #AmINext movement? Let's talk." (Participant 2)

The willingness of male participants to engage in such conversations may reflect a greater responsiveness to GBV as a societal issue. This may be associated with consciousness-raising through the movement. Male participants reported feelings of shock and disbelief when learning about the prevalence and impact of GBV. This reaction may serve to highlight the movement's ability to draw attention to the societal presence of GBV for male participants and the strong reactions may demonstrate a lack of prior consciousness. Furthermore, this highlights that when a movement is able to elicit strong emotions, such as

shock and even defensiveness, are more likely to engage the public (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Rauschnabel et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2016).

"It was shocking to see how many cases are actually happening." (Participant 8)

One significant way in which the movement was understood to be successful in expanding consciousness in association with GBV was how GBV was understood by young adults. The definition and acts of GBV was clarified and expanded, enabling a deeper understanding of GBV. This included the definition of GBV for the participants to extend beyond violent, physical acts and included a better insight into how certain conversations and actions count as acts of GBV. A deeper understanding of GBV may result in an increased likelihood to mobilise against and challenge GBV as well as challenging those who were unaware that they may have been perpetuating GBV in the past.

"I think it highlighted that it's not a case of crossing a line anymore. There's no grey area, it's black and white. You know, before it was what constitutes as violence or abuse." (Participant 8)

"We understand differently about the body and what it means to transgress someone." (Participant 2)

"A lot of guys have realised how certain things just aren't cool and they didn't know that it wasn't cool." (Participant 5)

The #AmINext movement was understood to encourage action against GBV. As highlighted above, conversations were a way in which male participants felt they were able to engage with the movement. The ability of the movement to initiate an increased number of conversations on the topic of GBV was identified as a significant theme by most of the participants. These conversations continued even after the movement ceased, further highlighting the movements influence and continued value. This may serve to illustrate the ability of hashtag activism to instill long-lasting change in relation to social injustices.

"The movement did start a lot of dialogues." (Participant 4)

"Ever since the #AmINext movement, I will say that society, especially the younger generations, have become more open to discussing and intervening. They are more willing to try and stop it from what I have noticed." (Participant 9)

In these hashtag conversations women took on the role of an educator. The tendency of women to interact in this manner may be explained by women interacting and engaging with GBV from an experiential point of view and may be true in terms of participants' exposure to GBV. This was reflected in the personal experiences of GBV shared by participants.

> *"People who tried to sort of argue against the movement, I would interact with them- try to educate them."* (Participant 9)

> *"I think also, you know, to a degree it's also on not only just men for calling out their male friends. It's also on women to educate."* (Participant 6)

> *"The first really traumatic experience I have in terms of gender-based violence was I think I was about seven-years old."* (Participant 3)

Beyond starting conversations, the movement was understood to initiate other actions against GBV. This was specifically true for female participants and these actions included engaging with people online, participating in physical protests, as well as donating to charities. The understanding of the #AmINext movement to initiate action in this regard can be associated with the goal of fourth wave feminism to encourage action against social injustices. Female participants may have been more comfortable in engaging with the movement in various ways as GBV is understood as a problem that significantly impacts them.

> *"Except for online sharing and signing petitions, I participated for a little bit in the protests in Rosebank as well."* (Participant 1)

> *"I think my presence was mostly online. I remember that a whole bunch of... I won't say charities, but a lot of people started sharing links for charities that you could donate to. My personal choice was, I'm not sure if you know about them, Open Doors Crisis Centre in Pinetown."* (Participant 9)

Engaging in conversations as a part of the movement was chosen over engaging with the movement online, for many of the participants. The tendency to engage offline rather than online was due to the negative perceptions surrounding social media and a hesitancy to use social media as a tool for change. The participants' negative views of social media included the spreading of false news and the misrepresentation of victims of GBV as well as the light-hearted nature of social media. These understandings of social media highlight the

potential pitfalls of using hashtag activism as a tool for effective social change (Lim, 2015; Mendes et al., 2018; Miller; 2017).

> *"I think for me I'm hesitant to use social media as a way or an avenue of change."* (Participant 2)

> *"I'm very sceptical on social media, because I've found a lot of cases where something's put out and it comes back later that it's not the full story."* (Participant 8)

> *"Social media almost makes a joke out of everything."* (Participant 4)

Although social media was highlighted as a negative space in which to engage with the movement, it is important to consider the effectiveness of the movement occurring online in initiating the relevant offline actions. Participants highlighted the ability of social media to disseminate information. This highlights the ability of hashtag activism and fourth wave feminism to spread information to a larger audience, in a short amount of time and furthermore, encourage offline action (Turley & Fisher, 2018; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Linabary et al., 2020; Zimmerman, 2017). Therefore, the offline conversations would not have occurred without the initial spread of the movement online.

> *"Social media is more effective than the news. It's what people do to waste their time. They spend hours on social media, so, if there's a platform to make a difference it would most definitely be with social media."* (Participant 8)

> *"I think social media is an excellent place to get information."* (Participant 9)

> *"We also have to credit the media because the media, as much as sometimes they can add sensationalism to other things and whatever, they did bring the attention to the nation itself and probably the world."* (Participant 5)

4.2 Challenging Rape Culture

Central to the discussion of the #AmINext movement in South Africa, was the rape and murder of Uyinene. Specific mention was made about the brutality of her case, the environment in which it occurred, as well as a lack of remorse from the perpetrator. As a result the dominant theme that emerged from these discussions was identified as rape culture. Within this theme, victim-blaming was specifically highlighted by participants in relation to rape culture and the #AmINext movement. Moreover, the case of Uyinene was understood to be central to this movement in that it served as the catalyst that ignited the movement in

South Africa. It is therefore essential to discuss and address the Uyinene case when investigating young adults' understanding of the movement. Uyinene's rape and murder served as a representation of GBV in the country as a whole, as well as a tipping point for GBV action, which resulted in a nationwide outcry by the public against ongoing social injustices against women.

When discussing Uyinene's case, the participants referenced the brutality that she experienced as well as the lack of remorse from the perpetrator. The extent of the violence and the associated emotions it triggered served as the impetus for the creation of the movement. Her case resulted in strong emotions of anger felt by the public. In turn, this anger led to people speaking out and starting an online movement against GBV. This may also explain why this case was the one that started a movement and not others, as movements are understood to be more successful when they elicit strong emotions among the majority of people (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

> *"It started after that brutal murder and rape of Uyinene, in the post office, and that just because of the innocence of her, and because of the complete disgusting violence that was shown with no remorse. I think that was just the final nail in the coffin and from there everyone was like, 'I'm not taking this anymore', and it started that #AmINext movement, you know… I won't be next."* (Participant 6)

> *"I think that is another reason why people were so angry and especially in the case of Uyinene, specifically as an individual. People were very angry because they were like oh again, you know? But even worse than before because it is just getting worse and worse."* (Participant 7)

> *"It's always the most violent thing that gets on the news."* (Participant 2)

Another significant line of discussion associated with Uyinene's case was the location and time of day that she was victimised. These details elicited emotions of shock and exacerbated the stark reality and fear that anyone can fall victim to GBV, regardless of who the person is and what they are doing. As a result, the #AmINext movement was understood by participants to be challenging victim-blaming and therefore, rape culture. Moreover, victim-blaming and rape culture ensures that perpetrators are not held accountable as the responsibility is placed on the victim's behaviour for controlling a perpetrators sexual urge. In Uyinene's case, this was contradictory as she was completing a mundane, everyday task that was during daylight hours. This context therefore left little room for victim-blaming.

This meant that the crime was unable to be explained away through arguments such as 'she was asking for it'; 'she was drunk'; or questioning what she was wearing at the time. Thus, this case highlighted that victim-blaming was challenged by the movement as it aims to dispute the idea that a victim is responsible for a perpetrator's actions.

> *"This movement specifically showed that what led to that was not any fault of the woman involved. Concretely, you know. Obviously, it never is."* (Participant 7)

> *"She was going to the post office. She was doing something we all do, and it was one of those moments that was linked to so much brutality, but no one could pin it on her - what she was doing or what she was wearing."* (Participant 6)

Therefore, by challenging victim-blaming in this way, attempts are made to place the responsibility of GBV on the perpetrator rather than the victim. Notably, rape culture and victim-blaming may result in victims not being taken seriously when they come forward to share their experiences of GBV, which also contributes to the underreporting of this injustice (Boux & Daum, 2015). However, this was counteracted by the #AmINext movement by creating an environment in which victims are acknowledged and validated when sharing these experiences.

> *"Teach him not to rape. Do not teach her how to protect herself because that should not be a problem."* (Participant 6)

> *"I think the reason for the movement was for these cases to be taken seriously."* (Participant 1)

Other ways in which rape culture was presented in the #AmINext movement was expressed in other targets of the movement which included the government and the justice system, in addition to the perpetrators. The understanding was that the government and justice system have failed to instill policies and hold perpetrators accountable, which provides an environment in which perpetrators are able to flourish and remain protected. More importantly, this creates a society where perpetrators are able to get away with acts of violence and that these acts remain excusable (Boux & Daum, 2015). This may be understood to be a result of rape culture. Therefore, the movement, in part, was understood to be challenging the government and justice system to take further action against perpetrators. This understanding of the movement may be associated with the call-out culture established by fourth wave feminism which encourages the calling-out and challenging of perpetrators as

well as various institutions on public platforms in order to encourage accountability and the further protection of women and victims of GBV.

> *"It is targeting parliament to change laws and to have a better way to incriminate…to bring justice for the victim."* (Participant 1)

> *"Our police system needs to improve."* (Participant 5)

The negative side of social media was seen through the presence of what is known as social media "trolls" throughout the movement therefore, highlighting one of the pitfalls of hashtag activism. Social media trolls are understood as people who engage with others on social media in a way that is usually destructive, disruptive, and intentional in order to detract the goal of topic of conversation (Zezulka & Seigfried-Spellar; 2016). Participants expressed frustration in having to engage with trolls online as these individuals may take away from online movements and propagate victim-blaming. The presence of trolls also served to highlight the understanding of social media as a space with limited protection and censorship and a space which perpetuates counter-narratives.

> *"I must say, it was a bit of a frustrating experience, in general, working with the trolls."* (Participant 9)

> *"You do come across the occasional troll who tries to say something different try to goat you."* (Participant 6)

> *"We live in a very negative time because of social media."* (Participant 4)

Participants discussed a tendency of people to ignore GBV as though it does not impact them personally. This hesitancy seemed to arise from narratives around its normalization and the culture of silence that exists in association with GBV. The hesitancy to take action against GBV may also be associated with these attitudes. Hence, it is not believed to be morally, physically and emotionally problematic. It is viewed more as a domestic issue than a human rights issue.

> *"We have this, 'It's none of my business', culture in this country."* (Participant 4)

> *"I fully believe that a lot of people keep passing the buck about it because it's not an across the boards represented issue."* (Participant 3)

> *"Some people feel like I see something, I don't want to be involved. It's none of my business."* (Participant 5)

As mentioned above, one of the goals of the movement was understood to be that of consciousness-raising among the public. It is important to consider how this relates to rape culture. Participants expressed that the more exposure GBV is able to attain, the more likely it will be addressed rather than ignored. Therefore, the notion of GBV being excusable and expected part of society is challenged the more it is addressed and acknowledged. Therefore, the culture of silence and shame associated with GBV was challenged which further allowed for the continued defiance of the perceived normalisation of GBV in society.

> *"I believe a movement like this has put it out there that this will not be tolerated, this will not be accepted in society."* (Participant 8)

> *"The more people talk about it, the less they can ignore it."* (Participant 3)

4.3 Unity and Connectedness

Hashtag activism creates a sense of connectedness on a large scale due its widespread presence, which allows people with shared experiences and values to rally together against common causes (Mills et al., 2015). This has been highlighted as a significant advantage of hashtag activism as its ability to connect people as well as its ability to create spaces where experiences are shared and validated. In this study, connectedness emerged as a significant theme in relation to the participants' understanding of the #AmINext movement. The #AmINext movement was understood by participants as a domain that created a safe space for victims to come forward and share their personal experiences of GBV. This may be illustrative of the ability of fourth wave feminism to utilise personal experiences as political tools against GBV (Gleeson & Turner, 2019; Jean-Pierre, 2022; Linabary et al., 2020; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Turley & Fisher, 2018).

> *"It's about creating a platform that is safe and secure for survivors to come out and speak."* (Participant 2)

The utilisation of the personal as political not only served to highlight the societal presence of GBV, but also further encouraged and empowered more victims to come forward and share their experiences. This understanding of the movement may allude to the advantages associated with hashtag activism. This not only includes the ease of accessibility and low risk, making it easier to engage in hashtag movements but also highlights the ability hashtag activism and fourth wave feminism to create online communities which offer physical and emotional support as well as empowerment (Jean-Pierre, 2022). Therefore, the #AmINext

movement created a platform for victims and survivors of GBV to not only come forward but to also receive support while doing so.

> *"It opened the platform for conversation, for people to come out and say, look this has happened to me before as well, you're not alone." (Participant 8)*

> *"It allowed victims who could not speak out to see that others are speaking for them. It gave those people the sense that you are not alone, you never were, and you never will be." (Participant 3)*

Moreover, the coming forward of victims to share their experiences was also believed to create an understanding among victims that they are unified. This was reflected in there being a sense of comfort at seeing the number of people come forward to share their experiences. This sense of support not only empowered victims and survivors to share their experiences and receive support, but also in challenged the notion that GBV was a private, shameful, and personal problem. This understanding of GBV is one that is encouraged by fourth wave feminism. This online community was able to provide support and validation of women's experiences.

> *"There is nothing quite like seeing hundreds of women together and them saying that you are valid." (Participant 3)*

> *"It tried to target survivors in trying to remove the shame of what might have happened to them."* (Participant 2)

The perceived sense of community, support and solidarity associated with the movement was not only associated with victims of GBV but was also expressed by those who participated in the movement. Participation in the #AmINext movement was a positive and unifying experience. Moreover, the participation in physical protests was met with feelings of physical unity which was expressed as an overall positive experience by participants. Unity was central to collective action and hashtag activism. This sense of unity may have emerged from the hashtag activism, centered around the shared experiences and formed a group identity focused on activism.

> *"There was definitely a sense of unity among the protesters, for sure, and they were males and females."* (Participant 1)

> *"It was hugely positive to experience that kind of sense of community."* (Participant 7)

> *"I feel as though a protest, in and of itself, is a poetic and cathartic thing that people go through in terms of unifying with like-minded individuals in order to face demons that are hard to do alone."* (Participant 3)

The feelings of unity associated with the #AmINext movement, for participants, extended worldwide. Participants highlighted the widespread nature of the movement and its ability to cross national borders.

> *"The reaction from the online community was phenomenal. There was international interference. There were people from America, Canada, and Australia. There were people from Europe that were joining. They were also protesting. They had sign boards, that kind of thing. So on that side, the movement was phenomenal. It was sort of inspiring. It made South Africa feel maybe a little more connected to the world. Like, you know, they know we're here."* (Participant 9)

Chapter 5: Discussion

There was a collective understanding that the rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana ignited a national and even global online movement in South Africa during 2019. As a result, widespread online activism took place, specifically challenging the high presence and indifferent social and governmental perception of GBV in the country. This study aimed to gain an understanding of how young adults in South Africa experienced the movement and how it served to conscientise and shape their ideas around GBV. These aims were achieved by exploring; how young adults understood and made sense of the #AmINext movement; whether there was a difference in how male and female participants spoke about the movement and GBV and how the #AmINext movement shaped the way in which young adults spoke about and made sense of GBV. The findings indicated that young adults understood the #AmINext movement to challenge GBV and the societal norms that surrounded GBV such as rape culture. Furthermore, the movement was understood to play a role in the creation of awareness regarding the extent of GBV, providing an educative platform as well as foster a support system for any victims and survivors coming forward.

For participants in the study, the #AmINext movement was understood to be aimed at raising awareness on GBV in South Africa. This awareness can be understood as what fourth wave feminism calls consciousness-raising (Gleeson &Turner, 2019; Jean-Pierre, 2022). Consciousness-raising, through feminism, has been focused on highlighting the inequalities women face which includes GBV (Gleeson & Turner, 2019; Orth et al., 2021; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Turley & Fisher, 2018). One of the ways in which the #AmINext movement was understood to draw attention to GBV was through highlighting the extent and impact of GBV on women across South Africa which was understood to be necessary to acknowledge GBV as a significant problem. Therefore, through consciousness-raising, GBV may be acknowledged as a problem that impacts society rather than individuals and through furthering this understanding of GBV, a greater involvement from the public may be encouraged (Flores et al., 2020; Mendes et al., 2018). This facilitates feminist engagement on a greater scale, especially when this occurs online (Gleeson & Turner, 2019).

The understanding of the phrase “Am I Next” was significant in how young adults understood the movement. The most dominant understanding of the phrase was that anyone can be a victim of GBV which was significant for various reasons. Firstly, this understanding

of the phrase highlighted the extent of GBV but also served to encourage greater involvement in the movement by highlighting that feminist movements are not only those who have been victims of GBV which was understood to be the case for previous movements such as #MeToo. This highlights the goal of fourth wave feminism to create large feminist communities by engaging as many people as possible and further highlighting GBV as a societal problem (Mendes et al., 2018). Furthermore, the importance of this may be associated with addressing the significant cost of GBV not only for individuals but also for communities and countries and the impact this has on development (Morrison & Orlando, 2005; Mosavel et al., 2012; Raghavendra et al., 2017; Terry, 2004).

Furthermore, the phrase "Am I Next" was associated with feelings of fear, specifically for female participants. This was echoed by Morshedi (2020) which found that participants expressed that the phrase "Am I Next" was scary as it highlighted the fear of being the next victim. Moreover, the fear highlights the anticipation and constant awareness associated with GBV as highlighted by female participants. Therefore, women may be understood to have higher levels of consciousness in association with GBV, resulting in feelings of fear. The correlation between feelings of fear and a person's awareness of GBV, have also been noted in other studies which found women live in fear due to the anticipation of GBV due to a consciousness of the extent of GBV in South Africa (Dosekun, 2007; Gordon & Collins, 2013). Thus, the high levels of GBV in South Africa and women's consciousness of this explain these feelings of fear as reflected by the #AmINext movement (Gordon & Collins, 2013; Mills et al., 2015; Singh, Mudaly & Singh-Pillay, 2015; Thobejane, 2019).

These levels of consciousness experienced by women were understood to be contradictory as to those experienced by men. This discrepancy in levels of consciousness may indicate a gendered difference in how young adults understand and speak about GBV. Men were perceived to be less conscious of GBV and as a result, were understood to be one of the targets of the #AmINext movement with the focus being on consciousness-raising and education. This contrast was also reflected in the reported shock that male participants exhibited when learning about the extent of GBV as a result of the movement and the experiences being shared online. This highlights both a lack of consciousness prior to the movement as well as the movement's ability to highlight the extent and impact of GBV for male participants. This highlights how the movement served to conscientise male participants on GBV.

In understanding the contrast in consciousness levels it is important to discuss patriarchy. Within a patriarchal society, men occupy a more privileged position (Hadi, 2017; Mitchell, 2009; Skalli, 2014). Therefore, men can afford to be ignorant as they are the ones who are seen as dominant and do not have to be aware of GBV or assume responsibility as the effects on them are limited (Mitchell, 2009). In turn, this creates a culture where are men less likely to worry about becoming victims of GBV and may explain the perceived lack of male consciousness around GBV. As women are understood to be the disadvantaged and those needing to be controlled within a patriarchal society, they are more often victims of GBV resulting in a greater level of consciousness and the impacts of this as discussed above (Skalli, 2014).

Furthermore, men are understood to be the perpetrators of GBV as violence is used to maintain power and control over women (Reed at al., 2010). Men were understood to be targets of the movement due to this understanding. This highlights the call-out culture associated with fourth wave feminism where, in this case, men, as perpetrators, are challenged and exposed online (Munro, 2013; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). One of the aims of this is to facilitate a sense of accountability (Linabary et al., 2020; Orth et al., 2021; Sills et al., 2016). Therefore, the #AmINext movement may have been challenging perpetrators, and men in general, to take accountability for their role in perpetuating GBV and to therefore, play a more significant role in challenging GBV. Moreover, this may further drive the understanding of GBV as a societal problem, rather than a problem that only impacts women and victims of GBV. This may therefore, highlight how the movement shaped young adults understanding of GBV.

There was an understanding that men were less likely to engage in the movement as compared to women. This was reflected by both female and male participants. This lack of participation online, in protests and in some conversations was associated with fears around being attacked for speaking out as if they themselves were perpetrators of violence. This may be associated with the understanding that the movement was targeting men. This further highlights the patriarchal understanding that men are more often perceived as perpetrators of violence. Male participants noted that they felt misrepresented and, therefore, perceived the online space as unwelcoming and were discouraged in participating in the online movement. This may further highlight a difference in how males understood and perceived the movement which impacted how and whether the movement was engaged with.

Studies have found that the shame and guilt associated with men engaging in preventative measures is due to fear and shame associated with being labelled as perpetrators for doing so (Colpitts, 2019; Gottzén, 2016). Although men are more often labelled as perpetrators of GBV, there has been an acknowledgement that not all men are violent, but all men do have a role in combating GBV (Colpitts, 2019; Jewkes et al., 2015). Men who do nothing are understood as bystanders and these men have been cited to be complicit in GBV (Peretz & Vidmar, 2021). These understandings of men's unwillingness to engage, specifically online, with the movement highlights the movement's perceived necessity for targeting men to participate more in preventative action against GBV. The movement may have been considered successful in engaging men in some preventative action offline.

One of the instances in which male participants were understood to engage in the movement was through conversations with friends, even though this was perceived as difficult. Macomber (2018) found that it is difficult for men to let go of what has been labelled a "patriarchal allegiance" to other men when challenging people within their own social circles. In feminist focused movements, men's allegiance with other men is seen to be replaced with an allegiance to women, which is understood as a betrayal (Macomber, 2018). The #AmINext movement may have therefore been understood to challenge this allegiance through fostering actions taken against GBV, as well as the perceived increase in the willingness of male participants to challenge their friends when exhibiting some form of problematic behaviour. This indicates a change in how young adults, especially males, engage with GBV as a result of the #AmINext movement. Therefore, ideas around GBV may have been shaped in terms fostering an understanding and highlighting the importance of men to engage against GBV. Furthering the understanding that GBV is not only a woman's problem.

The willingness to engage in conversations was not only significant for male participants but was understood to be significant for the movement as a whole. Studies have shown that social media and online activism effective in initiating conversations in order to raise awareness and educate the masses (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Bogen et al., 2019; Eagle, 2015; Gouws, 2018; Lim, 2015; Miller, 2017). Therefore, bringing more attention to political issues such as GBV (Eagle, 2015; Miller, 2017). This was reflected in the understanding that conversations played a significant role in consciousness-raising for the #AmINext movement and further highlights the importance of dialogue creation. Fourth wave feminism is understood to use social media as a tool to encourage debate and discussion

of feminist ideas (Flores et al., 2020). These conversations were understood to be present after the movement ended and were understood to still be happening at the time of the interviews further indicating an increased willingness of people to engage against GBV. The existence of conversations at present further serves to highlight the potential long-lasting change of the movement.

A study conducted by Fabiano et al. (2003) found that men were less likely to intervene with peers in instances that may be considered problematic based on their own and their peers' perception of what is right and wrong. Therefore, by targeting men through the movement, and encouraging education and consciousness-raising, these perceptions of right and wrong may change which may result in an increased willingness to challenge others which was reflected by the participants. This was seen in how young adults understand GBV as a whole which further reflects a change in how young adults make sense of GBV as a result of the movement. Participants discussed a deeper understanding of what constitutes GBV and what it means to perpetuate GBV. Therefore, increasing an individual's own understanding of GBV may provide more tools and the opportunity to challenge and further educate on others' ideologies that perpetuate GBV. This may highlight the movement's success in its goal of consciousness-raising for the participants of the study.

Moreover, the movement was understood to encourage various actions against GBV and resulted in people being more willing to intervene against GBV. The ability to encourage action was significant in participants' understanding of the #AmINext movement. This was not only indicated in men's willingness to engage in conversations and challenge friends but also in the presence of other action incited by the movement, specifically for female participants. The #AmINext movement was also believed by participants to encourage engagement online, challenging trolls, joining on-the-ground protests, and donating to GBV non-profit organisations which is something social media movements have been argued to do (Lim, 2015). It may be important to note the different ways in which male and female participants engaged in the movement. Female participants may have been considered to have had a greater involvement in the movement whereas male participants experienced the movement to be attacking and exclusionary. This may highlight contrasting experiences of the movement for young adults.

Evidently, the more a person identifies with a group the more likely they will be to mobilise with said group (Postmes, 2007). This may explain these identified differences in

terms of males and females engagement with the movement. Women, as the perceived victims of GBV, may be more likely to mobilise on behalf of other women due to a greater awareness of GBV as a problem (Skalli, 2014). A study conducted by Mogoatlhe (2019) found that during the #AmINext movement women expressed fears regarding the safety of their loved ones. Thus, highlighting a shared awareness on GBV and the impact thereof, specifically for female participants.

Moreover, female participants stated that they would often adopt the role of an educator, especially when engaging with male peers, which, presumably, indicates a deeper, engaged understanding of GBV. This level of understanding may have been attributed to women engaging in the movement from an experiential point-of-view. This was indicated by the sharing personal experiences of GBV by most of the female participants further perpetuating the understanding of women as victims of GBV. This role may highlight a gendered difference in how young adults spoke about GBV and may further highlight the way in which females experienced the movement.

The participants' perceptions and experiences of social media may serve as reflections of the debates on the advantages and disadvantages of hashtag activism and its ability to ignite societal change. Social media was perceived as a negative platform with the presence of trolls and bullying and the potential to spread false news. These views highlight some of the disadvantages associated with hashtag activism such as the dissemination of false information due to limited censorship (Miller, 2017). Other disadvantages include the perpetuation of harmful narratives. These perceptions of social media are important to consider in how they may have further impacted young adults' experiences of the movement. Therefore, negative perceptions and experiences associated with social media may have also been associated with the movement as it existed significantly in the online domain.

With regard to the advantages, participants understood social media to be a highly effective platform in the dissemination of information therefore, encouraging learning and consciousness-raising (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013). Furthermore, fourth wave feminism results in the rapid, extensive spread of information (Turley & Fisher, 2018; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Linabary et al., 2020; Zimmerman, 2017). Other studies found hashtag movements effective in initiating and encouraging learning on GBV at university campuses (Orth et al., 2020b; Orth et al., 2021). Osuna-Rodríguez et al. (2020) found that

young adults obtain most of their information, relating to GBV, from the media. This further highlights the ability of social media to play an educative role (Sills et al., 2016).

Therefore, although understood as a platform capable of both negative and positive engagement, social media played a significant role in the #AmINext movement. The presence of offline action against GBV may not have been present without the existence of the movement online as an increased presence of online campaigns results in real-world action (Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). The existence of conversations offline, engagement in on-the-ground protests as well as engagement with charity organisations highlights the initiation of offline action by the #AmINext movement. Previous studies have also shown that social media movements are more effective when they exist both online and offline (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Fischer, 2016; Miller, 2017). This highlights the importance and effectiveness of the utilisation of offline and online action in challenging social injustices and may therefore, highlight the effectiveness of the #AmINext movement. Therefore, the #AmINext movement was experienced as an online and offline movement.

Uyinene's case was central to participant's understanding of the #AmINext movement. This was specifically in relation to the level of brutality associated with her case. Studies have found that hashtag movements are more likely to go viral if they are understood to be relevant to society and if they elicit strong emotions and thoughts among the public (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Rauschnabel et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2016). Based on participants' views, the #AmINext movement was understood to elicit strong feelings among the public in various ways. Uyinene's rape and murder was associated with feelings of anger with regard to the brutality. The feelings further encouraged people to speak out on social media and engage with the #AmINext movement, resulting in its virality.

Further, Uyinene's case was associated rape culture as perpetuated by victim-blaming which was therefore, central to the understanding of the #AmINext movement. Social media has become an increasingly important space in which rape culture can be challenged (Orth et al., 2021; Rentschler, 2014; Sills et al., 2016). By shifting or placing this blame onto victims, accountability is taken away from perpetrators in terms of their actions (Gordon & Collins, 2013; Jago & Christenfeld, 2018; Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Additionally, victim-blaming can be associated with why the movement was understood to be targeting men and perpetrators of GBV. This encourages and challenges men to start taking accountability for their roles in perpetuating GBV, offering their support, and therefore ensures that GBV does not remain a

'women's problem' (Colpitts, 2019). Further highlighting that ending GBV is an issue of social justice at a collective level (Gouws, 2016).

Other social media movements in South Africa, such as #EndRapeCulture, have been understood to be successful in challenging and highlighting victim-blaming and rape culture-specifically on university campuses (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Gouws, 2018; Orth et al., 2021; Orth et al., 2020a; Orth et al., 2022b). The success of these movements, including the perceived success of the #AmINext movement in challenging victim-blaming may highlight the value of hashtag activism in challenging social injustices relating to GBV. One of the ways the movement may have been perceived as successful in this regard was that victims are now taken seriously when coming forward to share their experiences of GBV. By taking victims seriously, rape culture is challenged by ensuring that GBV does not remain excusable and justified. This may indicate a change in young adults' ideas of GBV as a result of the movement.

Social media has also been used to change laws as well as challenge societal norms (Eagle, 2015; O'Donnell & Sweetman, 2018). Examples of effective online campaigns include #JuusticeForNoura; #BringBackOurGirls, as well as #MeToo (Datiri, 2020; Tuerkheimer, 2019). A further target of the #AmINext movement was understood to be the government as well as the justice system as echoed in studies conducted by Morshedi (2020) and Pagel (2021). These studies found that one of the goals of the movement was to attain the attention of the government to attain resources and solutions against GBV (Morshedi, 2020; Pagel, 2021). The participants understood this to be the case for further policies to be instilled to protect victims and ensure victims are taken seriously when coming forward, as well as ensuring perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. Moreover, the lack of justice associated with GBV may be attributed to rape culture as it has an impact on reactions toward allegations of GBV in society, including how the justice systems manage crime (Boux & Daum, 2015). Victims not taken seriously and the ease at which perpetrators escape prosecution may further excuse GBV which perpetuates rape culture (Bashonga & Khuzwayo, 2017; Boux & Daum, 2015; Rentschler, 2014). Therefore, this may highlight another way in which rape culture was understood to be challenged during the #AmINext movement. Moreover, in the same way that the movement was associated with call-out culture when targeting men, the same can be argued in relation to the government and justice system as targets of the movement. Call-out culture extends to institutions such as

government which may initiate policy changes and protection initiatives for women (Turley & Fisher, 2018; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Linabary et al., 2020).

Therefore, call-out culture allows for the establishment of counter-narratives which challenge the patriarchal norms within society (Chen et al., 2018; Munro, 2013; Orth et al., 2021; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). This is specifically true in relation to rape culture. The #AmINext movement was understood to challenge the culture of silence and therefore, the normalisation and excusable nature of GBV by drawing attention to the extent of GBV, educating people on GBV and encouraging more acknowledgement of GBV. Therefore, indicating the ways in which the movement provided conscientization around GBV for young adults. This highlights the ability of feminists to use social media to challenge rape culture (Orth et al., 2021; Rentschler, 2014; Sills et al., 2016).

The current study found that, although social media was effective in raising awareness on and challenging victim-blaming, it was also a space in which rape culture and victim blaming was perpetuated. This was exhibited through the engagement with social media or online trolls and highlights one of the pitfalls of hashtag activism. A study by Orth et al. (2020b) reflected similar findings during the #EndRapeCulture, #RapeAtJunction, and #RUReferenceList protests in which comments online perpetuated rape culture. It has been argued that those standing up against GBV, online, have faced instances of bullying and backlash (Cole, 2015; Eagle, 2015; Turley & Fisher, 2018). Moreover, women facing this online harassment and subsequently challenging internet trolls, further highlights their role as educators within this context as they take on the responsibility of attempting to educate those who oppose these movements. A study by Macomber (2018) reflected the understanding of the role of educator falling onto women where women are responsible for challenging men and holding them accountable. For women taking on this role was met with feelings of frustration which was also reflected in other studies (Dosekun, 2007; Macomber, 2018). Social media is known as a space which allows for freedom of speech and room for hate speech, propaganda, and negativity exhibited by online trolls. Therefore, social media can be perceived as a negative space that is argued to further perpetuate inequalities that exist within society, such as GBV (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Social media can therefore also be a space in which social injustices and the ideologies thereof are maintained rather than dismantled. This highlights further negative experiences of the movement by participants. Therefore, indicating the range of experiences within the #AmINext movement.

Significant in participants' understanding of the movement was its ability to create a space in which victims could come forward and share their experiences. Sharing personal experiences is done during fourth wave feminism as a tool to achieve political or social change (Gleeson & Turner, 2019; Jean-Pierre, 2022; Linabary et al., 2020; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019; Turley & Fisher, 2018). Similarly, a study conducted by Mogoatlhe (2019) saw women engaging in the #AmINext movement by openly sharing their experiences and fears. Additionally, the importance of fostering a space for victims to share their experiences can be empowering and may therefore, be important for the wellbeing of victims themselves (Gordin & Collins, 2013). The ability of social media and hashtag feminism to create a sense of solidarity, as well as empowerment, has been shown to result in physical and mental health benefits (Jean-Pierre, 2022). Therefore, movements such as #AmINext have been beneficial in fostering a community that is able to offer support. The willingness of victims to share their experiences online may be attributed to the low risk nature of hashtag activism (Lim, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013).

The coming forth of victims resulted in feelings of unity. In this sense, women may therefore feel less alone when coming forward, sharing their stories, or reporting a crime, which has been shown to be a significant advantage of social media usage (Eagle, 2015; Mendeset al., 2018). This may indicate a more positive experience that was associated with the #AmINext movement. Although sharing of such experiences may be difficult it may have resulted in feelings of empowerment and support. Moreover, social media disputes the private and unspoken nature of GBV and serves as a reminder that GBV is a societal rather than individual problem (Eagle, 2015; Mendes et al, 2018). With more victims coming forward and sharing their experiences, the more the societal presence of GBV is highlighted (Eagle, 2015; Mendes et al, 2018).Therefore, challenging the understanding of GBV as a personal problem which reflects a change in how GBV may have been understood by young adults.

In turn, this collective fight against GBV and the sharing of experiences was understood and associated with feelings of unity for the participants. Social media has therefore been argued to be effective in fostering a sense of community that engages in activism and offers support (Eagle, 2015; Khoja-Moolji, 2015). Moreover, a study by Gouws (2016) showed that movements are more successful when there is a sense of solidarity. This sense of solidarity was believed to be experienced by those participating online as well as those participating in physical protests. As the movement had a vast reach and initiated engagement with people both nationally and internationally, it highlighted the ability of

social media and fourth wave feminism to have a considerable impact on the spread of information (Miller, 2017). Moreover, it demonstrated the ability of hashtag activism to construct group identity in a larger scale therefore, allowing for the creation of a feminist community on a global scale which is understood to be necessary for broader, sustainable change (Gouws, 2016; Jean-Pierre, 2022; Miller, 2017; Schradie, 2018; Valenzuela, 2013).

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

GBV is a significant concern within South Africa. Recently, there has been an increase in the use of online movements against various social injustices including GBV. However, there are many debates regarding the effectiveness of these online movements (Lim, 2015; Mendes et al., 2018; Miller; 2017). The #AmINext movement was chosen as the focus for this study because of its recent development as well as it being a movement that was based in South Africa. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the way in which young adults understood and made sense of the #AmINext movement which included gaining an understanding about whether the movement had an impact in which young adults engage with and make sense of GBV. Young adults were included in this study as they are more often users of social media (Duffett & Wakeham, 2016). Furthermore, the study aimed to understand in what gendered manner the participants discussed GBV by interviewing five male and five female participants.

In terms of the understanding of the movement, the young adults in the study all seemed to have a clear grasp as to the reason the movement started and made specific mention to rape and murder of Uyinene. Central to the discussions around the movement were the goals of the movement, the targets of the movement, how the movement was engaged with as well as the phrase of the term “Am I Next”. The goal of consciousness-raising was specifically associated with men due to a perceived discrepancy in the level of consciousness regarding GBV as compared to women. Therefore, majority of the participants felt the movement was targeted at men and the perpetrators of GBV. This was specifically in relation to creating a greater sense of consciousness as well as being an educative process.

It was noted by participants that the movement highlighted that GBV is something that women are more conscious of than men, which resulted in feelings of fear. This level of consciousness of GBV was also associated with how young adults understood the meaning behind the phrase “am I next”. This was understood to encompass the understanding that anyone can be a victim of GBV. Not only does this reflect a further understanding of the movement but may highlight a gendered difference in how male and female participants spoke about and understood GBV.

The movement was argued to have encouraged action against GBV. Female participants seemed to engage more with the movement online and offline, often adopting the role of educator, further indicating a difference in how males and females spoke about GBV. However, all of the participants felt the movement encouraged them to engage in conversations on GBV regardless. Through the process of conscientisation, a greater willingness to engage against GBV may have been fostered.

It is important to highlight the contrasting experiences of the #AmINext movement and social media. Some male participants noted that they felt attacked and subjugated to societal prejudice as men are more likely to be perpetrators of GBV and therefore, expressed a preference for engaging with the movement through conversations in their personal network rather than engaging online. In turn, engagement and conversing around GBV created an overall feeling of unity and connectedness which helped victims to share their experiences and led to supportive networks. The ability of the movement to create a sense of community was also associated with how the movement was able to challenge the silence and shame associated with GBV which could stop victims from disclosing. Thus, confronting a victim's feelings of isolation served to highlight GBV as a societal rather than an individual problem therefore, highlighting one of the ways in which young adults' ideas of GBV were shaped as a result of the movement.

Moreover, due to the online nature of the movement many of the participants expressed various feelings around the use and effectiveness of social media for activism. Overall, social media was experienced as quite a negative, fast-changing platform which stopped people from engaging online- especially by male participants. Those who did engage, expressed frustration in experiences with online trolls. Albeit the understanding that social media was experienced as quite a negative space, the effectiveness of using social media the spread information and raising awareness on social injustices was noted. This may further highlight various experiences with the online space and therefore, the movement, by the participants.

Specific mention was made to rape culture and victim-blaming. Uyinene's case itself, and therefore the #AmINext movement, was tied closely to victim-blaming which allowed it to be challenged. This encouraged the importance of holding perpetrators, rather than victims, accountable for the acts associated with GBV. This was also found to be significant in relation to the government and the justice system and the important role they play in holding

perpetrators accountable as its inability to do so, ensures rape culture is further perpetuated. The movement was understood to challenge rape culture by highlighting victim-blaming and ensuring victims are taken seriously when sharing their experiences rather than excusing acts of GBV. This may reflect how the movement served to challenge the normalised nature of GBV and young adults' understanding of GBV as ignorable.

In understanding how the #AmINext movement how young adults make sense of and speak about GBV, the participants expressed the belief that the movement did start necessary and difficult conversations around GBV and these conversations are believed to still be happening. This may indicate an increased willingness to engage against and challenge GBV. This has also been associated with the movement being able to challenge rape culture and the normalised and excusable nature of GBV and to create counter-narratives. It is important to note the impact this had on the acknowledgement of GBV as a societal rather than an individual problem. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of GBV was noted as well as a heightened consciousness, especially for male participants.

Therefore, from the study one can conclude that there was a cohesive understanding of the #AmINext movement among young adults. This movement can also be said to have had an impact on how GBV is engaged with as there is an increased sense of awareness on the extent of GBV as well as various practices associated with GBV now being challenged, such as victim-blaming. A difference in the way in which males and females engage with GBV has also been noted.

6.2 Limitations

This study adopted a binary view of gender by only engaging with participants that identified as either male or female. This can be considered a limitation that exists due to the expanding definition of gender identity. Therefore, it is important to consider this in relation to those identities that may have been excluded from the study and whose opinions were not obtained on the topic of GBV. Due to the study using a binary approach to gender, some of the findings may not be able to be extended to other gender identities. This study was also completed during the global pandemic of COVID-19. It is important to consider how this may have affected and limited the study in that online interviews were used which may have affected the ability to connect to participants, especially as some of the interviews were conducted via a phone call. This may have had an impact on rapport building, identifying

social cues such as picking up on body language and disruptions in internet connectivity may have impacted the flow of interviews.

6.3 Recommendations

This study explored the perceptions of young adults in South Africa, specifically males and females, in relation to the #AmINext movement aimed to address the social and public health issue of GBV. The following section outlines potential opportunities for the expansion and or extension of this study which may help guide future research. As previously mentioned, the study adopted a binary understanding of gender. This may serve to exclude experiences and perceptions of genders not included within this study. Therefore, further research may benefit from expanding the definition of gender in order to further understand the perceptions and experiences of those who are not included in the binary definition. This may also be helpful in further understanding the link to GBV and the nuances associated with patriarchy and masculinity and how this is often associated with GBV.

The following study only sought to explore the impact of the #AmINext movement on the understanding and engagement of GBV. Due to the rapid increase in the use and availability of social media and online movements, as well as the debates that exist around social media and online movements, it may be beneficial to further explore the effectiveness of such movements in challenging social injustices. This may help provide a deeper understanding of such movements and may include the study of various online movements, but may also include further study in the use of online platforms' effectiveness for such movements and whether the effectiveness may differ depending on the platform used. A further recommendation that may be considered to extend or expand on this line of research may be to include more studies on the perceptions of young adult males. In this sense, it may be important to understand the way men may interact within various spaces, including with each other, to better understand the male role in feminist movements. This may also be helpful to develop a deeper understanding into how they understand and contribute to GBV as a social issue, as well as addressing normalisation culture associated with a patriarchal view.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant information Sheet

Exploring the #AmINext movement with young adults in South Africa

Good day

My name is Nicole Smith and I am a Masters student in Community-based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies I am required to complete a research project. My research project hopes to explore gender-based violence and the role that the #AmINext movement played in bringing awareness to this social issue. The views of young adults in South Africa is especially important as many of them have the potential to be victims, perpetrators or even advocates for change. This research is being completed under the supervision of Dr. Vinitha Jithoo.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study which involves an interview that will take about 45 minutes to an hour on a digital platform which enables social distancing to occur safely, in the context of Covid 19. Participation in the study is voluntary. There are no risks or benefits that are associated with being involved in the study. You are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time during and you are welcome to not answers any questions you do not wish to answer. The interview will have limited confidentiality as my supervisor will also have access to the recordings and transcripts. I will ensure that you remain anonymous in the transcripts and in the final report write up your identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms or false names or numerical codes. All recordings and transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer and only myself and my supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, the data will be kept, in anonymous form, by the university for the potential use in future studies.

If you are feeling at all distressed after the interview and feel you are in the need of support or counselling services there are some services offered, free of charge, from Life Line. Life Line offers free telephonic and in person counselling. If you are a student at the University of the Witwatersrand the CCDU also offers free in person counselling.

Life Line: Johannesburg – (011) 728 1347 (24/7 Counselling)
0861 322 322 (24/7 National toll free counselling)

Umthombo Building – 2nd Floor, Room U211, Braamfontein East Campus, Private Bag 3, WITS 2050
T +27 11 717 4503/53 | E psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za | www.wits.ac.za/shcd/psychology/

065 989 9238 (WhatsApp counselling)

www.lifelinejhb.org.za

Pretoria – (012) 804 361

www.lifelinepta.org.za

If you have any questions during or after the research please feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website and may be published in an academic journal. If you would like a summary of this report, I will be happy to send one to you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Your participation would be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

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Appendix B: Consent form (Interview)

I, _____ , hereby agree to participate in the interview portion of this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I consent to the following:

(Please tick the relevant options)

I understand that my participation will be confidential	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in their research	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained	YES	NO
I understand that the online interview is technical in nature and that problems with the Internet may occur. If something beyond our control disrupts the connectivity of the interview, attempts will be made to reconnect accordingly.	YES	NO

Signature : _____

Date : _____

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Appendix C: Consent form (Recording of Interview)

I, _____ , hereby agree to participate in the interview portion of this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I consent to the recording of this interview. I understand that confidentiality will be ensured throughout and that only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the recordings. I understand that no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the study and that the data collected may be stored in anonymous form for the potential use in future studies subject to the researchers obtaining ethical clearance.

Signature : _____

Date : _____

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Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Biographical information

1. How old are you?
2. What is your current occupation?
3. Where are you from?
4. What gender do you identify as?

#AmINext

1. Please share your views about gender-based violence.

   Prompts:

   i. Experiences of gender-based violence: either personal or violence perpetrated on others
2. In your opinion, how do males and females engage with gender-based violence?
3. Can you tell me what you understand about the #AmINext movement?

   Prompts:

   i. How do you understand the movement? (Reason why it started? Who/what was the movement targeting?)

   ii. Can you tell me about your experience of being a part of the #AmINext movement? (online, taking part in the protests)
4. In what ways do you think that the #AmINext movement influenced the ways that the public understands gender-based violence?
5. What is your opinion and theories about why gender-based violence is such a big problem in South Africa?

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