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Men's responses to the #menaretrash movement on Reddit: A social constructionist and psychoanalytic analysis

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been declared a global pandemic by the United Nations and has been linked to traditional gender roles and societal pressure to achieve certain masculinities. The necessity of including men in conversations around gender and GBV interventions has been highlighted, however, there is limited research on men's responses to GBV or to protests against GBV. This study aimed to contribute to the inclusion of men in GBV conversations by focusing on men's responses to a particular online protest movement, #MenAreTrash (#MAT). This movement began in South Africa in 2016/17 in response to violence against women and was adopted by women across the world as a means to express anger toward broader gender discrimination, violence and gender power imbalances. This study examined men's responses to the #MAT movement on Reddit (a free online social media platform). In particular, these men's constructions of masculinity, women, and the #MAT movement were examined. Subreddits threads and posts (including comments) using the hashtag from January 2019 to January 2021 were analysed. An interpretive thematic analysis that utilized psychodynamic and social constructionist frameworks was conducted, which allowed for both intrapsychic and social aspects of responses to be explored. This study found that the predominant emotion displayed by men in the threads was anger, in response to feeling threatened. However, underlying this anger was anxiety. Anxiety was understood as an underlying response to feeling the need to defend their masculinity. Masculinity was constructed in two ways: as either unfairly under attack or needing to change. Some men felt that the good parts of masculinity were being ignored. Other men viewed masculinity as capable of being more responsive and adaptive to female causes. However, within these two constructions the complex nature of masculinity emerged, within which there were shifting positions of agency and victimhood. Men in the study constructed all women who support the #MAT movement as feminists, however, splits in this construction were also evident: women were either 'reasonable feminists' who demonstrate less combative support of the movement, or 'radical feminists', who aim to annihilate and alienate men. Overall, #MAT was constructed as damaging and stereotyping. However, a small number of men viewed the movement as helpful and necessary in generating awareness of GBV.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction and aim of the study

The United Nations has declared gender-based violence (GBV) a global pandemic (Lange & Young, 2019). Gender norms and the pressure to achieve certain masculinities are linked to GBV (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Nanda et al., 2014). In many societies masculinity is associated with traits such as strength, power and dominance and femininity with traits such as submissiveness and fragility (Nanda et al., 2014). It has been found that in these societies, in order to avoid exclusion and humiliation, many men feel pressure to demonstrate their manhood through violence (Johnson, 2014). These gender norms are perpetuated by patriarchal systems that value men and masculinity over women and femininity (Johnson, 2014; Lange & Young, 2019). In order to effectively reduce GBV, social and cultural norms regarding gender need to change (Gabriel et al., 2016; Lange & Young, 2019; Wigglesworth et al., 2015). However, several studies have found that as women start to move away from more traditional gender roles, they are met with violent retaliation from men (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Sovann, 2019). This has been explained as a reaction to men feeling threatened, incompetent, and experiencing a reduced sense of control, and exerting violence to re-establish and reaffirm dominance (Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014). Literature on men's responses to masculinity threats has suggested that when fearing exclusion or the withdrawal of their masculine status, men may demonstrate their masculinity by drawing on traditional masculine behaviour (Johnson, 2014; Vandello et al., 2008). The current day precarity of masculinity has been linked to increased levels of anxiety and men feeling the need to protect and maintain their masculinity through active demonstrations (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020; Johnson, 2014; Vandello et al., 2008).

The #MenAreTrash (#MAT) movement is reported to have begun in South Africa in 2016/17 in response to GBV and was used to call out problematic male behaviours (Brusuelas, 2017). The hashtag was a direct response to violence against women in South Africa, where the rape and murder of women, often by their partners, is common (Brusuelas, 2017). The hashtag went viral, meaning it gained popularity across the world quickly and was shared widely. #Menaretrash was adopted by women across the world to express anger toward the mistreatment and disrespect of women. It is a good example of women finding a voice to speak out against GBV and challenge current gender norms. Given the research that highlights the need to

consider men's responses to these challenges to the status quo (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Sovann, 2019), this study aimed to examine men's responses to the #MAT movement on Reddit.

Reddit is a free online social media platform that allows users to post content (a link post or text post) anonymously and engage (via comments) with other users' content (Anderson, 2015). The anonymity of this platform allows people to share, more freely, honest opinions around sensitive topics compared to in-person interviews (Drioli-Phillips et al., 2020; Wilson, 2018). Using data from an open access domain allowed for data to be collected without researcher interference (Gough, 2016). The study employed a qualitative approach using interpretative thematic analysis to analyse men's comments related to #MAT posts on Reddit. An important aspect of this qualitative study was reflexivity and I engaged in critical self-reflection of my role as a researcher in the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Reflexive notes were made throughout the research process and were taken into consideration in the discussion of the results.

1.2. Rationale

While there is a wealth of literature on GBV, masculinity and women's responses to GBV, current research on men's responses to GBV is limited. Some literature exists on men's understandings of GBV (see Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Nanda et al., 2014; Sikweyiya et al., 2007; Wigglesworth et al., 2015). However, there is very little literature exploring men's emotional responses to GBV. Various studies (see Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Lange & Young, 2019; Sikweyiya et al., 2007; Thulin et al., 2020) have hinted at this gap but focus more on the necessity of including men in the discussion around interventions of GVB. For example, Graaff and Heinecken (2017) and Lange and Young (2019) explain that interventions to end GBV need to focus on men. Sikweyiya et al. (2007) argue that the attitudes and behaviours of men need to change in order to combat violence. The question should not be: "what can women do to avoid violence?" rather, "what can we do as communities to prevent men from violating women?" (Lange & Young, 2019, p. 307). Thulin et al. (2020, p. 2) elaborate that interventions focusing solely on women "reinforce the hegemonic gender-binary view" that GBV excludes men and is a female problem. This study aimed to contribute to this shift in focus towards research on men's responses to GBV, with a particular focus on men's responses to a particular

protest movement, #MAT. The study could also contribute to future research about effective GBV interventions.

The finding that as women move out of more traditional gender roles and exercise agency, there is a backlash from men resulting in an escalation of violence against women, is of particular significance to this study (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Sovann, 2019). This pattern demonstrates the vital need for the inclusion of men in GBV interventions (Whitehead, 2005) and to understand why men react this way. Lange and Young (2019) and Nanda et al. (2014) have suggested that gains in female power result in feelings of incompetence in men, who in turn, exert violence as a way of showing dominance. This study aimed to contribute further understanding of this pattern by analysing men's emotional responses to the #MAT movement.

Research has linked the notion of masculinities to GBV (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Nanda et al., 2014). Nanda et al. (2014) explain that the rules created by gender norms allow for GBV; the valuing of certain forms of masculinity such as male dominance, and femininity such as female submissiveness in certain societies, appear to reinforce the dynamics of GBV. Several studies have called for men (and women) to challenge and change social and cultural norms around gender in order to target GBV successfully (Gabriel et al., 2016; Lange & Young, 2019; Wigglesworth et al., 2015). Jewkes et al. (2015) explain that when attempting to challenge gender relations, it is important to include reflection. Reflection encourages men to explore the implications of power dynamics and alternative ways of being, as this supports a movement toward gender equity. Jewkes et al. (2015) continue that gender constructions function in social groups and the superiority given to men over women informs how men think about themselves, how groups relate, and which behaviours are valued. Jewkes et al. (2015) conclude, therefore, that attempting to shift hegemonic masculinity requires changes in what is valued at a societal level. Sikweyiya et al. (2007) explain that because GBV is rooted in gender inequality and certain constructions of masculinity, it is important to explore discourses of violence. Discourses of violence express how people think about and construct ideas that legitimise violence – "what men say, in other words, is part of the problem" (Sikweyiya et al., 2007, p. 48). For this reason, this study aimed to focus on how men are responding to, reflecting upon and constructing masculinities in relation to a movement against GBV.

Online platforms are more frequently being used to investigate men's discourses and construction of meaning around masculinity and other important topics (Hall & Gough, 2011). Online platforms offer a level of anonymity that allows responders to disclose more freely and feel more comfortable with sharing opinions around sensitive topics (Drioli-Phillips et al., 2020; Wilson, 2018), including men's personal inadequacies and feelings of powerlessness within hegemonic masculinity (Drioli-Phillips et al., 2020). Using online data where people can discuss topics anonymously allows for data to be collected without interference from the researcher (Gough, 2016). Horne and Wiggins (2009) argue that one of the values of online forums is that they allow for analysis of constructions of experiences at the time of distress.

Although Sikweyiya et al. (2007) used face to face interviews to conduct their study, it was explained that the study relied on participant honesty and openness and that the study would have been undermined if participants lied or refused to respond. However, participants in this study remarked that when feeling unsafe or judged by the researcher, they would exert their power by withholding information (Sikweyiya et al., 2007). Participants identified anonymity in the study as crucial. In fact, the majority of the participants reflected they would have preferred computer administered measures, as opposed to in-person interviews (Sikweyiya et al., 2007). Jewkes et al. (2000) state that computers alleviate participant stress and reduce the temptation to protect themselves by withholding information. In light of this, this study made use of an online discussion forum (Reddit) because the anonymity that the site provides encourages more disclosure and honesty from online users.

1.3. Theoretical framework

This study adopted both social constructionist and psychodynamic frameworks. Social constructionism explores the creation of knowledge through communication and social context (Becvar & Becvar, 2014). It examines how individuals construct concepts and assumptions about reality and language is viewed as the framework through which reality is experienced (Becvar & Becvar, 2014). Social constructionism is anti-realist, meaning reality is constructed through social interactions and communication, and is therefore dependent on historical, cultural and social context. Findings are, therefore, dependent on the moment the research was conducted and may not be generalisable (Losantos, 2016). Secondly, it is anti-essentialist – it challenges the notion that individuals have an inherent knowable nature. This implies that people are ever evolving and changing (Losantos, 2016). Social constructionism emphasises

process over structure; therefore, knowledge is understood to be constructed within the interactions of a relationship and is not something that is possessed - it encourages curiosity throughout the research process, highlighting the notion of 'not knowing' (Losantos, 2016).

Psychodynamic approaches also acknowledge the unknowable in the form of the unconscious, and argue that the majority of psychological processes take place outside of conscious awareness (Lemma, 2016). Psychodynamic approaches argue that an individual's internal world (meanings and phantasies) shape behaviour and thinking (Lemma, 2016), and their subsequent positioning of themselves in relation to various discourses (Frosh & Baraister, 2008). The influence of the social is also considered by psychodynamic approaches, most notably in the influence of important relationships on an individual's representational understanding of relationships (Lemma, 2016). Thus, complementing a social constructionist approach, a psychodynamic approach allows for an additional layer of analysis of texts, highlighting emotion through language choices, ambivalences, temporary incoherences and avoidance (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Employing a psychodynamic framework alongside a social constructionist framework allows for a deeper, more complete, emotion-inflected interpretation of the data (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). This is because psychodynamic theory explores the conscious and unconscious processes and reasoning behind an individual's behaviour or discursive position (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Using both perspectives acknowledges both the intrapsychic and social domains of experience and meaning-making.

Within this dual approach, Hollway and Jefferson (2008) explain the notion of the defended subject. This refers to the psychoanalytic principle that humans experience anxiety when there is a threat to the self. Defences against this anxiety occur at an unconscious level - people use language and draw on particular discourses and position themselves in relation to these discourses in ways that defend against anxiety (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). These defences can impact the meaning of discourses and the manner in which they are received by the researcher, who is also a defended subject (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). By interpreting the data at face value, important defensive positionings may be missed that reveal much about the underlying emotional responses of the participants. Interpretations of data that include both the interpersonal and the intrapsychic attempt to find patterns in the data beyond face value.

Both social constructionist and psychodynamic approaches encourage researcher reflexivity – while the social constructionist approach encourages researchers to acknowledge their role in the construction of knowledge, psychodynamic approaches recognise researcher influence in the interpretation of data (Frosh & Baraister, 2008; Losantos, 2016). Consequently, the positioning of the researcher, the researcher's own responses to the data, and the influence of the language used by the researcher when writing the report were taken into consideration.

2. Literature review

Following the second wave of feminism during the 1970s and 1980s, where women began to speak out about their experiences of violence, 2006 saw social media hashtags (#MeToo and #TimesUp) encourage individuals globally to disclose acts of violence (especially sexual violence) against women (Lange & Young, 2019). The founders describe the goal of these movements as being to disrupt systems that enable sexual violence and expose gender power imbalances across race, class, age, institution, nation and culture (Lange & Young, 2019). The #MeToo movement prompted similar hashtag movements across the world (Lange & Young, 2019). While these movements have importantly afforded more women a voice, the voices of men are also required. Interventions for GBV have largely been focused on women (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2010). However, because men are the primary perpetrators of violence against women, it is necessary to understand how men think about women and violence (WHO, 2010). This will help inform culturally appropriate interventions aimed at influencing attitudes and behaviours (WHO, 2010).

This study is set in the larger context of GBV which is discussed in this literature review. Also covered is masculinity as a construct, which has been linked to GBV, and current literature around men's responses to GBV. This study gathered data from an online forum, thus literature about online interactions and hashtag movements will also be discussed.

2.1. Gender-based violence

For the purpose of this literature review, it is necessary to define several terms. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) 2015 Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action defines GBV as a broad term that encompasses any harmful act perpetrated against individuals because of their gender. Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to physical, sexual or psychological abuse of a women by a current or ex- partner (Jewkes, 2002). Sexual violence describes any sexual act performed against a person's will, this includes rape, physical force or harassment (Lange & Young, 2019).

Genders are socially-constructed roles that men and women are socialised into; these roles inform how individuals act in particular contexts and how they present their gender (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Nanda et al., 2014). Butler (1988, as cited in Graaf & Heineken, 2017) asserts that individuals are active in choosing how they perform their gender identity, while

acknowledging the existence of social pressure to act a certain way. Connell (2005) explains that different societies place greater value on certain identities over others; this results in varied power differentials. Connell (1987, as cited in Connell, 2005), argues that this has resulted in the preference of masculine identities over feminine, and a preference for specific versions of masculinities, which she termed 'hegemonic masculinities'.

An important aspect of these hegemonic masculinities is the expression of dominance through violence. Peacock (2013) states that statistically the majority of violence is committed by men, mostly against other men. However, high levels of male-on-female violence is also prevalent. Feminist writer, Lisa Price, argues that violence directed by one person against another is inherently gendered because sexual violence is aimed at women because they are female (Price, 2005, as cited in Lange & Young, 2019). Nanda et al. (2014) argue that IPV is used to maintain this power imbalance and that violence against women is intimately linked to a real (or perceived) fulfilment of masculinity. In a study of over 1500 men in India, Nanda et al. (2014) found that men largely enact predetermined gender roles, learned from social expectation and childhood experiences. Masculinity, which Nanda et al. (2014) defined in terms of attitude towards gender equality and relationship control, was found to determine men's aggression and inclination to violence within their relationships.

The WHO (2018) that reports almost one third of gender-based violence is intimate partner violence, with 38% of murders of women perpetrated by a male partner. In United States of America, 30% of women experience sexual violence. In South East Asia and Africa 37% of women experience physical or sexual abuse (Lange & Young, 2019). In light of these statistics the United Nations (UN) has deemed GBV a global pandemic (Lange & Young, 2019). Several sources, including the WHO and UN, state the cause of violence is the unequal position of women relative to men socially, legally and economically (Blanc, 2001; Jewkes et al., 2010). There is an urgent need for multisector responses to GBV and IPV (Lange & Young, 2019; Wigglesworth et al., 2015). Lange and Young (2019) argue that the high levels of female under-reporting of GBV indicates institutional and structural (not just relational) forms of violence. Lange and Young (2019) continue that the patriarchal system enables and maintains structural violence. Gabriel et al. (2016) corroborate this by highlighting that the acceptance of violence and gender inequality operates at a societal level, while further risks occur at an individual or relational level. Hamburger et al. (1996, cited in Graaff & Heinecken, 2017) found that sexual

aggression is most common in patriarchal societies that hold fixed, traditional gender roles that include the acceptance of violence and dominance in men.

Patriarchy describes a society of male privilege, that is "male-dominated, male-identified, and male centered" (Johnson, 2014, p. 5). This means that men dominate positions of power and as such a power differential is created between men and women (Johnson, 2014; Lange & Young, 2019). Traditionally women have not had access to positions of power, or access may not have been granted on their own terms (Lange & Young, 2019). 'Male-identified' means that cultural ideas about what is acceptable are based around men and masculinity (Johnson, 2014; Lange & Young, 2019). Patriarchial societies are male centered, meaning that attention (in the media, education, art) is focused largely on men (Johnson, 2014). Johnson (2014) includes an obsession with control as a further prinicple of patriarchy. Control is synonymous with a system of privilege which requires control and oppression of the other in order to maintain this privileged position. Men are expected to be "in control at all times, to be unemotional (except for anger and rage), to present themselves as invulnerable, autonomous, independent, strong, rational, logical, dispassionate, knowledgeable, always right, and in command of every situation, especially those involving women" (Johnson, 2014, p. 13). These traits are valued as superior and justify male privilege. In contrast, women are expected to be, in relation to men, the opposite of these qualities. Patriarchy is a system that designates social standards of beauty, behaviour, value, all of which are male identified and centered (Johnson, 2014). Both men and women are victims of the partriarchal system (Johnson, 2014; Lange & Young, 2019; Sovann, 2019).

There have been calls for men and women to challenge and change social and cultural norms around gender, as only then can interventions targeting GBV be successful (Gabriel et al., 2016; Lange & Young, 2019; Wigglesworth et al., 2015). It is important to note, however, that as women begin to move away from traditional gender roles, or challenge men, several studies reported a backlash of violence against women (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Sovann, 2019). It is hypothesised that when men feel threatened and incompetent in their roles, they exert violence as a way to show dominance (Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014). Criminal statistics from the London Home office (cited in Whitehead, 2005) show that shifting gender roles has not reduced men's violence toward men or women. These findings highlight the importance of examining men's responses to campaigns aimed at shifting gender dynamics and highlighting GBV.

2.2. Masculinity

Masculinity is a set of socially constructed characteristics and behaviours that are generally associated with men (Nanda et al., 2014). Masculinity is different from the definition of biological sex in that both men and women can embody masculine attributes (Nanda et al., 2014). Kimmel (2018, cited in Lange & Young, 2019) explains that boys learn stereotypical qualities of manliness (for example competitiveness, having sex, never showing weakness) from male figures in their childhood, such as coaches, fathers, older brothers. Poverty, power, culture and neighbourhood dynamics are formative in the constructions of masculinities (Jewkes et al., 2015).

South Africa has been recorded as having the highest rates of violence of any country not at war (Peacock, 2013). Graaff and Heinecken (2017) attribute this to apartheid and the normalisation of violence, patriarchal beliefs, income inequality, militarisation and hypermasculinities and gender inequalities. Militarisation under apartheid normalised violence and impacted the development of masculinity in South African men. Societal pressure on men to fulfil militarised standards of masculinity likely encouraged greater use of violence in men versus women (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Militarisation breeds a culture of hypermasculinity which values aggression and strength. Violence has therefore become an accepted part of the achievement of manhood (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Violent acts do not just include acts resulting in severe physical or emotional pain. Lange and Young (2019) explain that violent acts are accepted, even encouraged in general society. This includes male behaviours such as: ignoring sexist humour, intimidation by violating personal space, patronising language and actions toward women, and persistent commentary on physical appearances. It also includes domination in conversation, finding pleasure in pornography that shows domination over women and in controlling language (Lange & Young, 2019). It also includes the way men ridicule others using female references such as ‘girl’, ‘pussy’ or ‘mama’s boy’ (Johnson, 2014).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has influenced thinking about men, gender and social hierarchies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, the concept has attracted criticism from several groups, including: sociology, psychology, poststructuralists and materialists. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 832) explain that hegemonic masculinity (an abstract rather than descriptive concept) describes a “pattern of practice” that enables men’s dominance over women. Hegemonic masculinity is differentiated from other subordinate masculinities. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note that hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily enacted

by the majority of men, rather it symbolises the most acclaimed way of being a man and results in men positioning themselves in relation to it. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain that men who do not enact a strong version of male dominance but who benefit from patriarchy demonstrate a complicit masculinity. This group of men and the compliance of women uphold the concept of hegemony. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note that hegemony is not synonymous with violence (however, it has the potential to be maintained by force), rather hegemony means superiority through cultural, institutional and persuasive practices. The concept of hegemonic masculinity was developed on the assumption that gender hierarchies were historical and subject to change. Therefore hegemonic masculinity itself is open to change (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). There are five main criticisms of the concept of hegemonic masculinity: the soundness of the underlying concept of masculinity, the ambiguity and overlap of the concept, the problem of reification of masculine power, an oversimplification of and misguided focus on the masculine subject, and a lack of focus on hegemonic masculinities as a pattern of gender relations.

Realists and poststructuralists argue that the underlying concept of masculinity is unsound (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is argued that the concept is unfocused and underrates issues of power and dominance (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Hearn 2004 cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Others argue that the concept of masculinity reduces men to a set of traits and tries to unify a fluid reality (Collier, 1998; Maclnnes, 1998; Petersen, 1998, as cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Further, the concept of masculinity is criticised for being developed within a heteronormative formulation of gender without taking into consideration other gender categories. The concept is argued to rely on a "dichotomy of sex (biological) versus gender (cultural)" and therefore disregards and naturalises the body (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) reject the notion that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is essentialist. They argue that the development of research around the concept of hegemonic masculinity in various fields and settings supports the notion that there are multiple constructions of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) reiterate that masculinity is not a fixed concept or structure rooted in the body or personality. Rather, the concept of hegemonic masculinities are a group of practices constructed through social action, and therefore vary according to gender relations in a specific setting (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) respond that the

concept of gender being rooted in heteronormativity is applicable in categorical models of gender, but that this is not a valid criticism of relational models of gender. The original development of the concept of masculinity highlights that "divisions among men – especially the exclusion and subordination of homosexual men – were quite central issues" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 837). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) accept the criticism that there is a tendency in research to separate or oppose the experiences of men and women – investigating masculinities solely by looking at men and relations between men, excluding women from the analysis. However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 849) continue that this was not part of the original formulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, where "emphasised femininity" was included. As research into masculinities developed, so the inclusion of the emphasised feminine was forgotten (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is unclear why attention in research has been largely focused on masculinities (Paechter, 2018). Research on gender does not include a detailed understanding or consideration of femininity (Paechter, 2018). How femininity is treated in research reflects wider society in that femininity has become 'othered' and understood as a counterpart to masculinity and thus cannot be conceptualised without it (Paechter, 2018). Paechter's argument is evidenced in Connell's singular focus on hegemonic masculinity.

Another criticism of hegemonic masculinity questions who represents hegemonic masculinity – "many men who hold great social power do not embody an ideal masculinity" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838). Martin (1988, cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) finds fault with the concept of hegemonic masculinity arguing its ambiguity leads to inconsistent and incorrect applications (for example, using it to refer to a fixed type of masculinity). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) agree that there are ambiguities in its usage but say ambiguity in gender processes may be seen as mechanisms of hegemony. At a societal level certain masculine practices may be celebrated, that actually differ from everyday practices – masculinities may be constructed that do not reflect the lives of actual men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Holter and Collier (cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) argue that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is used to reify masculine power. Holter argues that masculine power is upheld by both patriarchy, of which men and women fall victims, and gender relations, which are at play on a more individual level. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) support Holter's criticism by suggesting "the institutionalisation of gender inequalities, the role of cultural

constructions, and the interplay of gender dynamics with race, class, and region" also be factored in (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 839). Collier criticises the concept of hegemonic masculinity for being associated with only negative characteristics, such as aggression, unemotional, independent and self-serving, and excludes behaviours that may benefit women. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain that because hegemonic masculinity is founded in practices that perpetuate male dominance over women, in some cases it may refer to negative behaviours such as physical violence. However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) continue that these violent practices are not the defining characteristics because hegemonic masculinity has multiple manifestations. Hegemonic masculinities do include 'positive' male behaviours such as "bringing home a wage, sustaining a sexual relationship, and being a father" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). If hegemonic masculinity did not include positive characteristics, its applicability would be challenged and the practices would merely constitute dominance not hegemony – which implies participation from a subordinate group (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The concept of hegemonic masculinity is not intended to explain all behaviours or act as a main cause, rather it is a way of understanding certain interactions within a social process (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Interestingly, these 'positive behaviours' are only mentioned as being positive in so far as they benefit women. Here again, the feminine is used only to explain masculinity.

Several authors (Collier 1998; Jefferson 1994; Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Whitehead, 2002) criticise hegemonic masculinity for oversimplifying the male subject (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is argued that the concept fails to appreciate the complexity of the individual, the focus is instead placed on a structure of ideal masculinity. Whitehead continues that hegemonic masculinity does not sufficiently explain why a minority group of men maintain their dominance over men and other women. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) disagree with this critique, arguing that the concept was built with an understanding of the layered and contradictory aspects of personality, and that the concept only homogenises the individual if it is understood as a single dimension of gender relationships.

The final critique is about the pattern of gender relations. Hegemonic masculinity is not a self-reproducing system, rather it relies on the regulation of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Demetriou (2001, cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), explains the concept of hegemonic masculinity differently. Demetriou identifies two forms of hegemony, internal and external. External hegemony refers

to institutionalised male power; internal hegemony refers to the dominance of one male group over all others. Demetriou's critique is that hegemonic masculinity has not clearly formulated the relationship between the two. Demetriou continues that internal hegemony is viewed as elite, in that other, subordinate masculinities are not influential in the construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculinities. They exist only in opposition and thus are a dualistic representation of masculinities. This, Demetriou argues, results in a process of internal hegemony whereby hegemonic masculinity appropriates from other masculinities that which will perpetuate its dominance. This results in a historic bloc of hegemonic masculinity that is constantly negotiating, translating and reconfiguring enabling external hegemony. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) agree that this is a useful understanding of hegemonic masculinity and that certain masculine practices are appropriated, thereby creating a hybrid.

Taking into consideration these five criticisms, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain that the very nature of social science concepts is that the theoretical formulations are applied in a multitude of settings by various groups. The concept is therefore forced to mutate, transforming the specific concept into a widespread idea. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) therefore reject the use of hegemonic masculinity as a group of fixed, toxic traits. It seems as if the concept of hegemonic masculinity uses it's fluidity to explain and avoid certain criticisms and also hides behind it. While Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue all the things hegemonic masculinity are not (essentialist, normative, negative traits), they fail to provide a description of what practices do constitute hegemonic masculinity in a given society or context. This study attempted to hold the complexities of masculinities in mind whilst exploring the masculinities constructed online in response to the #MAT movement.

A psychodynamic understanding of masculinity includes exploring the "emotional costs and tensions" (Langa, 2006, p.262) experienced by men negotiating both hegemonic and alternative masculinities. Psychodynamic theory attempts to understand the individual experience of being positioned as masculine. Lacan's notion of the phallus is that an integral part of the experience of masculinity is power and struggle. The cost of this masculine pursuit can be burdensome and therefore, while it has the potential to symbolise something powerful it can also symbolise something empty. For many boys and men, this internal struggle signifies some kind of performance pressure (Langa, 2006). Frosh (1994) explains that pressure to achieve a certain type of masculinity is complex and provokes feelings of anxiety and fear of failure. For adolescent boys, this pressure often manifests in public performance of risky behaviours in

order to achieve a hegemonic masculinity. Men may also shift positions as they attempt to achieve the expectations of being a 'real' man (Frosh et al., 2003; Renold, 2004). Assuming certain masculinities and forgoing others induces anxiety, ambivalence, loss and sadness (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Frosh et al. (2003) describe homosexuality, that is the status of being 'not masculine", as being attributed to femininity. Therefore, the construction of masculinity is partially founded on 'projecting' femininity onto other men. This implies how fragile and precarious these masculine identities are (Frosh et al., 2003). Frosh and Baraister (2008) criticise psychodynamic theory for individualising and pathologising and argue for viewing the subject as both social and psychological – that is, behaviour is influenced by the external social and internal psychical processes.

2.3. Masculine movements

Over the last several decades male ethicists have attempted to reconceptualise masculinity in a way that will offer men a more liberating way of being male (Heinrich, 2014). Two contradictory movements emerged initially – the Feminist-Friendly and Mythopoetic Men's Movements. While the Feminist-Friendly Movement (FFM) called for devoted support of the feminist agenda, the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (MMM) emerged as a criticism of feminism and promoted unapologetic denouncement of male discrimination (Gremillion, 2011; Heinrich, 2014; Kimmel & Kaufman, 1993). These movements did not succeed in bringing about a change in the concept of masculinity, rather, these opposing movements divided the men's movement ideologically and politically, extinguishing the hope of birthing a universally appealing masculinity (Heinrich, 2014). A third movement then arose, the Moderate Men's Movement, which has been heralded as having the potential to achieve what the previous two movements could not; by focusing on moderation and balance as fundamental concepts powering collective efforts, it is hoped that a more suitable way of being male can be achieved today (Heinrich, 2014). The movement promotes, firstly, a rejection of ideals of hegemonic masculinity, that provides men unearned power and status over women and other groups of men. Secondly, the Moderate Men's Movement promotes that other traits of masculinity that have added value to the world in a meaningful way need to be celebrated. This balance allows men to save the ideals of masculinity worth retaining and reject those that are not (Heinrich, 2014). Silver et al. (2019) corroborate these categories of men but suggest an additional group of men who are unsure about their feminist identity. Silver et al. (2019) found that men who are unsure about their feminist identity sometimes share similar views to that of feminist men and others share similar views to non-feminist men. The importance of this finding is its

implications for how feminism is taught to men and how activists involve men in feminist agendas (Silver et al., 2019).

Feminism has been formative for men who have not identified with traditional gender roles (Heinrich, 2014; Silver et al., 2019). These men have supported the conversations on gender by arguing for a revision of traditional masculine roles. However, reconceptualising masculinity has proven no easy task – these male writers struggle with the complexity and contradictory arguments resulting in the polarised ideologies of the two movements (Heinrich, 2014). The FFM demonstrates "empathy and allegiance to the feminist movement" (Heinrich, 2014, p. 240). This is hoped to encourage male self-reflection that allows for an acknowledgement of the unearned gender privilege patriarchy has endorsed. This movement's anti-sexist agenda challenges male supremacy and institutional misogyny (Heinrich, 2014). The critics of this movement, the MMM, challenged the feminist agenda. Mark Messner (1997 cited in Heinrich, 2014) and Gremillion (2011) point out that the feminist argument has enabled men's rights activists the very same argument for male oppression – the MMM criticise feminism for attempting to combat oppression with further oppression and failing to advocate for *human* liberation. Through his publication *The Myth of Male Power*, Warren Farrell gained popularity by arguing that it is men, and not women, who are powerless and inferior in society (Heinrich, 2014). Farrell claims men are the true victims of institutional, cultural and social norms and evidences this with examples of male discrimination and oppression such as dating rituals, sexist media coverage, divorce settlements, false rape accusations, sexual harassment and domestic violence (Heinrich, 2014). Heinrich (2014, p. 240) comments on Farrell's argument as a response to men feeling "somewhat battered by the feminist movement" and a desperate attempt to recover patriarchal hegemony. Kimmel and Kaufman (1993) critique the MMM for being mostly white, middle-class men. The MMM fails to acknowledge the social privilege of its members (Gremillion, 2011; Kimmel & Kaufman, 1993).

Feminism's impact on the current conversations on masculinity is controversial. Heinrich (2014) questions whether feminism has included men in the process of reconceptualising gender in a way that is more enlightened for both men and women, or whether it has alienated and disregarded men in its narrow focus of women's rights. Highlighting the complexity in a finding a middle ground, Heinrich (2014) further questions, in the current reconceptualisation of masculinity, whether the force of the MMM has allowed men greater gender awareness or simply encouraged a reclaiming of ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Heinrich (2014) proposes

that men, similarly to the message women have received about femininity, need to be taught that a variety of masculinities are valid. This liberates men from the constraints of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Male ethicists argue for "more diverse and moderate views of masculinity" (Heinrich, 2014, p. 241). In his publication *Masculinity and Morality*, Larry May (1998 cited in Heinrich, 2014), charges men to recognise their gender privilege and acknowledge their own complicity in female discrimination and oppression. May also cautions men not to forget the value that men have contributed to society (Heinrich, 2014), thereby conceptualising a more holistic view of masculinity without forsaking 'maleness'.

In a study exploring men's rights activist groups online, Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) found a split in men's positioning towards feminism that echoes the ideals of the FFM and MMM. One group, Cyber Lads in Search of Masculinity are extreme in their derogation of women and promote male entitlement, viewing men as socially superior to women (Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016). This response seems aligned with those of the MMM. A second group in the Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) study, Virtual Victims in Search of Equality use language typically associated with feminism and support the notion of the harmful impact of stereotypical masculinity. While this response appears aligned with those of the FMM Schmitz and Kazyak's (2016) analysis of other strategies used by the Virtual Victims in Search of Equality showed that it differs from those of the FMM in that the Virtual Victims in Search of Equality argue men suffer more from oppression. Thus, both of the men's rights activist groups in the Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) study demonstrate ideologies grounded in hegemonic masculinity and a degree of demonisation of feminism. These are the very concepts Heinrich (2014) warns against in his support of the Moderate Men's Movement.

Growing men's movements have given rise to a growing body of research on cyber masculinities. This research explores the ways in which men's movements and masculinities are being constructed and reproduced online, often causing toxic antifeminism. Gin (2019, p. 638) explains that some online spaces have given rise to the "communication of men's rights in Western culture" in response to challenges to masculine privilege. Interestingly, however, the increase of socio-political challenges to hegemonic masculinities has resulted in "hybrid masculinities" banding together to attack feminism, confounding certain gender expectations - these online spaces are protected by labelling them "homosocial" (Gin, 2019, p. 652).

2.4. Men's responses to threatened masculinity

According to Johnson (2014), men seek approval of their manhood from other men, not women. Johnson (2014) elaborates on this, explaining that many men, fearing humiliation, exclusion and violence, solidify their manhood through violence, partly as a defence. Both Johnson (2014) and Vandello et al. (2008) explain that the attainment of masculinity is not a developmental certainty, and once achieved it can be lost at any time (Vandello et al., 2008). Vandello et al. (2008, p. 1326) assert that because of its "elusive and tenuous nature" anything that threatens one's masculinity will likely cause anxiety. In a study examining the precariousness of masculinity, Vandello et al. (2008) explore beliefs of manhood among a predominantly white, middleclass tertiary educated sample. Where womanhood was seen as s permanent developmental certainty, manhood was viewed as a social accomplishment that can be forfeited and therefore needs to be protected and maintained through active demonstrations of masculinity (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020; Vandello et al., 2008). In response to a masculinity threat, men showed increased anxiety related thoughts, and an increased desire to hide negative feedback about their masculine status and a defensive assertion of better performance in the future (Johnson, 2014; Vandello et al., 2008). DiMuccio and Knowles (2020) termed the anxiety rooted in the precarious nature of masculinity and the resultant behavioural consequences, 'fragile masculinity'. Vandello et al. (2008) argue that demonstrations of aggression are likely to be responses to anxiety caused by attempting to earn and prove an unattainable standard of masculinity. A man may risk exclusion if he does not demonstrate solidarity by objectifying women, reinforcing the male sense of superiority. Even while disagreeing with violent or discriminatory acts, many men become complicit by remaining silent to maintain their own masculine status (Johnson, 2014). However, Vandello et al. (2008), are careful not to suggest that physical aggression is inevitable when threats to masculinity occur. In situations where physical aggression is the most noteworthy route to restoring 'real man' status, Vandello et al. (2008) explain that men are more likely to use aggression. Lange and Young (2019) corroborate that many men do not feel in control and thus protect their masculinity. They also highlight the limited ways in which to validate masculinity, and argue that this makes forgoing the fantasy of male superiority difficult (Lange & Young, 2019). Lange and Young (2019) broaden the explanation of threatened masculinity to its impact on women. Women, fearing a violent retaliation, become complicit by not exposing these illusions. Within this dynamic of male fear and control, women have become a source of

maternal comfort as men cannot comfortably access this part of themselves without exposing weakness in their manhood (Lange & Young, 2019).

Cheryan et al. (2015) explored two strategies that men use in response to masculinity threats: (i) avoiding stereotypically feminine preferences and (ii) exaggerating their masculinity. Cheryan et al. (2015) found that men attempted to regain their masculinity by distancing themselves from stereotypically feminine preferences such as clothing and beauty products. They also exaggerated stereotypically masculine facts about themselves (for example over-stating their height, past relationship experience, and self-reported aggressiveness) in order to regain masculine status. In conclusion, Cheryan et al. (2015) found that, in response to threats against masculinity, men simultaneously distance themselves from the feminine and assert their masculine attributes, a similar finding to that of Johnson (2014) and Vandello et al. (2008). A recent study conducted with men in the South African navy found of the notion of traditional masculine ideology to be associated with self-sufficiency, physical toughness, and emotional restrictedness (Martin & van Wijk, 2021). Interestingly, avoidance of femininity was not endorsed as a construct of masculine ideology in this study, which was hypothesised to be linked to high levels of gender-integration and gender-inclusivity training in the organisation from which the sample was drawn (Martin & van Wijk, 2021). Cheryan et al. (2015) suggest that removing the threat to or validating men's masculinity (highlighting more diverse forms of masculinity) may assist men in aligning themselves with feminine and egalitarian issues. This study aimed to hold in mind men's responses to threatened masculinity whilst exploring men's responses to the #MAT movement.

2.5. Men's responses to GBV

In the literature, discrepancies emerged about what men constitute as GBV. Several studies have been conducted that investigated men's understandings of GBV in a variety of countries. In post-conflict Timor Leste (in South East Asia), a country with a history of long-term trauma, Wigglesworth et al. (2015) interviewed 500 men between the ages of 15 and 24 on their attitudes and perceptions toward gender equality and violence. There was confusion and little consensus about what constitutes acceptable levels of conflict, physical abuse and domestic violence. Between 21% and 31% of men who took part in this study believed that physical abuse such as "threatening, pushing, slapping and throwing stones" are not violent acts (Wigglesworth et al., 2015, p. 325). Wigglesworth et al. (2015) found that 40% of men

surveyed did not believe verbal sexual harassment of women in public is wrong. In Haiti, Gabriel et al. (2016) found participants understood a broader scope of GBV. In semi-structured interviews exploring male university students' perspectives on GBV in Haiti, the majority of participants agreed that violence against women included physical and psychological harm (Gabriel et al., 2016). In a study conducted in Spain, that investigated male and female nurses' responses to GBV following training on the topic, Maquibar et al. (2018) found that although participants agreed GBV was serious, in order to qualify as GBV, violent acts needed to be severe in order to be reported to the police. This included physical violence, but not psychological abuse. Kaufman et al. (2019) conducted interviews and focus groups with male and female university students in Ethiopia. The study explored students' perspectives of gender roles, relationships and GBV. In this study, participants were required to give their own definitions and understanding of causes of GBV and IPV. An important finding of this study was the influence that cultural beliefs have on normalising GBV. Kaufman et al. (2019) concluded that this emphasises the importance of clearly defining GBV interventions.

In a study conducted by Thulin et al. (2020) men described sexual GBV as acts perpetrated by strangers. When they spoke about IPV, however, rape and violence were normalised because, the men believed, it is acceptable within an intimate relationship (Thulin et al., 2020). Through interviews with men about rape in South Africa, Sikweyiya et al. (2007) found that only a minority of men understood that rape meant non-consensual sex. The majority of men believed the act could only be called rape if the women fell pregnant, if physical force was used or if the man had scratches to prove the woman had fought back (Sikweyiya et al., 2007). This again highlights the misunderstandings about what constitutes violence, rape and GBV.

Limited literature exists regarding men's responses to GBV in developed nations. However, the literature that does exist explores perpetrators' behaviours post violent acts, men's experiences of GBV, men's willingness to engage in GBV interventions and their perceptions of GBV interventions. Interestingly, more literature was found on men's responses to masculinity threats, as discussed above. There is some literature on men's understandings of the causes of GBV, this includes definitions of GBV, who is to blame, and cultural and masculine expectations. However, there is limited literature about how men are responding (emotionally) to GBV and the dynamics of responses.

2.5.1. Men's understandings of the causes of GBV

Within the current literature, men's understandings of the causes of GBV includes the following subthemes: pressure to achieve certain masculinities, exposure to violence in communities or childhood, cultural expectations, and women.

Pressure to achieve certain masculinities. A study exploring men's attitudes to GBV in India found that 93% of men reported "to be a man, you need to be tough" (Nanda et al., 2014, p. 27). Similarly, Graaff and Heinecken (2017), who conducted a case study of an intervention workshop (One Man Can) in South Africa, found that participants condoned and often expected violence as part of achieving manhood. In this way, pressure to achieve a certain level of masculinity has normalised violence for South African men (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Thus, despite understanding South Africa's history of militarisation under apartheid as an explanation for level of violence, as mentioned earlier, Graaff and Heinecken (2017) found it less helpful in explaining the country's current levels of violence.

Graaff and Heinecken (2017) found hegemonic masculinities were given as reasons for various forms of violence – men in this study felt that violence towards others, particularly partners, was necessary to fulfil societal standards of masculinities. Similarly, Wigglesworth et al. (2015) found participants believed men should maintain dominance in intimate relationships. These behaviours are strongly associated with GBV (Wigglesworth et al., 2015). Participants explained a number of 'masculinities' that they felt pressure to achieve (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). These included expectations of aggression, violence against women, being a financial provider and authority in the home. Practitioners and participants of the One Man Can workshop also described the expectations of men to be physically strong and to handle pain without showing emotion (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Participants gave examples of how societal expectations of masculinities condone men's use of violence – if men are unable to financially provide for their families, it is assumed they will use violence as an alternative means to fulfil masculine expectations (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017).

Exposure to violence in communities or childhood. Men also believed that exposure to (either witnessing or being a victim of) violence in communities or childhood perpetuates the perpetration of violence (Gabriel et al., 2016; Graaff & Heinecken, 2017) and normalises it (Sikweyiya et al., 2007). Gabriel et al. (2016) continued that in addition to exposure to violence,

the environment and the culture contributed to the acceptance of GBV in Haiti. Other factors include substance abuse, changing gender roles and increasing female power (Gabriel et al., 2016).

Cultural expectations. Wigglesworth et al. (2015) found that from 18 years of age, men in Timor Leste became more aggressive and attitudes towards gender became significantly more inequitable. This study found that 70% of younger participants believed women should not endure violence to keep the family unit together. However, this number decreased significantly with age. The majority of older participants believed violence in this context was acceptable (Wigglesworth et al., 2015). A third of men surveyed believed a wife could be beaten if she makes a mistake or breaches gender roles. Wigglesworth et al. (2015) found that 60% of participants believed it was acceptable for husbands to slap and push wives, even though most defined these acts as violence. Concerningly, 31% of participants did not believe forced sex is violence and 42% believe a woman cannot refuse sex with her husband (Wigglesworth et al., 2015). This finding was also noted by Nanda et al. (2014) and Kaufman et al. (2019). In a study interviewing university students in Ethiopia about perceptions of GBV, Kaufman et al. (2019) found some male participants expect sex in return for academic assistance. This often results in GBV. Kaufman et al. (2019) continue that perceived risk factors for GBV is the belief in female inferiority by males and females. Kaufman et al. (2019) found that the belief in traditional gender roles caused some participants not to classify IPV as violence. Kaufman et al. (2019) also found women to be more at risk of GBV when challenging traditional roles by demonstrating their power of choice in relationship decision-making.

While new regulations in Timor Leste are allowing women greater access to education and economic opportunities have increased women's personal freedom, men have stayed rigid in their understandings of some gender roles and have not fully supported these opportunities (Wigglesworth et al., 2015). A similar finding occurred in the study of Haitian university students who stated that improvements in female equality and changes in gender roles contribute to GBV and will continue until men's attitudes are changed (Gabriel et al., 2016).

Women. Participants of a GBV intervention workshop in South Africa believed women's behaviour and dress prompt violence from men (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). This notion of victim-blaming is supported by other studies (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lange & Young, 2019;

Nanda et al., 2014; Sikweyiya et al., 2007). Lange and Young (2019) explain that the assumption is that if a woman experiences violence she must have done something wrong. This belief is paralleled in law enforcement and education systems. This puts the onus on women to protect themselves against violence by adapting their daily routines, dress and behaviours (Lange & Young, 2019) – keeping the responsibility for preventing GBV on women, rather than on men (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017).

Participants did, however, agree that rape was driven more by masculine expectations than women's behaviour (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Kaufman et al. (2019) and Sikweyiya et al. (2007) found that male and female participants believed that some men are unable to control sexual urges when they see a woman wearing certain types of clothing. These types of myths perpetuate the cycle of GBV by isolating and silencing victims and shielding perpetrators from accountability (Lange & Young, 2019). When the situation is reversed, when men experience sexual violence, they too are silenced for fear of being labelled weak or unmanly (Lange & Young, 2019; Waling & Pym, 2019). Moody (1999, cited in Lange & Young, 2019) asserts male nondisclosure of sexual violence is linked to the masculinities that encourage the internalisation of emotions and externalisation of behaviours. This was also found by Waling and Pym (2019).

2.5.2. Men's emotional responses to GBV

The second theme that emerged from the literature concerns how men are emotionally reacting to GBV. Sikweyiya et al. (2007) found men who had committed rape, used vague language to distance themselves from the term 'rape'. Participants also distanced themselves from their actions by offering excuses that reduced their responsibility – they were young or did not realise the seriousness of their actions (Sikweyiya et al., 2007). Interestingly, Maquibar et al. (2018) noted that when female participants spoke about committing violence, they used the term 'we' (women). However, male participants made clear distinctions between themselves and men who perpetrate violence. Sikweyiya et al. (2007) explain that one of the challenges men face in separating themselves from negative masculinities (e.g., sexism) is finding the language to express their emotions. Seidler (1997, cited in Sikweyiya et al., 2007, p. 49) explains that the "splitting of mind and body, and thought and emotion", prevents men from being in touch with their emotions. In order to combat GBV, it is important to put men in touch with themselves and encourage them to take responsibility for their actions (Sikweyiya et al., 2007). Charleswell

(2014) and Lisak and Miller (2002, cited in Lange & Young, 2019) found that 90% of college rapes were perpetrated by 3% of college men. Disturbingly, it was found that men would rape more often 'if they could get away with it'.

In contradiction to the research previously mentioned that explains men's beliefs about traditional gender roles and men asserting dominance in intimate relationships, Thulin et al. (2020) (when exploring the indirect impact of sexual and GBV on men, families and communities) found that men in the DRC experienced feelings of powerlessness over being unable to protect women. Participants explained that they felt a responsibility to protect the women in their family and feeling powerless made them feel "useless" in their role as husband and father (Thulin et al., 2020, p. 14). Several men reported that it felt as if someone had "taken their souls" after witnessing sexual GBV and that they were left with a mixture of emotions – "hopelessness, anger and fear" (Thulin et al., 2020, p. 14). Sikweyiya et al. (2007) found men were willing to discuss rape because it was seen as an important topic, something common in their communities. Participants reported 'feeling bad' and 'disturbed' by acts of rape (Sikweyiya et al., 2007).

Although female participants were likely to report GBV to close friends, male participants reported it unlikely for men to discuss GBV prevention with other men (Kaufman et al., 2019). This appears to relate to previously discussed instances of threatened masculinity, where men seemed reluctant to align themselves with feminine causes. Also, as previously discussed, notions of male discrimination and victimised masculinity (as promoted by the Mythopoetic Men's Movement) also appeared to influence emotional responses to GBV. Male participants in Kaufman et al.'s (2019) study reported resentment of the support services offered by the university to female students. When discussion occurred around further supportive measures for female students, male participants responded with agitation, arguing that female students already received more support compared to male students.

Some literature also noted contradictions between attitudes and behaviours to GBV, which points to possible complex and mixed feelings in men with regards to GBV. Although gender equality was widely supported, Wigglesworth et al. (2015) found that these understandings were relatively superficial and resulted in a contradiction between the attitudes that participants displayed and their actual acceptance of gender role changes. Participants preferred to maintain

traditional gender roles which allow men to retain power and status associated with masculinity (Wigglesworth et al., 2015). One of the aims of the 'One Man Can' GBV intervention was to encourage the development of alternative gender expectations (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). This study found that the intervention, while beneficial, targeted specific behaviours, but failed to shift underlying attitudes which allow for such behaviours. For example, participants agreed rape is problematic but failed to see that wearing a mini-skirt is not a reason for, or cause of, sexual assault (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017).

2.6. Online interaction

Reddit (an online international platform), founded in 2005, is a free online social media platform that allows users (Redditors) to post content and other users to engage or comment on posts and other comments (Anderson, 2015). Users are able to post freely from around the world, encouraging diverse opinions and ideas (Anderson, 2015). Redditors usernames can be anonymous without being linked to an email account (Anderson, 2015). Redditors can contribute content in two ways – a link post or text post (Tuomchomtam & Soonthornphisaj, 2019). A link post consists of a URL to an external website (usually a picture or video) which Redditors can view. A text post contains a comment or question to which the community can respond (Tuomchomtam & Soonthornphisaj, 2019). Redditors demonstrate their approval (upvote) or disapproval (downvote) for a post by voting using arrows next to the shared content. Receiving upvotes earns the Redditor "karma points" (Anderson, 2015, p. 3). Karma points are used to encourage users to post good content and make useful contributions in the comments. Reddit categorises content based on popularity. The more upvotes a post receives the higher it ranks in the categories. All posts are assigned a 'subreddit' and are posted along with date and time of submission (Anderson, 2015). A subreddit is a community that focuses on a specific topic (Anderson, 2015). It can be created by any Redditor and is moderated by other Redditors. Reddit users can subscribe to their favourite subreddits, posts of which will then appear on their individual homepage. Users have the options to share, hide, save or report any post (Anderson, 2015). Reddit has become a widely used social media platform; "in February 2015 there were 151,712,210 unique visitors from 212 countries with one million computer members logged on a daily basis" (Anderson, 2015, p. 5). Duggan (2013, cited in Anderson, 2015) reported that the largest group of Reddit users are men aged between 18 and 29. The majority of Reddit users are from United States of America (41.4%), with the United Kingdom, Canada and Germany accounting for 18.9% of users (Amaya et al., 2019). This information is accurate

as of November 2019, as Amaya et al. (2019) state, social media demographics are fast changing so these figures may not reflect current user demographics. The large majority of posts and comments are in English. From these findings, it can be concluded that the characteristics of the majority of Redditors are not comparable to the general world population (Amaya et al., 2019).

Anderson (2015) explains that community is one of Reddit's strengths. The subreddits allow for small communities to develop each with its own unique sub-culture. This allows Redditors a sense of belonging and validation when their content is received well (Anderson, 2015). Reddit posts are moderated by users who are guided by Reddit etiquette ('rediquette'). This means Redditors will downvote posts or call out and report users for insults, abuse or spam (Anderson, 2015). Even though Redditors are encouraged to adhere to rediquette, some users still post offensive content, and the anonymity of users has led to cyberbullying. Reddit itself relies on users to monitor content rather than monitoring content itself (Anderson, 2015). In the formal rules, Reddit appeals to users to "not post spam, ask for votes, post personal information, or post child pornography or sexually suggestive content featuring minors" (Anderson, 2015, p. 7). It is the informal moderation and staunch support of free speech that allows offensive content to be shared (Anderson, 2015).

Relevant to this study, some research has investigated the dynamics of online comments sections, including but not specific to Reddit. Lee et al. (2020) explore the online bandwagon effect. The bandwagon effect describes an individual's propensity to take on, and follow, others' opinions (Lee et al., 2020). Lee et al. (2020) explain that the ability to comment on news articles and other online content has blurred the lines between news suppliers and news consumers in current media channels (including news websites and social media). Online users do not only read the content piece but are also privy to other readers' opinions (Lee et al., 2020). The use and consequence of online comments has altered the readers' understanding of media as comments are used to infer public opinion. Lee et al. (2020) distinguish between two forms of online comments: quantitative (for example, a sum of views or likes) and qualitative (tone and quality of text-based responses). Lee et al. (2020) found that participants were not influenced by the highest rated (quantitative cue) comment, rather, participants were influenced by the opinions of multiple online comments (qualitative cues). This suggests that in changing opinions, qualitative cues are more influential than a single quantitative cue – opinions move

in favour of the opinion expressed by the comments (Lee et al., 2020). Lee et al. (2020) further investigated the reason behind these results. It was found that the qualitative cues held more influence because participants believed they were representative of broader public opinion. These findings are supported by Waddell (2018), who investigated how online comments and popularity metrics (likes, shares, retweets) affect credibility and issue importance. Waddell (2018) found that negative comments, through a process of bandwagon support, reduced perceived article credibility and popularity metrics did not have an effect on readers' reception to articles. Waddell (2018) acknowledges that other variables also play a role in perceptions of important issues, such as media exposure, family, friends and culture. It was important for this study to be aware of and include commentary on these kinds of dynamics during the analysis of online interactions around #MAT posts.

Other dynamics pertinent to this study include those found by studies conducted specifically into issues around masculinity and gender online. Waling and Pym (2019) investigated the cultural framings of unwarranted penis pictures ('dick pics') online. Among other reactions, Waling and Pym (2019) found humorous responses to 'dick pics'. Waling and Pym (2019) explain that this highlights a playfulness around men's nudity that is not seen in responses to women's nudity online. This also reveals a tension between the awareness of the potential for 'dick pics' to been seen as inappropriate or harassment and their position as common place in online sociality. Through their research, Waling and Pym (2019) found gendered double standards surrounding sexting practices. Where women risk being shamed, men are seen as achieving certain heterosexual masculinities. In a study investigating men's responses to a male contraceptive pill, Wilson (2018) found that men used humour to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the idea of a male pill. Humour is often observed in the discussion of sensitive topics largely by men who identify with traditional masculinities and is often used in male group bonding (Wilson, 2018). The disapproval men showed may be due to feminine associations with a contraceptive pill. Researchers describe the disapproval as a "distrust of the feminine, which is embedded in the science from which the medicine is based on" (Wilson, 2018, p. 260).

Little research has been conducted on how men experience and construct anxiety online (Drioli-Phillips et al., 2020). In a study investigating how men construct anxiety online, Drioli-Phillips et al. (2020) found that men often spoke with concern of an inability to keep their

anxiety under control resulting in intrusive thoughts. Drioli-Phillips et al. (2020, p. 2125) found men in the study constructed themselves as "somewhat emotionally detached and rational". In the vulnerability of experiencing and speaking about their anxiety, these detached attitudes allowed them to reclaim and protect some of their masculinity. Gendered norms appear to present a double bind, which both secure a man's sense of masculinity, and it is those very masculine features that make it more difficult for men to acknowledge anxiety and pain (Drioli-Phillips et al., 2020).

In an exploration of gendered and raced identities on an online chat forum, Kendall (2000) noted that like face-to-face interactions, aspects of identity (race, gender and class) characterise online interactions. However, online users have a choice about how and what they reveal about themselves. Kendall (2000) found that users of an online chat forum achieved a form of masculinity in line with a largely male dominated computer culture. However, Kendall (2000) explained that the preoccupation with technology may be an attempt to compensate for a lack of social power and status. Users explained that possessing a 'nerd identity' precludes them from a more hegemonic masculine identity (Kendall, 2000). One participant described himself as "nerdy but nice" (Kendall, 2000, p. 262), suggesting the nerd identity is not entirely enviable. This study found that users of this platform, while adhering to technology user stereotypes (white nerd identities) and related masculinities in computing and engineering fields, recognised their lack of other forms of hegemonic masculinity and made fun of such aspects of masculinity (Kendall, 2000). While distancing themselves from other forms of masculinity, users of this platform were also careful to distance themselves from femininity, and therefore achieve certain hegemonic masculinities (Kendall, 2000). This is in line with the findings by Cheryan et al. (2015) mentioned earlier. Homosexual or bisexual users' sexual orientation was accepted by the group. However, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual users constructed women as sexual objects. This, Kendall (2000) explains, indicates that for some men in achieving certain masculinities, it is more important to distance themselves from women than it is to distance themselves sexually from men.

2.7. Hashtags

Hashtags, the hash symbol (#) followed by a keyword, are used to express opinion on social media (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013). Hashtags are used as a search tool for finding and following topics and also indicate an individual's point of view on a topic. This makes it useful for

activists attempting to widely share and engage the public in their cause with the hope of inciting social change (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013). Activists develop a hashtag and attach it to social media content. Individuals demonstrate their support of the movement by employing the hashtag in their own posts (Kim et al., 2020). The effectiveness of hashtag activism has been questioned. The brief keywords of a hashtag are argued to be responsible for the loss of meaningful context of a movement (Kim et al., 2020). Kowald and Lex (cited in Kim et al., 2020) argue confirmation bias as the biggest threat to hashtag activism. Because hashtags make it easy to follow and find topics of interest, only content with similar views is consumed. This can result in polarised views.

Mendes et al. (2018) explained that the global support of the #MeToo movement demonstrates the public's desire and ability to challenge sexism, patriarchy and other forms of oppression via digital communication. However, they too question the effectiveness of hashtag feminist activism, stating that the answer as to whether this kind of activism is effective or not is complicated and full of contradiction. Female participants in the #MeToo movement expressed fears about bullying when sharing feminist views online, but participants also expressed feeling a sense of community and support within feminist communities online (Mendes et al., 2018). Despite fears around online bullying, these participants commented on a sense of safety in expressing anti-rape and feminist views online as opposed to in public or social spaces (Mendes et al., 2018). Mendes et al. (2018) concluded that while online activism provides more opportunities for women and girls to participate safely in public debates around sexual harassment and patriarchy in a way that documents their voices, there are also real emotional and psychological threats that make this form of engagement difficult.

2.8. Conclusion

In summary, the aim of feminist social media hashtag activism is to create awareness of gender power imbalances, to afford women and victims voices and to encourage male self-reflection on their unearned gender privilege and complicity in direct and indirect violence against women (Heinrich, 2014; Lange & Young, 2019). Gender norms and the pressure to achieve certain masculinities are linked to GBV (Nanda et al., 2014). Men are expected to be in control at all times and not show emotion (except for anger and rage) and dependence , while women are expected to be the opposite – submissive and emotional (Johnson, 2014). These masculine traits are valued as superior and are seen to justify male privilge (Johnson, 2014).

Research has found that as women start to move away from more traditional gender roles, they are met with violent retaliation from men (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Sovann, 2019). This has been linked to the concept of threatened masculinity. The expectation of men to achieve societally-endorsed masculinities and the precarious nature of masculinity leads to anxiety and the perceived need to defend one's masculine status (Johnson, 2014; Vandello et al., 2008). This is often done through active demonstrations of masculinity which includes, but is not exclusively, physical aggression (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020; Vandello et al., 2008). Threatened masculinity appears to result in response to the threat of having one's masculine status revoked and in response to changing gender roles. To manage the anxiety experienced in response to masculinity threats (Johnson, 2014; Vandello et al., 2008) men have been found to employ two strategies: (i) avoid stereotypically feminine preferences and (ii) exaggerate their masculinity (Cheryan et al., 2015). In a study investigating how men construct anxiety online, Drioli-Phillips et al. (2020, p2125) found men constructed themselves as "emotionally detached and rational". This allows men to reclaim and protect their masculinity. Gender norms create a double bind in that they both secure a man's sense of masculinity, but make it more difficult for men to acknowledge anxiety and pain (Drioli-Phillips et al., 2020).

There appears to be more literature on men's responses to masculinity threats as opposed to men's responses to GBV. The literature that exists around men and GBV mostly includes their understandings of the causes of GBV, which involves a lack of clarity around definitions of GBV, who is to blame, and cultural and masculine expectations. A small number of studies hinted at men's emotional responses to GBV; this included the language men used to distance themselves from the term 'rape' and making excuses that reduce their responsibility for committing violent acts (Sikweyiya et al., 2007). Thulin et al. (2020) explored the indirect impact of sexual and GBV on men, families and communities and found that men in the DRC experienced feelings of powerlessness over being unable to protect women. Kaufman et al. (2019) found that although female participants were likely to report GBV to close friends, male participants reported it unlikely for men to discuss GBV prevention with other men, corroborating previously discussed instances of threatened masculinity, where men seemed reluctant to align themselves with feminine causes.

The most common response from men when asked what emotions emerge when they think about or see a typical feminist, was anger, followed by disgust and annoyance (Haddock and Zanna,1994). In response to feminism two men's movements emerged – the feministed aligned FFM and the anti-feminist and hegemonic masculine movemement the MMM (Gremillion, 2011; Heinrich, 2014; Kimmel & Kaufman, 1993). Heinrich (2014) proposes a third movement, the Moderate Men's Movement which is focused on moderate and balanced forms of masculinity. A risk factor for GBV is the belief in traditional gender roles that support female inferiority (Kaufman et al., 2019). To effectively reduce GBV, social and cultural norms regarding gender need to change (Gabriel et al., 2016; Lange & Young, 2019; Wigglesworth et al., 2015).

The research above demonstrates the complexity of factors influencing men's responses to a feminist advocacy. Factors such as needing to maintain their masculine status, fearing exclusion, historical and social pressure to demonstrate certain types of masculinity, confusion as to their changing roles in society, and trying to respect women's right to freedom of speech, all contribute to men's complex and nuanced response to movements like #MAT.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research aim and questions

This study aimed to examine men's responses to the #menaretrash (#MAT) movement on Reddit. Given the study's theoretical framework, responses are understood to be influenced by both intrapsychic and interpersonal (emotional and social) factors, thus both social constructionist and psychoanalytic theories were used to answer the following questions in relation to the data:

1) What are men's emotional responses to the #MAT movement on Reddit?
2) How are men constructing masculinity in the #MAT threads on Reddit?
3) How are men constructing women who participate in the #MAT movement?
4) How are men constructing the #MAT movement?

3.2. Research design

This study made use of an interpretive qualitative design. This approach is useful in this study because it allows for data to be studied in depth with attention to detail (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The purpose of qualitative research is to develop detailed descriptions of social reality (De Vos et al., 2011). A qualitive study investigates phenomena as they are in real life, without manipulation, focusing on the relationship between elements and the context in which phenomena occur. This allows for immersion in the data in order to uncover important themes that describe the phenomena from the participants' perspectives (De Vos et al., 2011; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

3.3. Data collection

Data was collected from Reddit (an online international platform). Other social media platforms such as Quora and Twitter were also considered, however little extended engagement around #MAT posts was found on these platforms.

The #MAT movement went viral in 2016/17 in response to GBV and was used to call out problematic male behaviours. Due to the movement's link to GBV, it's popularity and the subsequent wide engagement around it, only subreddits containing #menaretrash were used. In the Reddit homepage search bar '#menaretrash' was typed and searched. This retrieved 153 original posts containing '#menaretrash'. Posts ranged over a three-year period (January 2019

to January 2021) and thus are up to date. Threads with less than 45 comments were excluded. This left 26 threads. Threads were excluded if posts were not in English, if #MAT was not the main discussion of the threads or if threads were a discussion of another #MAT thread and thus tangential to the focus of the study on #MAT. This resulted in seven threads that met the criteria for this study. These inclusion criteria were to ensure a focused study around aspects of #MAT that evoked conversation, and for convenience because my home (and educational) language is English. This resulted in 88 pages of typed text for analysis. Comments from all genders were present in these threads. However, comments from genders other than male were only used insofar as they informed the men's responses. The gender of the poster could, in most instances, be deduced from the username or the content of and pronouns used in the post. It was not possible to know the location of participants unless explicitly stated. However, references to local particulars, such as political parties, indicated that at least some of the posters and commentors were South African. One thread was also part of a subreddit community called 'South Africa'.

3.4. Data analysis

This study made use of an interpretive thematic analysis to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is used to "identify, analyse and report" themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It orders and describes the data purposefully, in order to formulate an argument in relation to the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is not bound by an existing theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). It can, therefore, be used within most theoretical frameworks. Thematic analysis explores a data set to identify recurrent patterns of meaning. These 'themes' are then used to answer the research question/s (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As previously mentioned, Hollway and Jefferson (2008) explain that defences against anxiety often occur at an unconscious level. As such, individuals use language and draw on particular discourses and position themselves in relation to these discourses in ways that defend against anxiety. This study looked for these defences in the data.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggested six phases of thematic analysis were used. The first phase entailed becoming familiar with the data through immersion in the data in order to begin identifying patterns. Initial familiarisation took place when copying the text from the Reddit

web page into a separate word document for analysis. Once this was completed I read through the data once, noting initial thoughts and highlighting patterns in the data.

Phase two involved generating initial codes. Codes identified an interesting feature of a data item and referred to a basic element of the data that was relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, I began organising the data into meaningful groups. In this study, this phase included an initial analysis that looked for emotional responses, including possible defensive positionings in the posts. Following this a second reading of the data looked for constructions of both masculinity and of women participating in the movement and for relationships between these constructions and emotional responses, defences, and positionings. I identified aspects of the data that developed into repeated patterns across the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once all data extracts were coded, they were collated together under relevant codes. To avoid context being lost, some of the relevant surrounding data was retained (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase three of thematic analysis involved searching for and organising the codes into broader themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In generating themes, I interpreted the data in a way that built explanations and descriptions to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, different codes (and their corresponding data extracts), that could develop into a theme at a later stage, were grouped together. Initial themes were: intention vs execution, social media, types of men (antagonists, allies, responsible masculinity, true men), aggressive women against men (pathology, intelligence/maturity of women), hate speech and limits of free speech, defences (displacement, it's stupid/I don't care), two types of feminists, impact of the movement, the male victim (powerlessness of men), I'm different, anger, discrimination, it's a female problem, and patterns of interaction. These were then refined and organised into overarching themes in phases four and five.

In phase four I determined the relevance and applicability of the initial themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The refinement of the initial themes took place at two levels. The first level of refinement occurred at the level of the coded data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I read the coded data extracts of each theme and assessed their relevance to the initial theme. Level two involved evaluating the validity of the initial themes in relation to the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, I determined whether the data extracts supported the initial themes and

correctly represented their meaning in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data extracts that were no longer relevant were discarded.

Phase five involved defining and naming the themes. In this phase, I defined and refined the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved identifying the essence of each theme by determining what feature of the data the theme expressed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, I also identified sub-themes that gave structure to the broader theme, and collapsed similar themes. By the end of this phase, I had clearly defined and structured themes and names for the themes were developed. These are reported upon below in the results section.

The final phase of this thematic analysis was producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The report was written to explain 'the story' of the data in a way that assures the reader of the validity of the analysis. The report used data extracts embedded in the narrative to illustrate the essence of the themes and answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5. Trustworthiness, credibility and reflexivity

Reliability and validity concern trustworthiness (Stiles, 1993). In qualitative research, reliability concerns the trustworthiness of data, and validity the trustworthiness of interpretation of the data (Stiles, 1993). Credibility refers to the researcher's ability to accurately reflect the participants' views (De Vos et al., 2011; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Stiles (1993) called this 'testimonial validity'. De Vos et al. (2011) explain that credibility is achieved through detailed and comprehensive descriptions that demonstrate the complex interactions of the variables in the data within the context they were retrieved. De Vos et al. (2011) continue that if the data are accurately analysed and reported within the parameters of the study, the research will have strong internal validity. This study ensured credibility through the use of triangulation; both the supervisor and I analysed the data and agreed upon themes (De Vos et al., 2011; Stiles, 1993; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Triangulation refers to the use of multiple perspectives and methods against which to check one's interpretation of the data (Stiles, 1993; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Ensuring prolonged engagement with the data also increased credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). While 'member checking' is another strategy to improve credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), due to the nature of the data collected in the study (online), it was not feasible to verify interpretations with participants.

Dependability refers to consistency (De Vos et al., 2011; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability refers to the ability of the results of the study to remain constant if the study were to be replicated in a similar context with similar participants (Stiles, 1993). Stiles (1993) refers to dependability in qualitative research as procedural trustworthiness which concerns the stability of findings over time. A challenge to dependability is that words do not mean the same thing to everyone and different perspectives of a single event exist (Stiles, 1993). In recognition of this, standards of good practice have been established for qualitative research (Stiles, 1993; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). These include researcher reflexivity and disclosure of the researcher's impact on the study, acknowledging and engaging rival explanations and immersion in the data (Smith, 2006; Stiles, 1993; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggest using an audit trail to increase dependability in qualitative research. An audit trail requires the researcher to transparently and thoroughly describe research steps throughout the research process. This study employed this technique to improve dependability.

Transferability relates to the findings' applicability in other contexts (De Vos et al., 2011; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Transferability is the degree to which findings can be transferred to other settings with other participants (De Vos et al., 2011; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). To achieve transferability I ensured rich, detailed responses from the participants (De Vos et al., 2011; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). As this study utilised existing data, this criterion was met through ensuring richness and detail in the data chosen for analysis, and that sufficient breadth of data was collected. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) highlight three further requirements for transferability, which were utilised in this study. Firstly, the report accurately explained the research process. Secondly, a discussion to support the chosen method was provided along with a thorough description of the research context. This allows other researchers to apply the findings of the study and make comparisons with their own research (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

When conducting qualitative research, it is important for me, the researcher, to be aware of my own assumptions and biases that I brought throughout the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This required, me, the qualitative researcher, to be self-aware and reflexive (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Smith, 2006). Reflexivity improves credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative data (Smith, 2006). Throughout the study I attempted to address my position in

relation to the research process. This included acknowledging that I am a young, white, female of privilege and the influence these facts had on the analysis of the data.

When initially developing this topic for research, I was interested to understand more about masculinity and particularly, to understand men's positions in relation to GBV. When I began reading around the topic, I felt angry about the limited research on men's responses to GBV, as I felt this this reflected many societies' view that GBV is women's problem. This further motivated me in conducting this study. While analysing the data in this study I tried to reflect on how my positioning, that of being white, a woman, and from a privileged background and education, was influencing how I initially read and understood the data. I realised that I was using my education defensively, initially approaching the data from a position of assumed superiority, a 'knowing better', alongside a sense of really wanting to prove the idea of toxic masculinity as real and harmful and an obstacle in the way of men developing a more balanced view of masculinity and gender equality. Being a woman, I felt a personal need to expose toxic masculinity and women's plight in defending themselves. I wanted to play a role in attempting to change gender power relations. Reading the data, I felt defensive of women and victims of GBV. I felt that the #MAT was a small hurt for men to endure compared to the daily vigilance and discrimination that women experience. Present in the data was a vast amount of toxic masculinity which angered me and I found myself formulating arguments in my head in support of women. This dynamic, when reflected upon, appeared to mirror a dynamic present in the data, namely defensive splitting in the face of threat. This is discussed further in the discussion section below. However, as I continued analysing I became aware of men's fears driving their behaviour, which allowed me to feel more empathy for their positions in society today. Throughout most of the threads there were male Redditors attempting to grapple with the complexity of the issues raised by the #MAT movement. I found myself feeling supportive of these Redditors and my opinion of the #MAT expanded to include an understanding of the harm it has caused men and the potential damage it could have on younger generations' ideas of gender roles and norms. To manage my responses, I read the data several times, each time becoming more aware of my positioning. I believe this allowed my initial view of the #MAT movement to shift to include empathy for men, even those demonstrating toxic masculine behaviours. Ultimately, by doing what men are being asked to do by many feminist movements, which is reflect on prior assumptions and how their own positionings may prevent them from knowing the experiences of others, I feel I was able to move beyond my own

defensiveness, which allowed for deeper analysis and a clearer understanding of the complexity of men's responses to the #MAT movement.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Terre Blanche et al. (2006) describe four philosophical principles that guide ethical research: autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice. All data was gathered from an open-access online platform freely available in the public domain. The content posted on this platform is available without needing a password protected account.

Users of this platform create a username of their choice, most of which do not include any part of their full name. However, the privacy of users was maintained by ensuring all identifying information was removed from the data set, thus usernames were changed for the purposes of this study. The principle of non-maleficence was maintained by demonstrating transparency throughout the research process. This includes an audit trail, note taking and reflexivity. This study committed to not causing harm to users of this platform by ensuring their comments are respectfully analysed and presented in context to maintain their truth. This was ensured by use of triangulation.

The principle of beneficence requires the researcher to maximise the benefits the research may offer participants (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Together with nonmaleficence, beneficence involves negotiating the risk/benefit factors of the research. Researchers and ethics committees need to consider the potential risks of a study against the possible benefits the study may have on participants or society (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). While the users of this platform post comments on an open access public platform, it is still necessary to consider the benefits and risks of the study. While the users of the platform cannot be contacted personally to notify them of the study, the author believes this study will be beneficial to the public. Gaining an understanding of how men are constructing masculinity and their responses to GBV will assist in a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that contribute to and perpetuate GBV. This information may inform future research and aid the development of effective interventions.

The fourth philosophical principle of research ethics is justice. This principle requires the researcher to treat all participants equally and with fairness throughout the study (Terre

Blanche et al., 2006). Fairness was maintained throughout the study by practicing reflexivity and self-awareness as well as through triangulation in the analysis phase.

Ethical permission was applied for and granted by the University of the Witwatersrand's School Human and Community Development Ethics Committee (see appendix for ethical waiver certificate).

4. Results

The Reddit threads began with an original post (OP) where a user posed a question or comment on the topic of #MAT. Other Redditors commented on the OP and created a thread. It was noted that the OP usually set the interpretation of the #MAT movement for the conversation. The threads usually continued to discuss the movement based on the OP's comments. Arguments were formed around the OP's understanding of the #MAT movement. It is possible for Redditors to delete their usernames from the comment after the comment has been posted. This leaves the username as 'deleted' – in these instances, these comments have been left labelled as 'deleted'. Spelling errors in the quotes are original mistakes made by Redditors on the threads – quotes were copied verbatim from the data. To maintain confidentiality, all other usernames have been changed.

From the analysis several themes emerged, which were organised into three overarching themes. These were: (1) men's emotional expressions, (2) men's defensive responses and constructions of the #MAT movement, and (3) patterns of interaction in #MAT online conversations. While the first theme explored emotions such as anger and shame, the second theme consisted of three defensive positions that men assumed: a position of superior masculinity, a position of victimised masculinity, or a position of responsible masculinity. The third overarching theme explored patterns of interaction during conversations about #MAT on Reddit that inform how the movement is being constructed by men.

4.1. Men's emotional expressions

The emotion that emerged most predominantly in the data was anger. A number of men demonstrated anger towards several aspects of the #MAT movement, experiencing it as discriminatory, stereotyping, and alienating.

Firstly, some men were angry at the existence of a hashtag that groups all men together, whether perpetrators of GBV or not. These men felt that the movement labels innocent men as part of the problem. The two quotes below from John and Sipho illustrate their anger toward

the generalisations of the hashtag. It is clear that some men took offence to the hashtag and responded by attacking back in anger as is illustrated below:

> *...Any person whose first response to a real issue is to create a hashtag is a posturing slacktivist windbag and can safely be ignored. If that hashtag deliberately attacks innocent people it's indefensible (John)*

> *Soooo the menaretrash thing is literally just an insult to me, and that bitch can fuck right off with her generalisations (Sipho)*

Some men voiced their anger at a double standard, arguing that if there was a similar hashtag about women it would be met with outrage and alarm. Many men in the present study felt that women who support this hashtag are discriminating against and stereotyping men:

> *I'm acc fuckin sick and tired of this whole men are trash band wagon, like. If men where to start a whole women are trash hashtag everyone would have a fuckin stroke! (Lesedi)*

Some men voiced the opinion that the hashtag is alienating of men in the battle against GBV. James and Peter explained that demeaning a group will not encourage men to align with a female agenda. Their anger was expressed as defiance and implicit of hurt:

> *Just no.#womenarebitches would be regarded a sexist blanket statement, and you wouldnt give 2 shits about me saying its only aboit the bad apples. I will not support anything which generalizes a group of people and personally offends me.i am neither responsible nor obliged and your argumentation basically defeats itself, in that what your saying is what every (excuse me) over the top ideologist would say if you dissapprove their extreme "execution". #manaretrash is a divisive, provocative, ignorant and offensive statement and i just cannot see how im obliged to say yeah, fuck me! Sorry for my english im german,btw (James)*

> *This doesn't help the women who are being taken advantage if by "weaker" men.*
> *Why would any man come to the aid of someone who literally said they are trash? I certainly wouldn't (Peter)*

Interestingly, anger was also targeted at men who support or validate the movement. These men were constructed as traitors of men and masculinity:

> *It's not surprising coming from a male feminists. They hate themselves ahhahaha (Jack)*

> *Fucking male feminists just trying to get laid (Angelo)*

> *What a fucking gamma male (Sheldon)*

Anger was directed towards men who aligned themselves with the movement in the form of accusations of ulterior motives, such as only aligning themselves with the movement to gain sexual favours from women. Interestingly, the second quote below from 'deleted' gained the most support from Redditors – 222 upvotes, the most upvotes seen across all the data.

> *Self Hating Male Feminist. Trying to gain sympathy points and Garner favor with the opposite gender. Won't be long before sexual harassment allegations are levelled against him. The Greatest Lies manifest themselves as Ideological Truths (Kevin)*

> *If I publicly deny reality and make myself a tool/doormat, I might just get rewarded with some poon (deleted)*

Anger was often expressed through the use of offensive language and attacks of women and men who support the movement were often made through the use of derogatory gendered terminology. The popularity of the comment that reduces women to 'poon' seems to evidence the tendency for men to respond with increasing violence to movements like #MAT, in this case, with verbal violence. Interestingly, few men demonstrated overt hurt and shame associated with the #MAT movement. This was not a major theme and was seen in a limited number of comments across only three of the seven threads.

> *It's easy to go from #MenAreTrash to #IAmTrash. Most of what I hate about myself is just normal Y-chromosome stuff. Without the association to the truly awful men in my life, and without the stereotyping that turns me into one of those men to every stranger,*

> *maybe I'd have a better relationship with gender. When commenting anywhere on anything I always feel the need to disclose, like an AIDS victim on a date, and I always fear the treatment I'm going to get for it. And that hurt isn't something I can share with a man to be mocked and emasculated or shunned. I can't share it with a woman, because for every pain I have she has a different man who caused her a bigger and less-deserved pain, and my 'pain' is just that I look a little bit like her abuser oh grow up (Evan)*

This quote captures the victimhood of a man who has been shamed and attacked. Evan struggles to make sense of his identity and expresses a fear of being treated badly for being male. Feeling like he needs to foreground his gender before he comments online illustrates the fear there is something inherently bad in his maleness. It is clear he felt lost as to where and how he can share his struggles, fearing women's plights are inevitably worse and fearing being shamed and emasculated by other men. His use of the word 'emasculated' is particularly meaningful as this suggests that some men responded to the sharing of hurt as un-male or deserving of being 'stripped of maleness'.

Below, Wandile echoed Evan's sentiment of 'starting to believe you are trash if you hear it enough'. He also hinted at a possible implication of this movement – that demonising the other may cause further division:

> *This kinda thing, makes me sad i can't impede real progress for being demonized, you know? i was worried i'd become abusive because i grew up in a bad home, and have been falsely accused enough to have to fight it in court, so constant demonization and the whole 'yes, all men' type thing makes me want to make them see that they are hurting me, but there's no way to do that, you know? (if you hear it enough, you believe it) (Wandile)*

Both Wandile and Evan illustrated a sense of not knowing how to show their hurt feelings for fear of being accused at undermining women's pain. These comments also expressed sentiments of victimised masculinity. This alludes to an underlying sense of anxiety that is implicit in many men's responses.

4.2. Men's defensive responses and constructions of #MAT movement

Through the analysis it emerged that the men in these Reddit threads were largely defensive in response to the #MAT movement. Three main defensive positions emerged (1) assuming a position of superior masculinity, (2) assuming a position of victimised masculinity and (3) assuming a position of responsible masculinity. Within each position various defences were used which entailed different constructions of the movement.

4.2.1. Assuming a position of superior masculinity

Some men positioned themselves as superior in response to the #MAT movement. The posts from men illustrating this positioning tended to use defenses that dismissed, distanced, and derogated both the movement and women. Men also placed themselves in this superior position using displacement and intellectualisation. This position appeared to construct the #MAT movement as ineffective, lazy, and childish and warned of its impact on younger generations.

Dismissal. Some men in this study dismissed the #MAT movement by encouraging each other to ignore it, perhaps in an attempt to invalidate the movement. The sense was that these men felt that the less the movement is spoken about the quicker it will lose traction. This was accompanied by an air of masculine superiority that assumes power to end a feminist movement:

> *... Just ignore them. The less attention the fuckers get the more they'll realize they won't get anywhere with it (Tom)*

Other men framed their dismissal of the movement as a valid reaction to being unfairly attacked. These men positioned the #MAT movement as causing men to disengage rather than grapple with the issues the movement highlights. While demonstrating the mixed emotions men feel towards the movement – support for the intentions behind the movement, but hurt and anger at being attacked – their dismissal of the movement as 'non-reflective' with regard to men's feelings assumes an entitlement to their feelings being considered. The withdrawal of their support for the movement is also framed as a 'punishment', which has a patronising tone, and again assumes their support is wanted or needed:

> *Thank you for sharing. This is why my response is just to disengage. I'm more than happy to discuss issues, self reflect, listen, and support. I too feel angry at the systematic oppression of women and everyday sexism they face. I too have and will continue to call men out for shitty behavior and attitudes. But I'm also allowed to have my feelings, and respect my own traumas. If discourse starts at throwing blanket statements from a combative emotional standpoint, I'm under no obligation to listen or engage… (Graham)*

Some men who shared this sentiment dismissed the #MAT movement by focusing on the language and tone of its users. The consequence is the same – men disengaging from the issues that the movement highlights.

> *…Part of grieving is being angry. I get that. I'm not going to tone police anyone for venting. I don't have to be liked by everyone. I will, however, walk away from those people, and I will seek out people aren't going to take out their frustrations on me (Steven)*

> *I don't engage with people using these hastags and usually treat them like someone speaking in anger. No matter how justifiable the anger is, I'm under no obligation to take on any emotional payload from the ideas someone wields under its influence (Matthew)*

The irony in this approach is that while it could be said to demonstrate healthy boundaries, in 'refusing to allow themselves to be insulted' – it sadly emphasises men's taken-for-granted ability to do this. These men appear to fall back upon their positions of greater agency and power, as opposed to reflect on them.

Some men used the 'superficiality' of social media to disregard the movement as well as disparage the women using social media. Their aim appeared to be dismissal of the #MAT movement by bringing into question the impact of a hashtag and the validity of the movement. The irony is that this argument is attempted on another social networking platform, namely Reddit:

First of all, it's a movement? So now every hashtag is a fucking movement? Get real… (Nick)

Try not to let twitter get to you. the stupidest people on earth are on that social outlet, that's all i tell myself before i ballistic (Rodrigo)

… If you think speaking out on social media is going help solve the issue, you're being deluded (Mark)

Distancing through derogation. A strong theme in the data was men assuming a position of superior masculinity by distancing themselves from the movement and derogating women. Men distanced themselves from the movement by arguing that women partake in upholding the structures that result in male power over women, thereby shifting the responsibility to end GBV onto women:

Woman social roles uphold the patriarchy too, it's everyones responsibility to abolish patriarchy (Lebo)

Some comments took this further, implying that the anger portrayed in the #MAT movement is the reason that women alienate men and elicit GBV:

The problem is not all allies have done bad things, and some women activists themselves could be argued to perpetuate the social structures they fight against (Jacob)

Some men distanced themselves from the responsibility of engaging with issues that they feel they are not personally responsible for:

Why am I trash because a woman I don't know suffered because of a man I don't know? (Miguel)

These particular men in the study also maintained a position of superior masculinity by positioning themselves as 'different' from the men who perpetrate violence against women.

The OP of one of threads is a picture of a man's tweets in support of the #MAT. In these tweets he asked men to think about how the portrayal of women in the media leads to socially accepted sexist remarks. The tweets encouraged men to examine their own silence and compliance that perpetuate the oppression of women. Referring to the OP, one Redditor commented the following:

> *I'm trying to think of all the times I did these things he's telling me to remember but I'm drawing a blank. It's almost like I'm not and have never been a misogynist (Daniel)*
>
> *I really can't relate to the stuff he's telling me to think about (Soren)*
>
> *That's because a vanishingly small proportion of men actually do any of these things (Kai)*

These men attempted to demonstrate that they are different from perpetrators and not 'all men' are trash, but also exhibited an unwillingness or perhaps, inability to reflect on the less conscious aspects of gender performance. These less conscious aspects of gender-relating are evident in the post below. Here, the well-intentioned Redditor starts by showing his support of the #MAT, and encourages men to call out friends who make sexist remarks. He aligns himself with good/innocent men by use of the word 'we' in "we need to be strong…" and distances himself from perpetrators with the use of the word 'they're' in "they're making girls feel unsafe…". He warns men not to be blind to their own sexist behaviours saying, "don't get defensive of trashy men (who actually see themselves just like you do)". The user positions himself as an ally of women and as a superior male, far from being a perpetrator and then shows possession of women by use of the word 'our' in "our women" and a possibly patronising stance through calling women "girls":

> *I don't know man, i think that it's important that we as the "good guys" (whatever that may be) start calling out bullshit behavior of our friends. We need to be strong and make our friends realise that they're making girls feel unsafe when cat-calling/ getting angry when a girl rejects them at a bar/make rape jokes & all other bullshit behavior. Don't get defensive of trashy men (who actually see themselves just like you do), get*

defensive of our women. A cool thing I read this morning, "women fear every day, what men fear the most when going to prison" Imagine that shit (Cosmo)

Some men derogated women more openly as a way of maintaining a position of superior masculinity and invalidating the #MAT movement. These men's derogation of women moved from insulting women's maturity and intelligence to pathologising them and adopting a pitying stance. The quotes below illustrated how men feel denigrated by the movement and defend against that by criticising women:

Generally, only trashy women say that. So just don't hang around them (Orion)

Lumping people together and blaming them for what others do is pretty much the definition of immaturity (Elio)

I see feminism as a double edged sword, there are some people who just genuinely want to he treated the same as men and others who are just downright idiots who complain about the gender pay gap which is pretty rubbish and call painting with period blood a feminist movement thing (it's a video). I really feel sorry for women who have their feministic title tarnished (Ari)

In order to maintain a position of superior masculinity, the Redditor below tried to control the way in which women's dissatisfaction/anger towards men is expressed. The Redditor derogated women by comparing them to unruly toddlers:

It isn't about catering to feelings, it's about whether the response is proportional, and I think it's very patronising to say women can't express their anger in a controlled way. That's how I expect toddlers to behave, not adults. There's nothing feminist about holding women to lower standards, especially emotionally (Mateo)

Some men in the study accused women who support this movement of being mentally ill:

The reason the hashtags exist is because a bunch of bipolar bags were given a platform…female co-dependency is destroying the world (deleted)

> *They're* [feminists] *pitiful people. Before social media, their insanity was contained to their own crappy little world (deleted)*

The Redditor below implied pathology in women who support the #MAT movement by drawing a comparison between these women and his own mentally ill mother. This implied pathology comes as a defense to the hurt this Redditor feels by being labelled as trash:

> *As a son of a borderline woman, I've been told that I'm trash all of my life… because I don't need to have shame and guilt dumped on me when I'm doing my best (Steven)*

Some men were more aggressive in their derogation of women, the movement and men who support the movement:

> *Anyone calling themselves a male feminist really mean they are less than beta males. they should all be shoved down the up escalator and be done with. Feminists need a good smacking around too. Your equality is because we allow it. We can take it all back in an instant. so keep on yapping bitches. the table turns (Cillian)*

The language used in the quote above denigrated women and men who support the #MAT movement. This Redditor belittled men who align themselves with the #MAT and relegated them to a "less than beta males" status, implying his position as a superior man. This position is further secured when he illustrated power and status over women by stating women only have equality because men have given it to them, and if women do not behave accordingly, men are powerful enough to withdraw it. This comment was particularly controversial, displaying the very behaviour the #MAT movement attempts to highlight, in that he denigrates women by equating them to yapping dogs and proposes violence to keep them in line. The responses to Cillian will be considered below in the 'responsible masculinity' section.

Displacement and intellectualisation. Some men in the study shifted blame relating to inequality and GBV onto social structures, government and historical inequality. This appeared to allow these men to maintain a position of superior masculinity as 'good/innocent men' and different from perpetrators and those who allow inequality and GBV (governments and social

structure). Intellectualisation seemed to be used to assert 'rational male superiority' over 'female irrationality'.

A common defence evident in the narratives was to denounce personal responsibility for inequality and GBV and shift blame onto the social structures/culture around men that perpetuate their power over women. Some men re-emphasised the idea that it is not 'all men' who perpetrate violence against women:

> *... My point is that many gender issues are a result of flawed social structures. Targeting the structures or the bad seeds within them would be much better than targeting an entire gender (Jacob)*

> *What about how women often tend to hate other women and be in constant competition? Don't get me wrong I'm angry at the male species and random men in general but it's because of society and how the various sexes interact with one another that we have things like inequality and harassment (Dimitri)*

Other Redditors attempted to displace the responsibility to governments:

> *its unfair the majority of men, i mean the 97% of us who don't rape or beat women, we walk our female friends home, care for them etc. Its the police and the ANCs fault that this is happening. If all men are trash, then so are your brothers and fathers too. Don't shift the blame to us, solve the real issue with the cops and the Government (Odin)*

> *The real issue is we've done this before and it didn't achieve anything other than #hastags in South Africa. At this point you need to jack up the police, legislation, and penalties (Angus)*

Some men in the study claimed women no longer suffer from gender inequality and discrimination, and that innocent men of today should not be punished for past inequalities and power imbalances. This position attempted to relieve men of responsibility, allowing them to maintain a position of superior masculinity:

First, that might've been true once upon a time but it simply is no longer the case, no woman who lives today (in the western world) really suffers from any injustice that was done hundreds of years ago (Otis)

The idea that such things are justified as "revenge" for historical events simply isn't reasonable. Most Western women today have never experienced such treatment and equally today's men are not responsible for it. Sins of the father-type justifications are never going to be anything more than mental gymnastics being used to justify prejudice (Ivo)

Intellectualisation appeared to be used to defend against feelings of inferiority and hurt, in order to maintain a position of superior masculinity and invalidate the #MAT movement. In the particularly intellectualised quote below the Redditor responded in support of the OP that proposes the #MAT may have good intentions but that its execution is poor, and attacking all men will not bring about change. The quote below demonstrates how the Redditor distanced himself from the uncomfortable emotions stirred by the movements, by focusing on certain issues and intellectualising a response to it. The Redditor rejected the generalisation of 'all men'. He argued for the superiority of masculinity saying it is beneath men to engage with such a trivial hashtag. He then positioned men in a victim role saying they are poor allies of the feminist movement because they cannot achieve the impossibly high standard society expects of them and that women require of them as allies in order to tackle GBV issues:

I would respond with 3 separate arguments, in no particular order of importance:

1. *There is no such thing as "THE MEN". Sure, technically about half of the population is biologically male, but thats about it. We do not share culture, gender, identity, or even economy with one another. Even if you are a male, you are not really part of the Men, in any meaningful way. This is just obsolete categorism. Therefore, an average male should not be upset about something being "anti-men" because he does not really belong in that category.*
2. *Even males who self-identify as MEN, do not need to bother. One of the cornerstones of the traditional definition of masculinity is stoic non-reactiveness. And honestly, it is kinda justified in the context. "Men"*

(standard cis men) have been and still are, crushingly more important and powerful than any other cultural gender in the history of mankind: politically, economically, philosophically, intellectually even morally one could argue. It would be "beneath" a traditional "Man" to be insulted by such remark. A "True Man" is a master of his own emotions and fate, and rationally decides what cause to support, regardless what names the activists of that cause call him.

3. *Related to the above. In the traditional gender model, most men ARE trash, unless proven otherwise. a "Man" is judged by his accomplishments and capabilities, and the bar is set very high. Majority of men do not reach the expected level of economic accomplishment, emotional maturity, social responsibility and moral standard that the Patriarchal Model expects of them. Which (among other things) makes them pretty useless as allies/activists of the feminist movement. One might say that it takes a lot of balls to be a feminist man, more than your average male is capable of displaying (Russell)*

4.2.2. The construction of the #MAT movement from the position of superior masculinity

Through the use of defences such as dismissal, disengagement, displacement of responsibility, as well as derogating women and distancing oneself from emotions, men in this position constructed the #MAT movement as ineffective, childish, lazy, counterproductive and even dangerous. The quotes below illustrate that men in this position believed that the #MAT movement does not achieve its goal. It is argued that the hashtag and its message are unclear and therefore ineffective:

> *It fails. Women are not even mentioned in its premise, and certainly no plight of theirs is highlighted (Bongi)*

> *It is making the issue less important to me because of nonsense arguments (Kofi)*

Other men specifically constructed the movement as being ineffective because they perceived it as alienating men, as opposed to winning men over into allyship with women. While

acknowledging that the title of the movement has the potential to ‘begin conversation’, many men appeared to take offense to the choice of words ‘men are trash’:

> *... the menaretrash hashtag is gross, prejudiced and part of the toxic outrage culture. It doesn't promote a healthy environment for actual change, it just says all men are bad. Such a childish and short-sighted "movement" (Mohan)*

> *... its own extraordinarily inflammatory…people using this hashtag know it'll be taken as such and view it as a way to "start a conversation” (Ruben)*

Through their dismissal of the movement, men who took a superior position and constructed the #MAT movement as an example of a ‘lazy’ generalisation and construed the emotion associated with the movement as child-like. These men argued that the movement demonstrates a lack of understanding of the real issues at hand:

> *... hating on men is socially acceptable, therefore a generalisation in the hashtag is no problem to a lot people. They are too lazy to single out specific issues and identify the kinds of people who perpetrate them, so they just label them as “men” (Ola)*

> *These [hashtags] are the tools of venting frustration and immature tantrum throwing. Sophisticated discourse does not happen as a hashtag. Sophisticated discourse doesn't happen as sweeping generalities (Matthew)*

> *It's just lazy. By generalizing, you don't have to understand the problem. You don't have to say which men, how many men, whether it's a majority or a loud minority. Does it correlate to something within the class? Does it correlate to something outside the class? It it an innate problem? Do you just hang out with assholes? (Zenzi)*

Some men took up a superior position through ‘educating’ and warning of the impact this type of generalisation and discrimination may have on younger generations, thereby constructing the movement as potentially dangerous. They argued that the inflammatory language of the hashtag will influence how young women perceive and treat men and how young men perceive

and treat themselves. These men suggested that movements such as these will cause further division and will impact men's allyship of women in the future:

> *In this context, we are discussing the impact of a growing message to all young women, that a collective gender is trash (and assumedly, that you should treat them accordingly)…(Zamo)*

> *Saying men are trash even if you don't meant all men is harmful especially for younger men and those who not yet join the women 's right agenda (Bruno)*

> *Sadly Ive spoke to boys who feel like trash or bad for literally being boys. Yes this is a real problem, and kids are noticing it. Own boys in my family have felt guilty or wrong about being boys. Something really needs to be done about this. There is a cultural war again being male. Every other article is about toxic masculinity, girls are so awesomme. We need to drop that label. This forum thats all it says, women good, men bad, we must be their allies. Even here this thread is locked, every other post silently deleted, we can post abour how bad men ARE and toxic, but talk about how society is bad or discrimnates men though and boom post deleeed, thread not accepted, banned (Cruz)*

The construction of the #MAT movement as potentially dangerous to men and women suggests a fear of victimhood amongst men who identify with a position of superiority. Interestingly, however, victimhood was the second position that was taken up by many men in the Reddit threads.

4.2.3. Assuming a position of victimised masculinity

It emerged that some men placed themselves in a position of victimised masculinity in response to the #MAT movement. In this position Redditors sought to show that men are also victims of GBV and that the hashtag is discriminatory. The taking up of a position of victimhood in response to the challenge of the #MAT movement can be seen as defensive. A defence utilised by these men that was evident in the data was splitting. Splitting is a type of thinking that fails to integrate opposing aspects or dichotomies into a realistic whole (Siegel & Forero, 2012). In response to the movement, these men split women into 'reasonable feminists' who advocate

for a just cause and 'radical feminists' who are aggressive women out to annihilate men. Men in this position constructed the movement as attacking, alienating, and demeaning of men. These men also questioned whether fighting abuse with abuse is effective or merely perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Men can also be victims. Some men in the study responded to the #MAT movement by stating that men are victims of sexual violence too. The quotes below demonstrate that men felt further victimised because male victims of abuse are less widely recognised and have less access to resources than female victims:

> *Edit: It also ignores a lot of issues. Such as men being roughly 30% of rape victims, or men being roughly 50% of abuse victims yet having only 5% of resources such as shelters available to them. That movement is deeming these victims trash on the basis of their gender and using that as a reason to deny them help (Alessio)*

> *...Rape is a problem, full stop - but victims of male on female rape are supported and sympathized with whereas victims of female on male rape are a laughing stock and the crime is under-reported. If they're truly interested in equality that's where they should start, but they're not. Beware anyone who claims to be in favour of equality but only focuses on issues that benefit themselves (John)*

> *I'm a man who's tired of women treating me like shit and using me? It's a problem for every gender woman aren't the only ones having problems what's the big deal? (Fritz)*

There was also an air of 'whose problem is worse' in this category of data as these men argued that men are also victims of violence:

> *70% of non-reciprocal domestic violence is perpetuated by women. Women are more likely than men to use weapons and other objects when perpetuating domestic violence. Lesbian relationships have a higher rate of domestic violence than heterosexual or gay male relationships. I doubt #MenAreTrash is addressing these, though (Ibo)*

Let's flip this... We are in a society that openly states men are shit, white men are shitter still. Women can beat us and if we take it we are weak and if we fight back and defend ourselves we abusers. Women take away our children and if we accept that we are bad/absent fathers and if we fight it we are hurting the children by dragging it out through the courts. Women can consent to sex and choice parenthood. Men can consent to sex and then must accept whatever the woman decides (Laurent)

There was a feeling of 'damned if we do and damned if we don't', as men explained that they try to align themselves with the female equality agenda but are then treated poorly in return:

…We try not to be toxic and we're deemed as toxic. We point out ways in which we can be more open and talk about our feelings and we're told it's toxic. What's Menslib come to? (Sven)

Yeah it is. I find myself frequently siding with those dealing with oppression only for them to attack me for who I am. It's so frustrating (Tsvi)

…For example, some of these "MenAreTrash" discussions among my female friends have happened when we have had them over to our home. In my living room…This is why I struggle with this phrase... when it's so clearly loaded and combative, and can make men with trauma (particularly if it was at the hands of a woman) absolutely triggered.... it just seems like emotional venting with no productive intent. Am I required to just allow it and put any feelings I have aside for fear of being too "fragile"? (Graham)

In this position of victimised masculinity, there was an undertone of men feeling misunderstood and attacked for privilege they feel they have not experienced. It is possible that for men who have not felt identified with, or feel that they do not meet the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, the perceived attack on masculinity represented by the #MAT movement feels even more unfair:

Feminists need to understand that patriarchy was never a thing. even if it is, it was not to the betterment of all men (Pablo)

But as others have pointed out, power isn't collective. I do not have power because other men have power. I have virtually no power, over anyone. Actually, the cruel joke of how stratified our society is gets revealed here (Ivar)

Discrimination. Feelings of being unfairly judged as 'bad', wrongly accused, vulnerable and exposed were evident in this category. Many of these men felt the #MAT movement is discriminatory, in that it groups all men together and stereotypes them as varying degrees of perpetrators:

What does that have to do with the millions upon millions of the men, the probable majority of them, who have had nothing to do with the history of their gender being viewed as superior? It's needlessly antagonistic to lump an entire class of people together when the real complaint is about a mindset within that particular group (Ruben)

We are individuals. This "group identity" based politics is incredibly harmful (Bayanda)

Similarly, some men believed the hashtag assumes that men are inherently bad to begin with:

You are assuming there is some inherent "bad place" that I start from and have to fix (Bandile)

So the options for those in the group being discriminatingly stereotyped are:

- *Bad person who denies being bad*
- *Bad person who tries to change*

I think you missed something. Does that make me the former? (Bandile)

Some men in the victimised masculinity position paralleled themselves to criminals and appeared to feel wrongly accused and felt exposed. This appeared to be linked to the theme that there is something inherently bad in being male, and the impossible position of not being able to do much about this inborn trait:

Innocent until proven guilty (Eduardo)

If you haven't done anything illegal, just let the police search your house. Great mentality (Boris)

At times, these men used references to media representations of men to corroborate their argument that men are victims of stereotyping and discrimination. The quote below reiterates feelings of being an unseen victim and male abuse not taken seriously. It explains how men felt media representations of men have skewed people's perceptions of masculinity and stereotyped men into boxes from which it is difficult to escape:

**thinks about media his was exposed to since childhood* You mean to how men are killed off unceremoniously in droves and no one bats an eye, but when woman snubs her toe it suddenly becomes a pivotal moment of drama for an entire movie? How men are always portrayed as either dumb as cavemen, driven by nothing but basic instincts and only good for fighting and manual labour, or as manchildren that their "mature" female peers have to begrudgingly tolerate; and how women are portrayed as hyper-intelligent, adult-mature since basically age of 5, competent at anything they do, etc. Yeah, i can see how people looking that that kind of media would come to the conclusion that men are trash...Actually, i say it as a joke, but now that i think about it - in every media i saw since childhood, men being verbally and physically assaulted and systematically abused by females was always treated as a joke and as something given, while men daring to as much as talk back was treated as shocking and often inappropriate. Men defending themselves against women in media is usually treated as creating conflict or, at best conflict escalation, with moral of the episode being them coming to a compromise of woman not changing a thing and man learning to accept it... Damn (Didier)*

In the excerpt above, women are portrayed as emotionally abusive and belittling of men, and as using their status in society as weaker and needing protection to perpetrate abuse of men in ways that are societally condoned.

Throughout several threads, Redditors also paralleled the fight for gender equality to that of racial equality. This appeared to be a partly intellectual response that distanced the Redditor from the emotions that the #MAT movement evoked.

> *Its acceptable discrimination. A lot of people like to think of themselves as good people but the real test is to stand in opposition to cruelty and avarice. The moment you accept or promote discrimination or cruelty simply because its publicly acceptable is the moment you prove your lack of character. Sexism against men is considered empowering so some women are misandric and bigots. Racism against whites is considered no big deal so racism and bigotry against white people is considered okay. As long as its publicly acceptable these people are okay with it and consider themselves moral. Meanwhile racism against blacks was publicly acceptable at one time and nazism was publicly acceptable and those people considered themselves moral. As long as you depend on social standards for your morals, you will find yourself betrayed when those standards change (Lorenzo)*

> *If you're going to generalize like that you might as well say that black people are criminals and white people are racist. It's not ok to generalize a whole group based on the actions of a few (Hakim)*

In these comments, an objection is made to the perceived generalisations that the #MAT movement makes. Men are positioned as victimised, alongside Black and Jewish people, while women who support the movement are labelled ‘misandric’ and as ‘bigots’.

Splitting of women. A further response of some of the men in the study was to split women into ‘reasonable feminists’ who are different from the ‘radical feminists’ who are aggressive women with a goal to annihilate men. This splitting was used defensively and appeared to reinforce positions of victimised masculinity. From this position radical feminists were perceived as aggressive women out to annihilate men:

> *Because the social justice warriors want to erase men (deleted)*

Some men questioned the true intentions of the #MAT movement and raised suspicions about women's true motivations:

> *They aren't trying to fight sexism. That's never been their goal. They're trying to denigrate men and elevate women. It's a supremacist movement (Adrian)*

> *One should be suspicious when someone tries to tell you it's alright to hate on a huge fraction of people because of an inborn attribute. Here's what history tells us about that: Someone is trying to use outrage for political power, and this is probably going towards villainy (Gaston)*

These men appeared to fear that women are out to dominate and control them:

> *Feminism is a hate cult. It always was. It came after the egalitarian women's right's movements. They are the descendents of the suffragettes, not the suffragists. Allies of the establishment who would shame men and use militant tactics (Luke)*

Despite these fears, some men spoke about a category of reasonable feminists. These men emphasised that reasonable feminists have a responsibility to separate themselves from radical feminists. The quote below suggests women need to moderate their combative agenda in order to ensure allyship from men and other women. They tried to communicate that achievements in inequality and the GBV movement should be made without disrupting positive gender interactions:

> *It is both the responsibility of reasonable feminists to distance themselves from the ideologies of the radicals, as well as those not connected to the movement to understand and separate the reasonable and the radical from each other. Draw a line in the sand, even if it moves later, and stick to it until you're pressed up against it and can decide if the gains are enough or if more should be made, fairly. I'm an ally of anyone who wants to make well moderated progress toward a better world. Most people, I think, would also be (deleted)*

In the quote below, the split between 'reasonable feminists' and 'fanatical feminists' is again evident. This Redditor showed an intention of allyship with feminist movements but explained

he struggled to commit because he felt persecuted simply for being male. He showed some allyship, empathising with GBV that woman face but explained that the #MAT hashtag is antagonistic and therefore will not help gain support for the issues the movement intends to shed light on. This quote demonstrates a theme among men in the study – a feeling of being attacked which results in division as opposed to union in a common goal. While reasonable feminist can be supported, radical or fanatical feminists drive support away:

> *It's probably one of the main reasons I don't label myself as a feminist despite wanting to advance women's rights. It seems like some feminists are intent on destroying all men no matter what. Just because I have a penis I'll always be the enemy. Which might be fair since will never experience what it's like to be a woman. It's unfortunate but while labels can be helpful for identifying issues, when taken to an extreme as blanket and combative statements they're not helpful at all. If someone is intent on labeling me as trash, then fine. I'm trash. But I know I'm not (Janos)*

4.2.4. Constructions of the #MAT movement from the position of victimised masculinity

From the perceived position of forgotten victims who are discriminated against, men in the position of victimised masculinity viewed the movement as attacking, alienating and demeaning of men. Many of these men perceived the #MAT as perpetuating the cycle of discrimination in trying to fight abuse with abuse. There is evidence of defensive splitting of women in the comments made by men who took up a victimised position, perceiving some women as reasonable and safe to support, and others as threatening and aggressive towards men. This ambivalence is echoed in their constructions of the movement.

The quote below illustrates the complexity of the construction of the #MAT movement by men who took up a position of victimised masculinity. Opening with support of the movement and acknowledging the violence that women face, this Redditor argued that the generalisations of all men in the hashtag shifts the blame and responsibility for ending GBV solely to men. He continues that the chastising language of the hashtag detracts attention away from the aim of the moment and instead causes division among men and between men and women:

> *I get the intentions behind these movements and agree with them. Highlighting the plight of women in gender issues, exposing the violence from men, toxic masculinity, toxic patriarchy, etc etc. I completely get and understand where most women are*

coming from… What I don't get is why it targets the entire gender as opposed to individuals. Why are all men being lumped together and judged based on the actions of a few? The poor execution for me comes down to expectations. Other movements that were focused on the plights of a group (such as Steve Biko's Black Consciousness) were about that group uplifting itself, regardless of the actions of their "oppressors". These "anti-men" movements however still put a large emphasis on men (as the "oppressors") to do something about it. I'd argue that that won't work. Attacking all men in hopes that they'll change, won't bring about any changes. Any "good" men will focus more on the fact that they're being attacked, and the "bad" men will either not care or just hide behind being lumped in with all the rest. In the end, besides highlighting these issues, these movements will only ever result in debates and arguments between the genders (Jacob)

Some of the men who felt victimised perceived the movement as demeaning, alienating and excluding men from the fight for equality:

Tearing others down to get there just creates more resistance and pushes the goal further away because the point deviates from the goal toward winning the battle that never had to be (deleted)

I'm a man. If I see someone using or promoting the use of the hashtag online, I regard them as a person who is not interested in growing the feminist movement to include men (Navarro)

Similarly, anger was expressed at the idea of fighting sexism with sexism arguing it will perpetuate a cycle of hate and division:

I'm just incredibly disappointed and angry that this is actually a thing. How the hell can we fight sexism with sexism? The only difference between this and a hypothetical #WomenAreTrash hashtag is that this is somehow acceptable. Get out of here with your double standards. No wonder we aren't improving as a country (Ola)

The only thing happening everytime is that the other side will team up and fight back, spinning the wheel of hate and intolerance on and on and FUCKING on! (Kees)

4.2.5. Assuming a position of responsible masculinity

The third position taken up by some men in the study was as allies of women, acknowledging the privileges that come with being male and grappling with how to retain a masculine voice in an issue that feels overwhelming and chastising. While some men in the position of responsible masculinity constructed the #MAT movement as a 'call to action', others felt that the movement has good intentions but poor execution, in that it runs the risk of alienating potential allies.

These men appeared less defensive in their responses and appeared to attempt to grapple with their role in sexism and GBV even if they are not obvious perpetrators. These men commented on the need for self-reflection and the need to survive discomfort as necessary processes in digesting one's compliance in violence towards women:

I think many allies feel a certain amount of shame for their past complacent behavior (I know that I do). With that comes a little voice of "I need to defend myself" when we're lumped in with antagonists despite changing our behavior. But really, that voice is just something allies have to train out of ourselves through hard work and self-searching. Eventually we can turn it into "my discomfort is OK, the activist has felt discomfort their entire life and if I feel that they are justified in being angry about that, it has to be OK for them to call me out for the things I have done, even if I think others have done worse (Baptiste)

I'm a white man, and this is how I try to approach race/gender, too. Even if I don't consciously try to, I participate in and benefit from systems of oppression. I work at discerning whether it's me personally this is directed at or the system in which both of us are forced to act (Riaan)

Some of these men appeared more able to take a meta-perspective and were able to empathise with women's positions. It was felt that the cost of the hurtful, attacking and generalised words

of the #MAT movement is minor in comparison to the reality of physical, verbal and sexual abuse women face:

> *40% of South African women will be raped at least once in their lifetime. I don't mind getting called trash if this movement changes that. I don't mind getting called trash for a South Africa where my sisters and daughters can walk in the streets without the fear of being raped (Jeff)*

Men in this position also seemed more cognisant of the need to be mindful of how their responses may be experienced by women and spoke of grappling with standing up for themselves without silencing the other:

> *…I'm still figuring out how to have those conversations, because sometimes I do get uncomfortable even though I know it isn't directed at me specifically. I typically disengage or pivot the conversation back to whatever prompted saying that. I'm working on how to express the way this hurts me without recommitting the same societal habits of silencing women (Riaan)*

Some men in the victimised masculinity positions argued that men no longer have power over women by using individual examples where women have positions of power in politics and in corporate institutions. However, the Redditor below responded that while some individual women hold positions of power, collectively men have more power than women. This illustrates how men in the responsible masculinity position aligned themselves with the female agenda by acknowledging and at points, explaining the reality of patriarchy:

> *The entire point of the power argument is that collectively, the power in this country still resides mostly with men. Not equally with all men, and not exclusively with men, but still mostly with men (deleted)*

As opposed to feeling threatened by the generalisations to all men that is made by the #MAT movement, some men in the responsible masculinity position were more able to grapple with the need for this generalisation. The quote below illustrates an understanding of why the #MAT includes 'all men'. Men in the responsible masculinity position argued that it is necessary to

call out all men to ensure more men reflect on their actions and recognise where they may be contributing to female violence through microaggressions:

> *They need to focus on all men because a lot of the problems are with the culture and not just a few bad apples. If you focus on individual actors it's too easy to think well what a bad person, I'm glad I'm not like that with no self reflection. A "good" man will hear these complaints and look at his own life to see if he contributes to the problem. I think people are afraid to do this because they are scared of what they will find. Maybe he has never raped anyone, but did they try to pressure someone into sex? Did they talk over a woman in a business meeting? Did they sit by and not say anything while these things happened? People aren't perfect and they make mistakes but that doesnt make them evil. But they should try to improve and better themselves. If you hear a complaint about all men and take an honest look at yourself, determine you haven't done that, then great. But instead of turning around and shouting "but I dont do that!" You can keep an eye out for behavior from both yourself and other men in the future. Maybe not every man is the direct cause of these issues, but many women have encountered them so often that they have to assume it could come from any man (Zandile)*

Some of these men were able to acknowledge that an important aspect of the #MAT movement is that it allows victims to speak up and have their experiences of abuse at the hands of men validated. This comment was made in response to a Redditor who argued that the aggressive tone of the hashtag causes men to get defensive and that's why he thinks the movement is a waste of time:

> *These movements are about more than just getting followers, though, it's about bringing issues to light and correctly shaming those behaviors. And maybe a bit of catharsis for the underpriveleged who have maybe spent decades feeling powerless and afraid to speak up. When they say "men are trash" they're saying "men that do these bad things aren't worthy of your fear, your abusive father is in the wrong, not you" to try and give some agency to oppressed people (Ben)*

Some men in this position also attempted to explain why the hashtag needs to be uncomfortable. It was suggested that the hashtag needs to be disruptive to generate traction and

create discussion, and is effectively the marketing of the movement. If the hashtag is more nuanced, it loses its impact and thus the issues the movement is trying to highlight will be lost. The quote below demonstrates an empathy for activists and criticises those who do not think beyond the initial words of the movement and grapple with its intended message:

> *Execution is important. However, "like the message, hate the execution" is not a good barometer of whether the execution is actually good, because anything that disrupts people - physically or emotionally - will receive similar backlash. We hold those seeking social change to an impossibly high standard, and forget that these movements are born out of significant pain, and that them causing a little discomfort is a moderated response in comparison to what's been done to them…All movements for social change are incredibly nuanced topics and all require thoughtful analysis to really understand the message. If you throw out the book without reading it just because you don't like the cover....well then your criticism of the book should not be taken very seriously when others are trying to decide whether to read it…If children were afraid en masse that their mothers were going to kill them, and other parents' response was "well that is just awful, but I'm going to be a good person by not killing my own children, rather than speak out or help prevent these murders", then I'd support kids who banded together under the banner #momsaremonsters. Obviously the hashtag isn't fully accurate, but what would you like? #stopkillingkids is inaccurate because the complaint isn't just about the mothers killing kids, it's about the silence surrounding those murders. By the time you approach the real truth, you end up having to go with something absurd like #stopkillingkidsorstayingsilentaboutkillingkids, or worse #SomeMomsKillKidsAndOthersStaySilentAndIfYouAreInOneOfThoseGroupsThenYouNeedToBeBetterButIfYouAreSpeakingOutThenThankYouForBeingAGoodPerson (Baptiste)*

Some men who fell into the category of responsible masculinity criticised other users for their sexist comments, thus demonstrating their 'responsible masculinity' which discourages male silence in the face of microaggressions among peers. This suggests that men who take up a position of responsible masculinity constructed the #MAT movement as a 'call to action'. As mentioned previously in the section on derogation, where a Redditor used insulting and

discriminatory language to both men and women, a second Redditor called him out on his behaviour:

> *Anyone calling themselves a male feminist really mean they are less than beta males. they should all be shoved down the up escalator and be done with. Feminists need a good smacking around too. Your equality is because we allow it. We can take it all back in an instant. so keep on yapping bitches. the table turns (Cillian)*

> *I really don't think you understand the point in this sub. You are no better than feminists. You should see yourself out and never comment again (deleted)*

> *You sound exactly like a male feminist to me. You should see yourself down the up escalator (Cillian)*

> *I'm calling out someone who says to "smack feminists around" and taking away "women's rights." This implies that we are better than women, and that we even have the right to decide if women have equal rights. I am not a male feminist, but you are a sexist. You really sound like someone with years of pent up sexual frustration who likes to take it out in women. I really don't understand why you think a man calling out blatant sexist behavior is feminist. Again, I don't think you understand this sub if those are your beliefs (deleted)*

4.2.6. Constructions of the #MAT movement from the position of responsible masculinity

While a number of men in this position did not appear to feel threatened by the #MAT movement, some felt that the intentions of the movement were good, but were concerned that it could be perceived as discrimination against men and that this may result in further divisions. While this concern was shared by men in the superior masculinity and victimised masculinity positions, the tone with which these comments were written appeared less defensive and rather as open engagement in discussion about a cause they perceived as relevant. One Redditor expressed that the movement is a reasonable response to structural discrimination:

> *I think that women saying "men are trash" is quite reasonable and appropriate as a response to sexist behavior out of men or structural discrimination (Olivier)*

Others framed the provocation of the hashtag as a means to create awareness and encourage men to call out microaggressions towards women:

> *It's also about actively shutting down any sexist, inappropriate or derogatory remarks, comments or actions (Peit)*

> *Perhaps it's more specific to where I am. But the gender issues it's linked too are global. It intends to highlight the plight of women in gender based issues. Kind of like the MeToo movement (Jacob)*

The 'means to create discussion' was a fairly controversial claim, however, because many other men responded that the use of the attacking language in the hashtag causes division and defensiveness rather than initiating a thoughtful discussion around the topic. Angus, below, notes the limitations of discussions, highlighting action that needs to accompany discussion for change to occur:

> *What if I told you the purpose of that campaign is to trigger a discussion? Exactly what you are doing right now (Taj)*

> *What is this discussion accomplishing, though? One side saying "all men are trash" and the other side saying "no lol"? (Thierry)*

> *What type of discussion is it triggering though? Seems to me it's causing divisions instead of solidarity. Ignorant blanket statements based on emotions usually do (Rafiq)*

> *...By all means, have the uncomfortable discussion, but then act on it in a meaningful way (Angus)*

Some framed the discomfort caused by the provocative hashtag as necessary in order to bring about social change:

In fact, women have to make people uncomfortable in order to get societal change at all. That's what happened with every single major victory that feminism has had, from suffrage, all the way to #metoo (Thando)

Others disagreed, arguing that the language used in the hashtag will not win men over:

If you want to make the world a better place, and you think the behaviour of men is the problem, then it's the hearts and minds of men you want to change. How receptive to change will someone be right after you call them trash? This seems like a way to be angry and call people names under the guise of justice (Tygo)

The quote below illustrates the tension evident throughout the threads with regard to the #MAT movement – 'it has good intentions but the execution is poor'. Below, Ringo illustrated the difficulty in being supportive of the intentions of the movement when feeling attacked and alienated by the language used in the hashtag. The argument was made that #MAT leaves men in a difficult position – acknowledging women are using their right to freedom of speech, but feeling it is at the cost of silencing men:

Yeah, I consider myself a feminist (kind of on the fence about it sometimes- the movement is so splintered it's hard to specify what you're actually for and against) but I hate when people say stuff like this. I completely understand how many women have been regularly victimized by men, sometimes more than one throughout their lives. I understand the pain and fear and frustration they experience. However, the attitude that men are to be looked down upon and lumped in with the horrible people and the abusers is counterproductive and hateful (Ringo)

Baptiste responded to the 'good intentions, poor execution' argument saying it takes the hashtag out of context and ignores the intention of the movement and the issues it aims to highlight:

Your criticism, "like the message, hate the execution" has been used against nearly every social-justice movement. It's incredibly effective on people who insist on taking

the hashtag out of context, without listening to the actual messages that people are saying. It is the origin of responses like #notallmen and #alllivesmatter (Baptiste)

4.3. Patterns of interaction

Several patterns emerged in the data with regard to how users were responding to each other on the threads. This was seen in how men addressed women in the threads and in the phenomenon of band wagoning.

4.3.1. Men patronising women

Throughout the data there were female Redditors who contributed to the various discussions of the #MAT movement. Some women were in support of the hashtag and its intentions and called out male sensitivity and defensiveness. Other women aligned themselves with men and supported their responses to the movement – corroborating that generalisations and the language used in the hashtag is hurtful and will not help gain male support in ending GBV.

Responses from men to comments from women who supported the movement tended to be attacking. These men's position was aligned with the argument that the words of the hashtag are hurtful and discriminatory, and their defensive response was to 'educate' and patronise women. The excerpt below illustrates how two men dismissed, patronised and pathologised a female Redditor who was trying to share the intention of the #MAT movement:

Again, you seem to fail to see the significance in your choice of words. "Men CAN BE such trash" is not "men ARE trash". dehumanising language like describing social groups as trash, vermin, etc, is viewed very negatively (Mateo)

if you're more upset about the generalisation embodied in the hashtag than the reasons that the hashtag exists, you are missing the point (Sofia)

Dude, don't even start with her. She clearly has angst and issues, and we're not gonna help her by challenging her narcissism (deleted)

Another male user belittled a female Redditor's intelligence, accusing her of failing to see the impact of the words in the hashtag. The female Redditor argued that women should not have

to explain the intention of the movement to men, that this "emotional labour" should be done by men reflecting and grappling with what the hashtag disturbs in them.

> *It seems that fundamentally you have got to work on your presentation. If you're intelligent this won't be difficult but if you're stubborn and not too smart then this will seem like a challenge, and no, "emotional labour" isn't a thing and it's not laborious to explain yourself properly (Paul)*

4.3.2. Bandwagoning

Another pattern of interaction that emerged was bandwagoning. The bandwagon effect describes an individual's propensity to take on, and follow, others' opinions (Lee et al., 2020). This is a common phenomenon of social media sites (Lee et al., 2020; Waddell, 2018). While it is not possible to prove that people are changing their opinions to fit in with current trends in the conversation, it is possible to see a run of similar opinions in consecutive comments. This pattern occurred between men who viewed male supporters of the movement as traitors. When a man demonstrated support for the movement, he was accused of being a feminist/anti-male, or an 'unmasculine' man whose aim is to get sex by demonstrating allyship with women, or he was denigrated to trash and accused of being one of the perpetrators masquerading as a good guy. These men were viewed as traitors of masculinity and men. The excerpt below illustrates the extreme of bandwagoning and is in fact also online bullying of a man who attempted to validate the #MAT movement:

> *pulls out a stopwatch and presses start lets see how long it takes until this guy is outed as a sexual abuser, male feminists that project this hard ALWAYS end up being outed as a hypocrite and do what they are bashing others for, this guy is saying men are trash, how long until we find out he treats women like absolute shit? (Zsoka)*

> *He has a profile pic with open mouth > Automatically 99% chance of being a Soyboy (Ziv)*

> *"If I publicly deny reality and make myself a tool/doormat, I might just get rewarded with some poon" (deleted)*

Judging by his profile picture he didn't have much of a shot with women in the first place, so you can't really blame the guy for throwing a Hail Mary (deleted)

Not poon, but social media points. It's pathetic (Willem)

God knows what i would do to this guy if i had him in front of me (Zevi)

My ex only ever listened to rap/ hip hop etc. He acts like women don't like vulgarity. He sounds like a virgin (Vasili)

I have a theory that male feminists are people that just want to get laid, but lack the social skills (and possibly IQ) to actually talk to a girl (Umberto)

Diacounting his manhood in hopes of chumming up to women and gettiing laid by the looks of it. Shame. Ugh this sub makes me mad (Vusi)

This guy should just say ##IAmTrash and be done with it (Mohamed)

Facial hair - check
Doughy body - check
Neckbeard style - check
I wonder how many sexual harassment complaints he's up to now (Jason)

4.4. Conclusion

In summary, anger was the predominant emotion expressed by men in this study. Men felt angry at being discriminated against, stereotyped, and alienated. Men were angered at being grouped together with perpetrators and felt the hashtag alienated men in the battle against GBV. Anger was expressed through the use of offensive and derogatory language towards women and men who support the #MAT movement. A small number of men demonstrated overt hurt, and shame associated with the #MAT movement, but this was not a major theme across the data. The men who did express hurt felt shamed and attacked by the #MAT movement. Overall, there was an underlying sense of anxiety implicit in many men's responses.

Men were largely defensive in responses to the #MAT movement. The first defensive position was a position of superior masculinity. Men placed themselves in a superior position through dismissal, distancing and derogation of both the movement and women. Men in this position also used displacement to shift blame and intellectualisation of the movement to maintain their superior position. This position appeared to construct the #MAT movement as ineffective, lazy, and childish and warned of its impact on younger generations.

The second defensive position was a position of victimised masculinity in response to the #MAT movement. In this position men felt they were forgotten as victims of GBV and that the hashtag is discriminatory. These men used splitting as a defense. Women were split into 'reasonable feminists' who advocate for a just cause and 'radical feminists' who are aggressive women out to annihilate men. Men in the position of victimised masculinity constructed the movement as attacking and demeaning of men and perceived #MAT as perpetuating the cycle of discrimination in trying to fight abuse with abuse. Constructions of the movement from men in this position were complex – trying to acknowledge the violence women face, these men also felt the hashtag shifts the blame and responsibility for ending GBV solely to men. It was felt that this causes division between men and women.

The third defensive position was a position of responsible masculinity. Men in this position were allies of women and acknowledged their gender privilege. These men appeared less defensive in their responses and grappled with how to retain a masculine voice while engaging with an issue that feels overwhelming and chastising. Some men in this position constructed the movement as a 'call to action', to self-reflect on one's complicity in GBV and call out microaggressions. Other men felt the movement had good intentions but was executed poorly and that the language used in the hashtag risks alienating potential allies.

Patterns emerged in the data with regard to how users were responding to each other on the threads. While some female Redditors in the data supported the #MAT and called out male defensiveness, other female Redditors aligned themselves with men's responses that the language used in the hashtag is discriminatory and will drive male support away. Men's responses to female Redditors in support of the movement tended to be attacking and their defensive response was to 'educate' and patronise women. A bandwagoning effect emerged in the data between men who viewed male supporters of the movement as traitors of masculinity

and men. A run of similar opinions in consecutive comments attacked male support of the movement as feminist/anti-male, or ‘unmasculine’. These supporters were denigrated and accused of being perpetrators in hiding.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to add to the literature on men's responses to GBV by analysing men's responses to the #MAT movement on Reddit. As discussed in the reflexivity section previously, in the interests of trustworthiness and credibility, it is important for the researcher to consider her own thoughts throughout the research process. While initially defensive and angered by responses in the data that appeared to represent toxic masculinity, the researcher found that through the process of this research she was able to find a meta-position in relation to the data, that allowed for acknowledgement of multiple positions and the fears that potentially drive these positionings. Researcher reflexivity allowed for greater engagement with the complexity that underlies men's responses to the #MAT movement.

Three overarching themes emerged in the data. The first theme was men's emotional expressions. This theme explored emotions such as anger and shame. The second theme, men's defensive responses and men's constructions of #MAT movement, consisted of three defensive positions that men assumed: assuming a position of superior masculinity, assuming a position of victimised masculinity, and assuming a position of responsible masculinity. The final theme explored patterns of interaction in the threads that also inform how men are constructing the #MAT movement. These themes are used in this discussion to answer the following research questions: (1) what are men's emotional responses to the #MAT movement on Reddit? (2) how are men constructing masculinity in the #MAT threads on Reddit? (3) how are men constructing women who participate in the #MAT movement? And (4) how are men constructing the #MAT movement.

5.1. Men's emotional responses to the #MAT movement on Reddit from January 2019 to January 2021

Anger emerged most predominantly in the data. Men expressed anger towards several aspects of the #MAT movement, experiencing it as victimising in several ways: discriminatory, stereotyping, and alienating. Anger was also targeted at other men who demonstrated support of the movement. These men were accused of being weak and traitors of masculinity. Hurt as an overt expression was not common in the data but it likely underlies much of the anger expressed.

The anger expressed in the data appeared to be predominantly defensive. The analysis uncovered that the men in the study were in fact feeling threatened. The #MAT movement calls out men's complacency which threatens masculine power and hegemonic masculinity causing destabilisation and disruption which many of the men found unsettling, and their defensive response was to attack back. Men expressed feeling threatened through claims of being misunderstood, unfairly accused, stereotyped and discriminated against, and that they too could be victims of GBV but lack support, resources, and awareness and are therefore vulnerable. This vulnerability seemed to cause many men to assume a hypermasculine position and call out the double standard in anger. It appeared that men felt threated by the female power that the #MAT movement represents and the aggressive position that women have taken in instigating the movement. Some of the quotes from the data demonstrate a 'fight or flight' response, indicating a threat has been identified; in response to feeling threatened men assumed a hypermasculine or victimised position. A deeper interpretation of men's threatened anger reveals anxiety about the confusion of the male role and the precariousness of masculinity.

While much of the literature around GBV speaks to male-on-female violence, Peacock (2013) stated that statistically the majority of violence is perpetrated by men against men. The patterns of interaction evident in the data supports Peacock's (2013) statement. The data suggests a male-on-male violence in an attempt to establish one's masculinity and discredit the masculinity of another. This was illustrated in the data by the online bullying of men who align themselves with #MAT movement. Considering Vandello et al.'s (2008) research, it is clear that in the examples provided in the results section above, the bullies feel that their complacency is being threatened, causing anxiety associated with their place in the male social order. This seemed to result in them retaliating violently through their words, in order to re-establish their masculine status with other men in the Reddit community. This is supported by Frosh (1994) who explains that pressure to achieve a certain type of masculinity is complex and provokes feelings of anxiety and fear of failure. For adolescent boys, this pressure often manifests in public performance of risky behaviours in order to achieve a hegemonic masculinity.

Although literature about men's emotional responses to GBV is limited, Sikweyiya et al. (2007) commented on the language used by men who had committed rape. It was found that men used language that distanced themselves from the term 'rape' and offered excuses that

reduced their responsibility for the rape in an attempt to further distance themselves for their actions. This defensive style is similar to that employed by the men in this study who distanced themselves from perpetrators with use of the word 'they'. There was a narrative throughout the data of 'us' (the good guys) and 'them' (the perpetrators). Sikweyiya et al. (2007) explain that one of the challenges facing men in distancing themselves from harmful masculinities, is learning to express their emotions.

Anger as the predominant outward expression of emotion from men in this study is supported by Johnson's (2014) findings, which explained that men are expected always to be in control and to be unemotional, except for anger and rage. Similarly and in line with traditional masculine roles, Graaff and Heinecken (2017), who conducted a case study of a GBV intervention in South Africa, found that both practitioners of the intervention and participants in their study described an expectation of men to be physically strong and to handle pain without showing emotion. Graaff and Heinecken (2017) explained that violence, and by association anger, has therefore become expected in the achievement of manhood. Cheryan et al. (2015) found that men, in response to masculinity threats, attempted to regain their masculinity by firstly, distancing themselves from stereotypically feminine preferences/products. Secondly, men demonstrated the preferred strategy of exaggerating stereotypically masculine traits about themselves in order to align themselves with the masculine ingroup (Cheryan et al., 2015). Together these authors describe a process, evident in the data, of regaining one's masculine status by distancing from vulnerability (perhaps associated with femininity), and demonstrating traditional masculine traits (aggression, unemotional, violence), in response to masculinity threats.

Johnson (2014) explained that men do not seek approval of their manhood from women, but from other men. This supports the theme in this study of men viewing other men who demonstrate support of the movement as traitors. This is because men risk exclusion, humiliation, or violence from other men if there is a doubt about their masculinity (Johnson, 2014). In the data, where men doubt another man's allegiance with masculinity, his masculine status is revoked. Johnson (2014) continued that a man risks exclusion if he does not demonstrate solidarity by objectifying women, reinforcing the male sense of superiority. This alludes to the precarious nature of masculinity asserted by Vandello et al. (2008), which appeared to contribute to the anxiety evident in the online conversations. Vandello et al. (2008),

Johnson (2014), Frosh and Baraitser (2008) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000) explain that men, in the face of threatened masculinity, demonstrate heightened anxiety and an increased need to conceal negative comments about their masculine status. The resultant behaviour is aggression, as an attempt to protect and prove one's masculine status, which will be further unpacked in the following section. This fragile masculinity (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020; Frosh et al., 2003) is evident in the data. Men in this study displayed aggressive behaviour in response to threats against their masculinity, which suggests that anxiety about losing one's masculine status underlies this behaviour. The findings of this study support Lange and Young (2019) and Nanda et al. (2014) suggestion that when men feel threatened and incompetent in their roles, they exert violence as a way of showing dominance.

5.2. Men's constructions of masculinity in the #MAT threads on Reddit from January 2019 to January 2021

Throughout the threads men broadly constructed masculinity in relation to the movement as either unfairly under attack or needing to change. Some men in the data felt masculinity needed to be defended and that the good parts of masculinity were being ignored. Other men in the study viewed masculinity as capable of being more responsive and adaptive to female causes. The latter was a more positive construction of masculinity; however, it was not a major theme in the data. Within these broad constructions, however, was a notable complexity with regards to constructions of masculinity in general, within which there were shifting positions of agency and victimhood.

Men who viewed the movement as aggressive and discriminatory became defensive and felt the need to protect masculinity. This was done in one of two ways – either, ironically, there was a tendency to draw on traditionally masculine discourses in response to a threat to identity, or, there was a repositioning of men and masculinity as victims of both attacking women and societal expectations.

Responses that drew on traditional masculine discourses in response to a threatened masculine identity reflected aggression and the assertion of dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Lange & Young, 2019). While responses that refused to be called 'trash' could be said to be men demonstrating healthy boundaries in 'refusing to allow themselves to be insulted', this unfortunately also emphasised men's taken-for-granted ability to do this. Instead of reflecting

on their position of power and felt entitlement to respect, these men rather enacted their male privilege (Johnson, 2014). Other responses that drew on traditional masculine discourses reflected a need to appear rational and unemotional. In a study investigating how men construct anxiety online, Drioli-Phillips et al. (2020, p. 2125) found men constructed themselves as "emotionally detached and rational". Drioli-Phillips et al. (2020) explains that this type of positioning allows men to reclaim and protect their masculinity. This was evident in the current study when men defended masculinity through intellectualisation, in an attempt to maintain their superior masculine status for fear of it being revoked. Drioli-Phillips et al. (2020) explain that gender norms can be a double bind, in that they both secure a man's sense of masculinity but make it more difficult for men to acknowledge anxiety and pain. It was evident that some men in the current study were unable to shift from positions of masculine superiority.

Other men who felt unfairly attacked appeared to construct masculinity as misunderstood. These men perceived the #MAT movement as focusing on the negative aspects of masculinity and not recognising that it is not 'all men' who perpetrate GBV and that not all men identify with ideals of hegemonic masculinity. These men appeared to experience the #MAT movement as implying that there is something inherently bad in being male, and thus constructed masculinity as misunderstood and under attack. Some men felt that masculinity is under attack because men who try aligning themselves with the female agenda are treated poorly in return and consequently feel they are 'damned if we do and damned if we don't'.

Others constructed masculinity as victimised. Wishing to highlight that men can also be victims of violence and rejecting sole blame for GBV, these men called attention to social structures that perpetuate male aggression and dominance. In line with this, some men in the study felt that media have distorted people's perceptions of masculinity and stereotyped men into boxes. In these instances, masculinity was constructed as a set of societal expectations, as opposed to a personal choice. Nanda et al. (2014) explain that the expectations created by gender norms link masculinity with aggression. In line with feeling like victims of the #MAT movement and feeling the need to defend masculinity, men in this study felt the media have distorted people's perceptions of masculinity. Participants in the study by Graaff and Heinecken (2017) illustrated these stereotypes by remarking on the pressure they felt to achieve certain masculinities – aggression, violence against women, being a financial provider and authority in the home. Some men in the study positioned men more directly as victims alongside women, in addition

to being victim to expectations of masculinity. Some men in the data felt forgotten as victims of GBV. A reason for this is suggested by Lange and Young (2019), who argue that male victims of sexual violence are silenced for fear of being labelled weak or unmanly. Waling and Pym (2019) explain that this is linked to ideals of masculinity that encourage the internalisation of emotions and externalisation of behaviours. Again this demonstrated the pressure to achieve masculine stereotypes. These men appeared to feel victimised by societally constructed expectations of masculinity and in line with this position of little agency, shifted responsibility onto social structures that allow for male dominance over women. This can be understood by Lange and Young (2019) and Gabriel et al. (2016) who explain that the patriarchal system enables, accepts and maintains structural violence and gender inequality. In spite of gender being socially formed, Butler (1988, cited in Graaf & Heineken, 2017) argues that individuals are active in choosing their gender identity, shifting the responsibility of male dominance over women away from social structures and back onto men. By constructing masculinity as a structural set of expectations to which men are victim, men appeared to be avoiding personal responsibility. Interestingly, Hamburger et al. (1996, cited in Graaff & Heinecken, 2017) report that sexual aggression is most common in patriarchal societies that hold fixed, traditional gender roles including the acceptance of violence and dominance in men.

For the group of men who did not identify with ideals of hegemonic masculinity, the #MAT movement appeared to feel particularly unfairly attacking. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain, however, that men who do not enact ideals of hegemonic masculinity but who benefit from patriarchy demonstrate a complicit masculinity. This group of men and compliance of women contribute to the upholding of the concept of hegemony. This suggests the need for these men to reflect on their role in male dominance of women as opposed to immediately becoming defensive of masculinity. However, Lange and Young (2019) explain that because men do not feel in control of their masculine status, forgoing the fantasy of male superiority is difficult when there is no other way to validate masculinity.

The need to defend masculinity can be explained by its "elusive and tenuous nature" (Vandello et al., 2008, p. 1326). Masculinity is not a developmental certainty, and once achieved it can be lost at any time (Vandello et al., 2008). Therefore, achieving a status of masculinity means constantly proving one's maleness, this is evidenced in the data by how men assume a superior position and bully men who support the #MAT movement. Due to the precariousness and ever-

changing ideals of masculinity, it is interesting to think about what these men think they are defending? Particularly on an online forum where people from various cultures interact.

As mentioned in the literature review, the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (MMM) is a movement born in response to the Feminist-Friendly Movement (FFM) that called for devoted support of the feminist agenda. Men of the MMM feel that women, in advocating for feminist rights, are in turn oppressing men – i.e., attempting to fight oppression with further oppression (Gremillion, 2011; Heinrich, 2014; Kimmel & Kaufman, 1993). This is a sentiment shared by many men in the present study who felt the #MAT movement is discriminating and attempting to fight abuse (GBV) with abuse. Echoing the sentiments of the majority of men in the present study, men's rights advocate Warren Farrell (1993, citied in Heinrich, 2014) claims men, not women, are the true victims of institutional, cultural and social norms. He uses examples of male discrimination and oppression such as dating rituals, sexist media coverage, divorce settlements, false rape accusations, sexual harassment and domestic violence as evidence for this (Heinrich, 2014). Heinrich (2014) astutely comments that Farrell's claims are a desperate attempt to salvage patriarchal hegemony and are borne from men feeling disrupted and destabilised by feminism. This again supports Vandello et al. (2008), Johnson (2014) and Lange and Young's (2019) notion of the precarious nature of masculinity and the underlying pressure and anxiety men feel to maintain it. There was no evidence in the data that men in this study were unsure about their feminist identity as Silver et al. (2019) suggested. However, Silver et al.'s (2019) notion of the importance of acknowledging various men's groups because of the implications for how feminism is taught to men and how activists involve men in feminist agendas is applicable to the ways in which men have constructed masculinity in the present study.

Converse to feeling the need to defend masculinity, some men in the present study took a more holistic view of the movement and constructed masculinity as needing to change and be responsive to other movements. These men viewed themselves as allies of women and were able to acknowledge the privilege that comes with being male, their role in sexism and GBV, and grapple with the complex feelings associated with the #MAT movement. In this way, these men were able to recognise harmful aspects of masculinity without defensively attacking back and acknowledged that there are aspects of masculinity that need transforming in a way that allows for masculinity to exist in greater harmony and equality with femininity. These men emphasised the need for masculinity to survive the necessary discomfort the movement brings,

in order to reflect on one's complacency and/or compliance in violence towards women. These men constructed a masculinity capable of empathising with women's positions, that needs to be mindful of how their responses are experienced by women without silencing themselves.

Reflecting on men's contributions to GBV without being direct perpetrators, men in the present study who constructed masculinity as needing to change argued for the importance of calling out microaggressions against women. Johnson (2014) explained this position: that while men may disagree with violent or discriminatory acts, many become complicit by remaining silent to maintain their own masculine status. These men feel the need to encourage the calling out of microaggressions because it appears that many men in this study have a narrow definition of GBV that does not include less obvious violent acts. Lange and Young (2019) explain that violent acts include male behaviours such as: ignoring sexist humour, intimidation by violating personal space, patronising language and actions toward women, persistent commentary on physical appearances and domination in conversation. It also includes the way men ridicule others using female references such as 'girl', 'pussy' or 'mama's boy' (Johnson, 2014). Interestingly Wigglesworth et al. (2015), in a study that explored men's attitudes and perceptions toward gender equality and violence, found that although gender equality was widely supported by men, their understandings of these concepts were relatively superficial and often resulted in contradictions between attitudes displayed and actual acceptance of changes in gender roles. Wigglesworth et al. (2015) found participants perferred to maintain traditional gender roles which all men to retain power associated with masculinity. This alludes to the fact that because the men in this study were discussing the #MAT movement on an online forum, it may be easier to communicate a 'responsible masculinity' in writing than it is to embody and act on it. The data also showed men's construction of masculinity is partially founded on 'projecting' femininity onto other men (Frosh et al., 2003).

The FFM consists of men who are in support of the feminist agenda and hopes to encourage male self-reflection to recognise unearned gender privileges and challenge male supremacy and institutional misogyny (Heinrich, 2014). In his publications, Larry May advocates for a more Moderate Men's Movement, and charges men to recognise their gender privilege and reflect on their own complicity in discrimination and oppression against women. May also cautions men not to forget the value that men have contributed to society (Heinrich, 2014). In the present study, these charges are echoed in the 'responsible masculinity' position and demonstrate men's movement towards a more holistic understanding of masculinity. The

sentiments by May reflected the challenge experienced by many of the men in the present study, who were cognisant of respecting women's freedom of speech without silencing male voices and labelling all aspects of masculinity as negative and harmful. While attempting to engage with issues of GBV, men who constructed masculinity as needing to change shared similar sentiments to those expressed by Heinrich (2014) when he questioned whether feminism has included men in the conversations around reconceptualising gender or whether it has alienated and disregarded men.

The findings of this study have reflected the three movements of masculinity. The analysis showed that some men in the present study felt victimised by the #MAT movement and passionately supported ideals and positions held by the MMM. Few men in the present study were solely advocates of the feminist, anti-sexist agenda described by the FFM. Another group of men in the data grappled with the complexity of the #MAT movement and ideals of masculinity. These men demonstrated a desire to be allies of women and encouraged male self-reflection of gender privilege and complicity in female discrimination and oppression without silencing themselves and completely renouncing their masculinity, demonstrating ideals of the Moderate Men's Movement. The complexity of the ways in which masculinity was constructed in this study appeared to attest to the difficult positioning of men in the world today and its attendant anxiety – attempting to renegotiate masculinity without further oppressing women or alternate forms of masculinity.

5.3. Men's constructions of women who participate in the #MAT movement on Reddit from January 2019 to January 2021

Interestingly, all women who support the movement were viewed as feminists, however, splits in this construction were evident; women were either reasonable or radical feminists. Reasonable feminists were understood as women who are moderate in their combative support of the movement. Radical feminists were seen as out to annihilate men and who were driving support away. Men demonstrated suspicions about women's true motives of the movement. A deeper interpretation reveals that men were constructing women as powerful and threatening. This is further evidence of an underlying anxiety in the men in the present study. These results suggest that the way men in the present study constructed women is similar to those found in a study conducted by Haddock and Zanna (1994), in which the most common response from men when asked what emotions emerge when they think about or see a typical feminist, was

anger, followed by disgust and annoyance. Men in both studies appeared to believe that the feminist agenda does not include equality.

Some men also viewed women who support the movement as needing explanations and education around certain topics; this could be seen by their patronising tone in response to female Redditors. In this way, some men constructed women as inferior and less intelligent. This stood in contrast to Haddock and Zanna's (1994) study, where the majority of men believed that feminists were intelligent and determined. The current study reflected much more ambivalence, which may be indicative of male anxiety around loss of the role and meaning of masculinity and feeling a need to establish themselves as superior and capable.

Johnson (2014, p. 13) explained that men are expected to be "in control at all times, to be unemotional (except for anger and rage), to present themselves as invulnerable, autonomous, independent, strong, rational, logical, dispassionate, knowledgeable, always right, and in command of every situation, especially those involving women". Johnson (2014) explained that these characteristics of men are valued more and therefore justify male privilege and that women are expected to be, in relation to men, the opposite of these qualities. At times in the data, women were constructed as irrational, childish, and toddler-like in their ability to manage their emotions. This was accompanied by the idea that women who support #MAT need to be ignored, so as not to reinforce or reward bad behaviour. The implication is that these kinds of women need to be managed, 'kept in line' or controlled. Nanda et al. (2014) corroborate this view by describing that in society certain types of masculinities such as male dominance and female submissiveness are valued. Nanda et al. (2014) contend that IPV is used to maintain this power imbalance and that violence against women is intimately linked to a real (or perceived) fulfilment of masculinity. This is evident in the present study by men's support of reasonable feminists who are viewed as less combative and more rational. Johnson (2014) explains that control is synonymous with a system of privilege which requires control and oppression of the other to sustain its privileged position. The masculine need for control underlies the inherent unstable nature of masculinity. Because men fear exclusion from the ingroup or their masculine status being revoked they attempt to control the women to maintain their masculine status among male peers (Johnson, 2014). Control of women by men in the present study is evident in men's decision to only support reasonable feminists and in their constructions of women as radical feminists. Constructing women as radical feminists 'others'

women for behaving in a way that disrupts men's masculinity. Interpreting this further revealed the anxiety underlying the need for control. The anxiety present in men in this study suggests they were constructing women as powerful and threatening, possessing the ability to disrupt men's position of privilege. In the present study, men acted out their anxiety with an attempt to control women, which Lange and Young (2019) describe an alternate position of women – that women have become the maternal comfort within the dynamic of male fear and control, as men cannot easily access this part of themselves without exposing weakness in their manhood. While this positioning of women was not directly evident in this study, women were still constructed as having the power to affirm masculinity. In this study this was evidenced at times where women were simultaneously 'objectified' as sources of sex, but constructed as powerful in their capacity to withhold this form of affirmation. Men who were belittled for supporting the movement were accused of trying to win sexual favour from women. The irony in this, is that women were still constructed as powerful in their ability to give or withhold 'masculinity-affirming' favour.

A risk factor for GBV is the belief in traditional gender roles that support female inferiority (Kaufman et al., 2019). Several studies report a backlash of violence against women as women begin to move away from traditional gender roles or challenge men (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Sovann, 2019). This is synonymous with the Johnson's (2014) argument around the male need for control and Vandello et al.'s (2008) explanation of men's responses to threatened masculinity. As women in the present study (represented through the #MAT movement) moved out of a traditional gender role of submissiveness and demonstrated agency and confidence by advocating for women's rights, men, who felt threatened in their position of masculinity, retaliated by attempting to control the narrative. Men attempted to control the narrative by labelling these women as radical feminists and by expressing suspicions about women's true motives, eluding to dishonest and cunning intentions. Such behaviours are considered by Lange and Young (2019) as violent acts. Lange and Young (2019) and Nanda et al. (2014) hypothesise that men feel threatened and incompetent in their roles and exert violence as a way of showing dominance.

Men's constructions of women in this study supported Heinrich's (2014) description of men's constructions of feminism: while some have viewed feminism's influence on gender reconceptualisation in a positive light, others viewed it as alienating and disregarding men in

the gender conversation (Heinrich, 2014). Messner (1997 cited in Heinrich, 2014) calls out the latter group (associated with the ideals of MMM) for their sense of hurt and outrage when women do not agree that men suffer similar issues to women. Messner explains that this has resulted in this group embracing "an angry and aggressive anti-feminist men's right discourse and practice" (Heinrich, 2014, p. 242). Heinrich (2014) comments that this response comes from a group of men who perhaps feel unfairly attacked by the feminist movement. The men in this study's ambivalence towards women, as evident in their conflicted constructions of women, is echoed in their constructions of the movement.

5.4. Men's constructions of the #MAT movement on Reddit from January 2019 to January 2021

On the whole, the men in this study constructed the movement as damaging. A relatively small number of men in the present study viewed the movement as helpful and necessary in raising awareness and making progress towards ending GBV. The movement was viewed as damaging in that it stereotypes all men as perpetrators. In response to supporters of the movement who argued that this understanding misses the intention of the movement, men argued that the hashtag and its message are unclear and therefore ineffective. Many men maintained that the movement is an example of a lazy generalisation, which is additionally illustrative of the inferior and less intelligent construction of women in the present study.

Again, there was complexity in the constructions of the #MAT movement. Some men acknowledged the importance of the movement and want to be allies of women. However they felt the aggressive language of the movement is attacking an alienating, in that it shifts all blame and responsibility onto men and causes division. Many men felt that rather than uniting the sexes in a common goal of ending GBV, the movement fights sexism with sexism and is perpetuating a cycle of abuse and division. It was felt that this left men in the difficult position of respecting women's right to freedom of speech at the expense of silencing their own emotional responses. Fewer men in the present study constructed the movement as a means to create awareness and a discussion, in the hopes that men reflect on their own behaviour and call out microaggressions towards women. The discomfort generated by the provocative hashtag was constructed by these men as a necessary part of social change.

As mentioned previously, there is limited research on men's responses to GBV and on their responses to feminist movements or feminism. This makes it difficult to contextualise how men are constructing the #MAT movement. Founders of the social media activism #MeToo and #TimesUp describe disruption of sexist structures and exposure of gender power imbalances as the goal of these movements (Lange & Young, 2019). It is clear from the results of the present study that the #MAT movement attained the goal of exposure of gender dynamics, however, it is unclear how much disruption of sexist structures was achieved. Men in the present study largely constructed the movement as damaging and, in many instances, this appeared to result in the adoption of unhelpful defensive positioning. As described throughout this discussion, this was largely in response to a perceived threat which caused an angry and victimised response in men. Many men felt their masculine status had been threatened. Underlying this is anxiety, which appeared to be related to the precarity of masculinity and an existing need to constantly re-establish masculinity for fear of it being revoked (Johnson, 2014; Vandello et al., 2008). This existing anxiety seemed to be exacerbated by the disruption of masculine power and exposure of complicity of the #MAT movement.

While there is limited direct research on men's emotional responses to feminist movements, responses can be inferred from other research, such as men's violent retaliation to feminist advocacy. Research has shown a violent retaliation from men towards women as women begin to move away from traditional gender roles or challenge men (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Sovann, 2019). It is suggested that this response to feminist advocacy is present in this study in that the #MAT movement appeared to evoke defensive positioning that reinforced patriarchal structures, such as dismissal and derogation of women and attention being drawn to men's needs. While there was only one explicit reference to using physical violence against women in response, the dataset was littered with implicit violence. As in existing studies, these men's violent response appeared indicative of underlying anxiety about their masculine status (Johnson, 2014; Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Vandello et al., 2008). It is suggested that in feeling destabilised in their masculine roles, men in this study consequently constructed the #MAT movement as harmful. The splits that were evident in the way that men constructed women appears to also inform their construction of the #MAT movement. Constructing the majority of women who support the movement as radical feminists out to annihilate men, appeared linked to men's construction of the movement as harmful and attacking. As discussed in the previous section, men appear to desire feminine

approval and affirmation of their masculinity. A movement like #MAT appears to represent an extreme in the withholding of masculinity-affirming favour, rather representing direct disapproval. It is this threat to masculinity that appeared to elicit defensive responses such as splitting.

Heinrich (2014) described three men's movements in response to the force of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. Responses to feminism caused a split among men – some men became advocates for and allies of the feminist agenda (FFM); others responded in defensive of masculinity and denounced feminism for fighting female oppression with male oppression, perpetuating its cycle (MMM) (Heinrich, 2014). A third, more recent men's movement is developing, the Moderate Men's Movement which encourages balance and moderation in standards and ideals of masculinity (Heinrich, 2014). This response and split among men was echoed in the present study by men's constructions of the movement. While this wasn't an even split, two constructions of the movement occurred. A smaller group of men demonstrated allyship with the women and supported the #MAT movement, encouraging male self-reflection of complicity and unearned gender privileges reflecting the ideals of the Moderate Men's Movement. The majority of men in the present study, however, demonstrated allegiance with the principles of the MMM in that #MAT movement was constructed as demeaning, stereotyping and discriminating of men.

This split in responses, and indeed the splitting evident throughout the data, draws attention to an important, perhaps insidious process that appears to underlie engagement with issues of GBV. Interestingly, it was revealed most clearly through the researcher's reflection on her own responses to the data. The repetitiveness of the 'not all men' and victimised responses in the data caused irritation in the researcher while conducting the analysis. These 'whining' responses seemed to elicit the 'critical, angry feminist' parts of the researcher. Interestingly, upon reflection, the irritation evoked by the victimised responses may be thought about as enactment of a victim-perpetrator cycle, where due to defensive splitting, one is either a victim or a perpetrator at any given time (both sides' victimhood cannot be acknowledged or held in mind simultaneously), and the potential for both co-exist cannot be acknowledged (Siegel & Forero, 2012). When the men in the study could not simultaneously engage with both their victim and perpetrator parts, this splitting appeared to evoke a complementary or similarly split response in the researcher. This dynamic may also explain why some men appeared to become

critical and attacking towards what they perceive as women 'whining' or 'yapping' about their female victimhood. It is significant to note that this process of splitting is implicated more broadly in the processes of GBV and IPV (Siegel & Forero, 2012). It was only towards the end of the analysis that the researcher gained a deeper understanding of men's position in relation to this movement. Understanding all that that evokes brought out an empathy in the researcher for the difficult position of men in the world today, which ultimately allowed for a more complete understanding of the responses.

One can speculate on the success of the #MAT movement. This study found that the meanings, understandings and consequences of the #MAT movement are still in process and being negotiated. If the intention of the movement was to disrupt, it has accomplished that. It is clear from the results of this study that the movement has unsettled men in various ways – some have become angry and attacked back, others have been able to assess the intentions and implications of the movement from a more distanced position. Both of these outcomes demonstrate a disturbance in the status quo of patriarchy. It is clear that the #MAT movement has disrupted the power relations between men and women. If the intention of the movement was to end GBV, it has not accomplished that. However, it has been successful in creating awareness of GBV and men's complicity in staying silent and committing microaggressions against women. The #MAT movement was also effective in revealing toxic masculinity – men's sense of entitlement to respect, being treated well and affirmed. These hard exposures are necessary to bring about social change. However, the movement is also explicitly aggressive and there are signs of trauma in men's responses. The results of the present study revealed that the movement is part of a bigger process of disrupting gender power relations. The movement is calling out blindness to the dynamic – it is the beginning of change and with that comes a range of emotions including anger and shame. Disruption is necessary in the process of social change; reconciliation will hopefully come later.

5.5. Implications of the study

The split in men's constructions of the #MAT movement that were found in the present study supports other findings that in order to combat GBV men needed to be included in the conversation and interventions (Gabriel et al., 2016; Lange & Young, 2019; Wigglesworth et al., 2015). While some men in the present study who demonstrated support of the movement did not construct the movement as damaging nor did they have angry or threatened responses

to the movement, the majority of men in the study perceived #MAT as attacking and responded defensively, often in ways that elicited the very behaviour women wish could change. While eliciting abusive responses from men may indeed effectively draw attention to toxic masculinity, it may perpetuate dynamics of shame and abuse. This suggests, that to win men's cooperation in the fight against GBV men need to not feel threatened. This was explained by Cheryan et al. (2015) who suggested that removing the threat to or validating men's masculinity (highlighting more diverse forms of masculinity) may assist men in aligning themselves with feminine and egalitarian issues. Men need to be included in GBV interventions because as Thulin et al. (2020, p. 2) explain, interventions focused on women only "reinforce the hegemonic gender-binary view" that GBV excludes men and is a female problem.

The present study also highlighted the importance of recognising intrapsychic defensive processes that may forestall change. This study finds that in response to a threat, defensive splitting may in fact reinforce the dynamic repetitive process, where the cycle of abuse and oppression is repeated – women, feeling abused by men, respond with aggression from the position of victim, to which men, feeling abused by women, respond either as aggressors or also as victims, which in turn provokes more aggression and rejection from women, and the cycle continues, with no change or sense of progress. This suggests that perhaps what is needed is a way to disrupt the defensive processes associated with the conversation about these issues, not only the hegemonic structures.

5.6. Recommendations for future research

This study has contributed to the literature on GBV by exploring men's emotional responses to GBV. While some literature has explained the violent retaliation from men to feminist advocacy as a reaction from men feeling threatened, incompetent and experiencing a reduced sense of control, and exerting violence to re-establish and reaffirm dominance (Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014), an important finding of this study is the underlying anxiety present in the majority of men's responses and the attention drawn to the intrapsychic defences to threat that appear to perpetuate cycles of attack and victimisation present in GBV and IPV, that seem to be repeated in protests and responses to these protests. Future research that aims to further understand this anxiety and these processes would be beneficial. While in-depth interviews may assist in gathering more detail around anxiety and defensive processes, these may not access sufficient honesty.

Research gathered on men's responses to GBV from in person interviews would be helpful in understanding the benefit of this study's methods – using online data which allows for a greater degree of honesty from participants in that their posts are anonymous and limited involvement from the researcher in collecting the data. This would be helpful in understanding the implication of researcher involvement in honest participation of participants in topics around gender, anger and shame.

Future quantitative research may also explore the efficacy of feminist movements such as the #MAT movement, and other social media activism.

It is suggested that further investigation be conducted into the effectiveness of the ideals of the Moderate Men's Movements to inform GBV interventions and current discourses on masculinity. Several men in the present study commented on the impact the demeaning and stereotyping language of the #MAT movement has on younger generations (both boys and girls). Research into this would help inform GBV interventions.

5.7. Limitations of the study

The findings of this study should be considered in the context of its limitations. There is potential bias in the interpretations of the data. Firstly, from the researcher's positioning as a white female and secondly, from the fact that the data was gathered from an open website, which means the meaning of responses made by participants could not be clarified by the researcher. The generalisability of this study is questionable because the geographic location, age, race (and sometimes sex) of the participants is largely unknown, unless revealed in their comments on the threads. As noted by Amaya et al. (2019) characteristics of the majority of Redditors, American men aged between 18 and 29, are not comparable to the general population. The qualitative nature of this study also limits the generalisability of the results. To mitigate these limitations, a quantitative study would allow for generalisation as this would include demographics such as ages, races and cultures. This would allow for an understanding of how men in different settings and of different ages are constructing and responding to feminist advocacy. Further limitations included self-selection bias and social desirability. Redditors choose which threads to comment on and which subreddits to join. Social desirability plays a role in what content Redditors contribute because users can upvote and downvote

comments which gives Redditors ‘karma points’ – this can influence people’s responses in order to gain karma points, or in order to cause outrage by posting provocative content. A final limitation of the study is that only English posts could be included, this may have limited some cultural understandings of the data.

6. Conclusion

The prevalence of GBV has caused the UN to declare it a global pandemic (Lange & Young, 2019). The cause of GBV is women's unequal position in society (Blanc, 2001; Jewkes et al., 2010); linked to this unequal position are gender norms and the expectation of men to achieve certain masculinities. Research has argued for the inclusion of men in targeting GBV by challenging traditional social and cultural norms around gender (Gabriel et al., 2016; Lange & Young, 2019; Wigglesworth et al., 2015). This has resulted in a difficult position for men in today's world – feeling pressure to be part of the conversation about gender relations and masculinity but feeling threatened that masculinity is under attack and their position in society is being questioned. These threatened feelings have been linked to a reduced sense of control and exerting violence to re-establish and reaffirm dominance (Lange & Young, 2019; Nanda et al., 2014; Vadnello et al., 2008). Understanding the need to include men in the conversation and interventions for GBV and the resultant necessity of understanding men's responses to GBV, this study aimed to contribute to the limited research on men's responses to GBV. Adding to this body of knowledge, the present study analysed men's responses to the #menaretrash (#MAT) movement on Reddit. This study aimed to provide insight into how men are constructing masculinities in relation to a movement against GBV. An interpretation of their responses to GBV and the #MAT movement aimed to contribute to the future studies on the effective development of GBV interventions.

This study found that the predominant emotion expressed by men in the study was anger. Hurt and shame as an overt expression was not common in the data. However, it did underly much of the expressed anger. The anger expressed was predominantly defensive and with a deeper analysis it was revealed that anxiety was the underlying emotion throughout the data. Men felt the #MAT movement threatened their masculine power and hegemonic masculinity. Underneath this aggressive need to protect masculinity lies an anxiety about their masculine status and their meaning as men in society.

Men in the present study constructed masculinity in two different ways – some constructed it as unfairly under attack and others constructed it as needing to change. The majority of men viewed masculinity as under attack. Men felt the #MAT movement was aggressive and discriminatory. As such men felt they needed to protect and defend their masculinity. Other men recognised men's role in GBV and grappled with the difficult emotions this raised. These

men tried to be self-reflective and acknowledge their unearned gender privilege whilst also recognising the flaws of the #MAT movement. In trying to gain allyship to the female agenda, women have alienated men with the aggressive language used in the hashtag. These men tried to be mindful of how their responses may be experienced by women and tried to respect women's freedom of speech, without silencing themselves.

The results of this study indicated that men constructed women in the study as either reasonable or radical feminists. Reasonable feminists are those worthy of support because they are moderate in their combative support of the movement. Radical feminists, however, are those determined to annihilate men and alienate them from joining the cause of ending GBV. A deeper interpretation reveals that men are constructing women as powerful and threatening. This is further supported in their constructions of masculinity and their angry emotional responses and is again indicative of an underlying anxiety around a loss of role and meaning of masculinity and needing to establish themselves as superior and capable. As a result, it is not surprising that the majority of men on Reddit constructed the #MAT movement as damaging. There was a relatively small number of men who constructed the movement as beneficial in raising awareness and contributing to the process of ending GBV.

Considering these ambivalent responses, it is clear that the processing of the #MAT movement is still being negotiated. The movement managed to disturb and create awareness and conversations around gender power relations and masculinity and exposed toxic masculinity. However, it is important not to overlook that the data did reveal some 'fight or flight' responses from men, which indicates that the movement is being experienced as traumatic. While disruption is necessary for social change, including men in the conversations and interventions is the only way to end GBV. Therefore, it is also important for women to consider how men are responding to their activism in order to secure men as allies in the fight to end GBV. As Heinrich (2014, p. 251) says: "if our aim is to bring men and women together in the spirit of open communication and sincere cooperation, we must begin the conversation by engaging boys in these critical processes of gender reflection and reform. We must quite simply give boys permission to speak honestly and without fear about the issues that inform their lives, and then once spoken, listen carefully to what was said".

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Appendix

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MCLIN/21/10W**
PROJECT TITLE:	Men's responses to the #menaretrash movement on Reddit: A social constructionist and psychoanalytic analysis.
INVESTIGATOR	Stroucken Paige (746098)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	11 June 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	No Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2023

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 21 June 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** G.Eagle

(Prof. Gillian Eagle)

Cc: Prof. Katherine Bain (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature **Date** 2 / July / 2021

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

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