

Millennials and Generation Z: Men's Perspectives on Hashtag Feminism

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Abstract

As the U.S. experiences widespread critical examination on gender and patriarchy, it is important for family therapists to learn how men perceive their masculinity amidst this critical discourse. In contemporary politics, feminist activism is largely conducted through social media and hashtag activism and is often called “hashtag feminism.” The feminist hashtags #MeToo, #HeForShe, and #HowIWillChange are well-known symbols of the modern feminist movement. Despite the large role that men and masculinity play in the construction of patriarchy, there is currently little research on how hashtag feminism influences men's perceptions of their own role in gender politics. This interpretive phenomenological study explored how Millennial and Generation Z men perceive the hashtag feminist movement. It also aimed to capture how these men experienced and perceived their masculinity as it related to contemporary gender politics. We conducted interviews with 12 social media-using Millennial and Generation Z men about their experiences of masculinity and hashtag feminism. We found that men's views on hashtag feminism and gender inequality were contradictory and overlapping, changing in response to different contexts. Additionally, findings indicated that participants did not see hashtag feminism as representative of the feminist movement as a whole. Results suggested that features of online activist discourse deterred men from engaging in hashtag feminism. Lastly, results suggested that Millennial and Generation Z men want cultural norms of masculinity to change to integrate the pro-social aspects of traditional masculinity with non-traditional qualities of empathy, emotionality, relationality, and vulnerability. Study discussion reviews clinical implications and research recommendations.

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General Audience Abstract

Gender and patriarchy are undergoing critical examination the United States. In this context it is important for family therapists to learn how men experience masculinity. “Hashtag activism,” or online feminist activism, uses social media to engage in feminist discourse. The feminist hashtags #MeToo, #HeForShe, and #HowIWillChange are well-known symbols of the modern feminist movement. Despite the large role men and masculinity play in patriarchy, there is little research about how hashtag feminism impacts men. However, it is important to gain an understanding of how men see their own role in gender politics. This interpretive phenomenological study explored how Millennial and Generation Z men perceive the hashtag feminist movement. It also aimed learn about how these men experienced and understood their masculinity in the context of contemporary gender politics. We conducted in-depth interviews with 12 Millennial and Generation Z men who use social media. Interview questions were about their experiences of masculinity and hashtag feminism. We found that men's views on hashtag feminism and gender inequality were not divided into separate categories of pro-feminist and anti-feminist. Instead, each participant held multiple viewpoints that overlapped and sometimes contracted each other. These viewpoints depended on the context in which the participant found himself. We also found that participants did not see hashtag feminism as representative of the feminist movement overall. Results suggested that men were disinclined to engage in hashtag activism because of unique features of online activism. Finally, we found that participants wanted masculinity norms to change to include more vulnerable, emotional, and relational qualities. We discussed clinical implications and research recommendations for family therapists.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Setting

As marriage and family therapists, it is important to understand how men perceive their masculinity, especially in the midst of the cultural change and shifts in gender norms happening in the United States (O’Neill, 2015). Masculinity refers to a gender schema usually associated with the male sex (Bem, 1981; Holt & Ellis, 1998). It involves a set of attributes, values, associations, and behaviors that are seen to represent men and male-ness (Bem, 1981; Holt & Ellis, 1998). While masculinity schemas differ across contexts such as culture and time, masculinity is a pervasive and powerful concept that plays a large role in human development, interpersonal relationships, and political organization (Bem, 1981). The ability to identify masculinity, and the power granted to it, is critical to understanding clients’ lives and the contexts they live in (Banyard et al., 2004; Clatterbaugh, 1997; Fabiano et al., 2003; Flood, 2011; Katz, 1995; Messner, 1997; O’Neill, 2015; PettyJohn et al., 2018). Specifically, it is important to explore how men perceive themselves in a time when gender and patriarchy are being examined critically in our cultural discourse (Fox, 2004; Nardini, 2016; PettyJohn, et al., 2018). It is imperative that marriage and family therapists attend to their clients’ experiences of gender and the role that our current political discourse plays in their lives. As systemic therapists, we know that context and relationships are indivisible from our clients’ lives and well-being. It is therefore important to examine how men’s concepts of masculinity were formed, how they are maintained, and the feelings that men have towards them. Additionally, the fraught political context Americans currently face demands an in-depth, exploratory look at how men are perceiving and engaging in online social activism surrounding gender and masculinity.

Social media plays a large role in contemporary social justice activism, including activism concerning gender inequality (Mendes et al., 2018; PettyJohn et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2019). Social media hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo, #HeForShe, and #HowIWillChange have gained widespread attention and have become emblematic of the push for gender equality (Anderson & Toor, 2018; PettyJohn et al., 2018; United Nations, 2019). In this climate, it is important for family therapists to understand how men perceive their masculinity within this discourse. Specifically, Millennial and Generation Z men are likely to be exposed to social media activism because of the high rates of social media usage amongst these age groups (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Dimock, 2019; Jiang, 2018; Milosevic-Dordevic & Zezelj, 2017).

Social media is used to organize and solidify personal identity and sense of self in relation to others (Kende et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2007; Reicher et al., 1995; Schumann & Klein, 2015). Research has shown that social media activism is helpful for activists to establish affiliation with a social cause and identify themselves as proponents of a movement (Kende et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2007; Reicher et al., 1995; Schumann & Klein, 2015). Activists use social media to organize social movements, and social media has become a highly visible tool for disseminating information, recruiting new members, and engaging in discourse around social issues (Fullam, 2017; Lotan et al., 2011; McGarty et al., 2014).

Hashtags

One of the ways in which social media activists communicate their ideas and goals is by using hashtags. A hashtag—a word or phrase denoted by the pound or hash sign ‘#’—was originally conceived as a way of linking a keyword across user posts on the same subject (Rauschnabel et al., 2018). According to Rauschnabel, Sheldon, and Herzfeldt (2018), hashtags serve a variety of purposes, such as broadcasting, marketing, chronicling, information seeking,

etiquette, venting, inventiveness, and self-presentation. The usefulness of hashtagging a post is illustrated by Osman's (2018) finding that the average reach of an Instagram post increases 12.6% when a user adds even one hashtag. As a result, approximately 125 million hashtags are shared daily on Twitter (McGoogan, 2017). Social activists have used hashtags in social media campaigns to promote different causes, from #BlackLivesMatter to #MeToo to #SayHerName (Brown et al., 2017; Cox, 2017; Kunst et al., 2018).

Hashtag Activism

Social media platforms such as Twitter have given rise to viral messaging campaigns often referred to as "hashtag activism" (Lotan et al., 2011; Maas et al., 2018; PettyJohn et al., 2018; Schumann & Klein, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2019). Hashtag activism refers to the use of hashtags to signify participation in a particular social movement. By placing a hashtag related to an activist movement in a social media post, the post joins a body of posts engaging in discourse on that topic (Clark, 2016; Ince et al., 2017; Lokot, 2018).

Hashtag Feminism

Hashtag feminism is hashtag activism that is dedicated to furthering the feminist cause, and within the feminist movement, hashtag feminism is the name given to feminist activism organized through social media (Dixon, 2014). In the feminist and gender justice movements, activists have used hashtags such as #MeToo, #HeForShe, and #HowIWillChange to document their tweets and Facebook posts as part of a larger feminist movement (Anderson & Toor, 2018; Kastein, 2016; Kunst et al., 2018; PettyJohn et al., 2018; United Nations, 2019).

There are also people who use feminist hashtags to oppose feminism. As hashtags are used to connect a user's post to a larger body of messages on a particular topic, users who disagree with the sentiment behind a hashtag can use that same hashtag to connect their

disagreement to discourse surrounding the hashtag (De Cock & Pedraza, 2018; PettyJohn et al., 2018). Feminist hashtags used for activism have therefore also been used on social media by those who disagree with their feminist messaging (PettyJohn et al., 2018). For example, PettyJohn, Muzzey, Maas, and McCauley's 2018 study documented men's tweets using the feminist hashtag #HowIWillChange. They found that some users actively engaged in the hashtagged conversation by tagging anti-feminist messages with #HowIWillChange: ““#HowIWillChange I will not. This 'culture' that women have created doesn't exist. It's fake. Catcalling isn't rape”” (PettyJohn et al., 2018, p. 6). Users who disagree with the premises of feminist activism are therefore also part of hashtag feminist discourse, representing anti-feminist perspectives in a conversation about gender equality.

Rationale for the Methodology

This study will use interpretive phenomenology to explore Millennial and Generation Z men's experiences of hashtag feminism. Phenomenological research aims to capture the “lived experience” of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The phenomenon this study aims to capture is young men's lived experiences of hashtag feminism, as well as how these men experience masculinity. Previous literature on men's experiences of gender activism has recommended conducting research that can gather nuanced data on men's experiences of the intersection of lived experience and ideology (Ben Salah et al., 2017; Harnois, 2017; Kastein, 2016). The use of an interpretive phenomenological approach fits the needs outlined by these recommendations.

Interpretive phenomenology requires that analysis strive to understand and express participants' experiences and place them in context (Larkin et al., 2006). Interpretive phenomenology is not purely descriptive as some would suggest, but requires careful, conceptual

interpretation, as conveyed by its name (Larkin et al., 2006). The aim of interpretative phenomenology is twofold. First, it requires the researcher to express the participant's experience as closely as possible, given the limitation that the description will be a mix of both researcher and participant understandings. Second, it requires the researcher to make a speculative interpretation of the participants' experiences in light of context and theory (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Interpretive phenomenology requires the researcher to become aware of and bracket off her own lenses, biases, and personal values in order to examine data with as much reflexive awareness as possible (Smith et al., 2009).

An interpretive phenomenological approach would be appropriate for this study, as there is currently little to no literature that explores men's experiences of hashtag feminism through detail-rich, personal accounts. This methodology allows for an exploration of Millennial and Generation Z men's lived experiences of coming into contact with hashtag activism as men. It also examines their experiences of being men, the contexts in which these men experience hashtag feminism, and how these two phenomena intersect.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how Millennial and Generation Z men experience hashtag feminism. The questions guiding this study are:

- 1) What does masculinity mean to you?
- 2) What has been your experience of hashtag feminism?
- 3) What effects has hashtag feminism had on you?

Theoretical Framework: Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel's Masculinity Framework

This study will follow Ben Salah, Deslauriers, and Knüsel's masculinity framework, which was based on their empirical study of male gender movement response categories (Ben

Salah et al., 2017). Drawing upon Messner (1997) and Clatterbaugh's (1997) works on masculinity politics, Ben Salah and colleagues (2017) refined and updated Messner and Clatterbaugh's masculinity frameworks (Clatterbaugh, 1997; Messner, 1997). The updated masculinity framework defines three categories of masculinity politics: Defensive, Expressive/Relational, and Radical Profeminist perspectives (Ben Salah et al., 2017). The Defensive perspective presented as support of hegemonic masculinity, in which group members expressed a perception of persecution and injustice towards men. The Expressive/Relational perspective is characterized by critique of traditional male gender roles and the constraints patriarchal definitions of masculinity place on men. The Radical Profeminist perspective strongly criticizes patriarchal privilege and advocated for men to participate in deconstructing oppressive structures in society.

Ben Salah, Deslauriers, and Knüsel also delineate four dimensions that exist within each perspective: (1) an Ontological dimension, (2) a Psychological-Axiological dimension, (3) an Interpersonal dimension, and (4) a Social/Legal dimension (Ben Salah et al., 2017). The Ontological dimension refers to beliefs about innate sex characteristics, which exist on a spectrum between essentialism to constructivism. The Psychological-Axiological dimension relates to internal emotions, beliefs, and thoughts. Its subgroups range from Stoicism, which advocates the emotional restraint typical of traditional masculinity, to Expressive/Reflexive, which values emotional expression and criticism of traditional masculinity, to the Anti-Oppressive subgroup, which values critical analysis of patriarchal gender roles. The Interpersonal dimension refers to attitudes about how men should act towards others, especially women, families, and other men. Finally, the Social/Legal dimension applies to men's roles in society at large, politically, economically, and domestically (Ben Salah et al., 2017). The

proposed interpretive phenomenological study will explore the meanings behind Millennial men's responses to profeminist social media activism. After these meanings are found, findings will be compared to Ben Salah, Deslauriers, and Knüsel's framework to see if men's meanings fit these three response categories.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Activism

Social media is an important tool that individuals use to consolidate their personal identity and organize around social causes. While some scholars have questioned the usefulness of online activism to affect policy and social change in the civic sphere (labeling social media campaigning “slacktivism;” Gladwell, 2010; Milosevic-Dordevic & Zezelj, 2017; Schumann & Klein, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2019), others have shown that social media activism is helpful for consolidating individual identity and group affiliation (Kende et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2007; Reicher et al., 1995; Schumann & Klein, 2015). Reciprocal action between activist group members’ behaviors creates a normative in-group culture, which contributes to the consolidation of group and individual identity (Kende et al., 2016). A social media user’s association with a particular online group or movement establishes their identity as an in-group member. Users are then motivated to take collective action on social media because of the social affirmation that it affords them within their online activist community (Kende et al., 2016).

Penney (2015) found that Facebook profile picture campaigns presented evidence of true civic engagement rather than that of “slacktivism.” Furthermore, he found that social media activism, which is often mimetic and presents low barriers to engagement, serves another function by drawing in users who would otherwise not be involved in activism at all (Penney, 2015). Milosevic-Dordevic and Zezelj (2017) found that online and offline activism created a “hybrid” activism, where each type of activism served a purpose and contributed to each other’s effectiveness. Instead of seeing them as two separate constructs, online and offline activism seemed to be driven by the same factors and contributed to shared results (Milosevic-Dordevic & Zezelj, 2017).

However, social media itself does not spark social activism; it simply acts as a tool (Fullam, 2017). In his 2017 case study of youth activism, Fullam asserts that activism is still fundamentally relational, and the underlying source of its power is in relationships and networks. As argued by Milosevic-Dordevic and Zezelj (2017), social media activism does not exist outside of the underlying activist relationships that exist in the “real world.”

Hashtag Activism

Hashtag activism is a way for individuals to engage in discourse around a particular subject within the space created by social media (Keller et al., 2018; Kuo, 2018; Lokot, 2018). Activists define social issues through online discourse (Ince et al., 2017). One way activists define social issues through online discourse is through the creation and selection of hashtags, which become a centralizing tool and symbol (Ince et al., 2017). By using a shared hashtag, social media creates a space for collective storytelling, especially when users’ stories would be otherwise marginalized or invisible (Bogen et al., 2019; Clark, 2016; Dixon, 2014; Ikizer et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2018). Because of the nature of online discourse, users also engage in counter-storytelling, in which users respond to the stories dominant to a movement by telling their own dissenting narratives (Jackson & Welles, 2015; Jackson & Welles, 2016; Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017).

By organizing many users around a particular issue, hashtag activism creates communities of individuals and groups who are related to each other because of their engagement around a topic (Gruzd & Haythornthwaite, 2013; Jackson & Welles, 2015; Jackson & Welles, 2016; Myrick et al., 2016). These communities are often made up of individuals who would not have been able to make these social connections without social media due to the invisibility of their stories (Keller et al., 2018). As a result, hashtag activism creates a way for

individuals to challenge and critique social norms and institutions and continuously organize around this purpose (Bogen et al., 2019; Lokot, 2018).

Within these online communities, individual users elicit, transmit, and receive social support (Bogen et al., 2019; Dixon, 2014; Myrick et al., 2016). Online discourse is highly affective in nature, relying heavily on emotional language and imagery to portray experiences and opinions (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015; Lokot, 2018; Mueller, 2016; Nikunen, 2018). For the activists relating their stories, hashtag activism is extremely emotional, a fact that is often belied by the brevity of posts (Mendes et al., 2018). Online discourse is discrete and conversational in nature, and audiences cannot assume any knowledge about a user's context when reading a post (Mueller, 2016; Scott, 2015).

Hashtag Feminism

Since the advent of hashtag activism, feminism has taken on a new form as a result of the internet. Hashtag feminism is feminism conducted through social media, and it functions like other forms of hashtag activism through the attributes listed above. As a result of access to the social media frontier, feminism has gained a new platform for discourse and recruitment (Keller et al., 2018; Kuo, 2018; Lokot, 2018; Penney, 2015). One of the ways that activists and opponents of the feminist movement organize their communication is through hashtags that frame feminist issues (Ince et al., 2017; Keller et al., 2018; Kuo, 2018; Lokot, 2018). The following feminist hashtags have focused on drawing attention to hegemonic masculinity and its consequences for gender justice.

#MeToo

#MeToo, created by Tarana Burke in 2006 and popularized by Alyssa Milano in 2017, has been used over 19 million times by social media users to chronicle their experiences of

sexual violence (Anderson & Toor, 2018). The purpose of the #MeToo hashtag was to give victims of sexual assault a uniform signal to alert their social networks of the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault. The movement helped replace the idea that sexual assault only happens to strangers reported in the news with the reality that assault is common and regularly affects people in one's own social network, but only strangers reported in the news (Anderson & Toor, 2018; Kunst et al., 2018). As the most well-known feminist hashtag, #MeToo has become a nearly universal way to reference hashtag feminism and feminist activism generally (Mendes et al., 2018).

#MeToo created a community for survivors of sexual assault and their allies to connect and support one another while challenging the social institutions that perpetuate rape culture (Xiong et al., 2019). However, #MeToo has come under criticism for such things as creating a culture of sexual victimhood, setting off a “witch hunt” for perpetrators of sexual assault, and inciting a “battle of the sexes” (Kunst et al., 2018). While social media is seen by feminists as a safer arena to engage in social activism, the discourse around #MeToo can also lead to conflict and changes in real-life relationships (Mendes et al., 2018). Subsequent to the debate around #MeToo, feminist hashtag activists have tried to engage men using hashtags such as #HeForShe and #HowIWillChange (PettyJohn et al., 2018; United Nations, 2019).

#HeForShe

The United Nations' 2014 campaign #HeForShe makes the argument that the gender equality movement is not just for women and other marginalized groups. Instead, #HeForShe invites men and boys across the globe to commit to gender equality and view gender justice as an issue for all genders (United Nations, 2019). Spearheaded by actress Emma Watson and the United Nations in 2014, the #HeForShe movement quickly gained momentum as a successful

push for gender equality (Edwards, 2017). As of March 2019, the UN's official #HeForShe website boasts over two million pledges to gender equality, 1.3 billion social media mentions, and over 1000 #HeForShe community events (United Nations, 2019). The movement's website names male corporate, political, and academic leaders who have committed to specific institutional goals that will increase gender parity and transparently outlines these missions on its home page (United Nations, 2019).

Men and men's groups have had varied responses to #HeForShe (Bundesforum Männer, 2015; Kastein, 2016). The movement has also received different responses from feminists in mainstream media. *Time Magazine* writer Catherine Young praised #HeForShe's mission of inviting men into the gender equality discussion and exposing the ways hegemonic masculinity hurts men; however, she criticized the hashtag itself for incorrectly framing the mission of #HeForShe (Young, 2014). Others in the feminist movement have asked the movement to demand more of those committed to its cause (Edwards, 2017). Despite these responses in mainstream media, little to no empirical research exists on #HeForShe, its effectiveness, or perceptions of it.

#HowIWillChange

To make the point that men's involvement is critical to achieving gender equality, the hashtag #HowIWillChange invites men to come up with explicit ways to deconstruct and fight hegemonic masculinity in their own lives (PettyJohn et al., 2018). First tweeted by Australian journalist and screenwriter Benjamin Law, #HowIWillChange is a hashtag meant to be used exclusively by men to concretize their contributions to gender equality (Cashin, 2017; PettyJohn et al., 2018; Vagianos, 2017).

Limited empirical research exists on this hashtag. However, one empirical study found that this hashtag was used in three ways by men after its introduction to Twitter (PettyJohn et al., 2018). PettyJohn and colleagues found that men used #HowIWillChange 1) supportively, to describe how they'd contribute to social change; 2) to express resistance to calls for change; and 3) to defensively and aggressively oppose social change (PettyJohn et al., 2018). PettyJohn and colleagues hypothesized that more men engaged with the #HowIWillChange hashtag than with other feminist hashtags because it was initially started by a man. They wondered if this fact made it feel like a safer conversation for men to engage in, but did not explore this further in their study (PettyJohn et al., 2018).

This study will use these three hashtags—#MeToo, #HeForShe, and #HowIWillChange—to characterize the gender equality and profeminist messaging that Millennial men are likely to encounter on the internet.

Contemporary Masculinity Politics

Masculinity politics has been defined as the sociopolitical stances surrounding men and masculinity (Clatterbaugh, 1997; Messner, 1997). Overarching perspectives behind how men perceive their masculinity have been identified and studied across cultural and contextual differences (Ben Salah et al., 2017; Clatterbaugh, 1997; Fox, 2004; Kastein, 2016; Messner, 1997; PettyJohn et al., 2018; Yun, 2018). From these overarching perspectives, Ben Salah and colleagues (2017), identified three categories that men typically adhere to: (1) Defensive, (2) Expressive/Relational, and (3) Profeminist.

Similar trends have been found when looking at men's politics in tweets and hashtag activism (PettyJohn et al., 2018). PettyJohn, Muzzey, Maas, and McCauley (2018) found three categories of responses in an analysis of men's tweets using the hashtag #HowIWillChange.

Tweets were broken into three categories, namely 1) Tweets promoting oppositional attitudes towards social change (Defensive), 2) Tweets expressing indignation over feminism's criticism of traditional gender norms and defending benevolent sexism (Expressive/Relational), and 3) Tweets supporting men's need to take an active role in profeminist social justice (Profeminist) (PettyJohn et al., 2018).

Fox (2004) interviewed members of men's rights activist (Defensive), mythopoetic (Expressive/Relational), and profeminist (Profeminist) men's groups to explore how members of these movements view each other. Findings showed that these groups had little awareness or knowledge of each other, although the men's activist and profeminist groups appeared to develop their group identities in relation to the other's opposing views. Additionally, results showed that the mythopoetic group seemed to have little focus on or relation to political or social justice campaigns, whereas the men's rights and profeminist groups were political in nature. While the men's rights and profeminist groups had negative opinions of each other and mixed opinions concerning the mythopoetics, mythopoetics were generally unaware of the other two groups' existence (Fox, 2004).

While there is existing literature on views in masculinity politics, limited work has been done on how social media influences masculinity politics (PettyJohn et al., 2018). Within the feminist movement, men are seen as critical to deconstructing sexist social structures. Much of the research examining men's engagement with feminism has been focused on how men can help end gender-based violence (Casey et al., 2012; Conlin & Heesacker, 2018; Crooks et al., 2007; Fabiano et al., 2003; Flood, 2015; Katz, 2005; McMahon & Dick, 2011; PettyJohn et al., 2018). However, there is little literature examining how feminist media activism influences men's perspectives on their engagement in gender politics.

Current Study

There is limited understanding in current literature on how men perceive feminist hashtag activism (PettyJohn et al., 2018). The current study aims to capture how Generation Z and Millennial men respond to the hashtag feminist movement.

Millennials (born 1981-1996; Dimock, 2019) and Generation Z (1997-2012; Dimock, 2019) are often represented in social media discourse on gender equality (Jiang, 2018). According to the Pew Research Center, 69% of Americans use some form of social media, and of this group, Millennials and Generation Z are the generations that have the highest rates of social media usage (Jiang, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2018). Millennials and Generation Z also have the highest rate of smartphone usage (92% own a smartphone) and are the most likely to adopt new forms of social media (Jiang, 2018). Furthermore, Millennials and members of Generation Z are more likely than older generations to say that they believe the internet has positively influenced society (Jiang, 2018). Young adults who have grown up using the internet from a young age are likely to use the internet for activist organizing (Mora, 2014; Prensky, 2001).

This study will interview young adult men born between 1981 and 2001—Millennials and adult members of Generation Z—to explore their experiences of and responses to feminist social media activism. Interviews will also explore men's experiences of masculinity. This study will use interpretive phenomenology to explore how men perceive and respond to feminist hashtag activism. The research questions this study will explore are:

- 1) What does masculinity mean to you?
- 2) What has been your experience of hashtag feminism?
- 3) What effects has hashtag feminism had on you?

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Design of the Study

The proposed study will use interpretive phenomenology to explore two goals: 1) how Millennial and Generation Z men perceive hashtag feminism, and 2) explore how these men experience masculinity. Interpretive phenomenology attempts to grasp the “lived experience” of a phenomenon from the participant’s point of view and requires the researcher to interpret results based on theory and context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Larkin et al., 2006). An interpretive phenomenological approach fits this study’s purpose of capturing men’s personal experiences of hashtag feminism and masculinity. Interpretive phenomenology gives a voice to participant experiences rather than using pre-existing categories to define data. This feature of interpretive phenomenology is appropriate for this study so that themes from the data can be compared and contrasted to existing literature on the subject. Data from this interpretive phenomenology will also provide the nuanced, detailed accounts of men’s experiences with hashtag feminism that are currently missing from current literature. This study will work to fill the gap of qualitative research on men’s experiences with feminism that has been pointed out previously by scholars of gender justice (Ben Salah et al., 2017; Harnois, 2017; Kastein, 2016).

Participants

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, the main researcher recruited 12 participants from various locations in the United States (Table 1). To meet eligibility criteria, participants had to 1) identify as male, 2) have been born between 1981 and 2001, and 3) use interactive social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit. These criteria ensured that participants would be able to speak to their experience as men, were members of the Millennial or Generation Z generations, and used or were exposed to social

media. Interviews sought to capture participants’ experience of the hashtag feminism phenomenon from the point of view of a Millennial or Generation Z male. The interview also intended to explore participants’ experiences of masculinity in their unique contexts. Each participant was informed of their rights as an interviewee. Table 1 presents participant demographics, including age, cultural identity, social media platforms used, and political affiliation.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Sex assigned	Gender	Ethnicity	Race	Education Level	Employment Status	Career Field	Relationship Status
Charlie	27	F	M	White	White	Undergrad	Full-time	IT	Single
Paul	27	M	M	Caucasian	White	Undergrad	Full-time	Public Policy	Married
Zach	26	M	M	Persian-American	White	Post-graduate	Student	Physics	Dating
Elijah	24	M	M	White	White	Undergrad	Currently unemployed	Journalism	Single
Thomas	30	M	M	European-American	White	Graduate	Full-time	Healthcare	Married
Sergio	27	M	M	White/Latino	White	Undergrad	Full-time	Business development	Married
Liam	20	M	M	Caucasian	White	Undergrad	Student	Social work	Dating
Brian	18	M	M	White	White	Undergrad	Student	Biology	Dating
Julian	21	M	M	Latinx	Asian	Undergrad	Student	Left blank	Dating
Miguel	21	M	M	Brazilian	Asian	Undergrad	Student	Business and social sciences	Dating
Kai	29	M	M	Filipino	Asian	Undergrad	Full-time	Education (libraries)	Single
Grant	28	M	M	White	White	Graduate	Student	Physical therapy	Single

Participant	Relationship Orientation	Sexual Orientation	Household Income	Social media sites used	Political identification
Charlie	Monogamous	Bisexual	\$25,000-49,999	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Snapchat	Democrat
Paul	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$50,000-74,999	Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat	Other - Centrist
Zach	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$0-24,999	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Personal website	Other - Distributist
Elijah	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$200,000 or more	Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, other – LinkedIn, Muckrack	Democrat
Thomas	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$150,000-199,999	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Blogs – Wordpress, author hosted	Conservative
Sergio	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$100,000-149,999	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat	Democrat
Liam	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$0-24,999	Reddit	Liberal
Brian	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$200,000 or more	Facebook, Snapchat	Conservative
Julian	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$0-24,999	Facebook, Instagram, Reddit	Republican
Miguel	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$0-24,999	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Other - Youtube	Democrat
Kai	Monogamous	Bisexual	\$25,000-49,999	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Blogs - Tumblr	Socialist
Grant	Monogamous	Heterosexual	\$0-24,999	Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Snapchat	Liberal

In accordance with the inclusion criteria, all participants identified themselves as men.

One participant lived on the northern West Coast in the United States, 10 along various parts of the East Coast in the United States, and one in Canada who had previously resided in the United States. All 12 participants identified as monogamous in terms of relationship orientation. 10 identified as heterosexual and two as bisexual. 11 identified as cisgender males, where their gender identity (male) matched their sex assigned at birth (male). One participant identified as transgender, where his gender identity (male) differed from his sex assigned at birth (female).

Nine participants identified as racially White, and three identified as racially Asian. In terms of ethnicity, one identified himself as Persian-American, one as White-Latino, one as

Latinx, one as Brazilian, and one as Filipino. Seven identified as ethnically White, European-American, or Caucasian.

Five participants had a household income of \$0-24,999; two of \$25,000-49,999; one of \$50,000-74,999; one of \$100,000-149,999; one of \$150,000-199,999; and two of \$200,000 or more. Political identification was varied. Two participants identified as Conservative, one as Republican, one as Centrist, one as Distributist, four as Democrats, two as Liberal, and one as Socialist. All participants had at least some undergraduate university experience. Two had graduate school experience and one was in a post-graduate PhD program.

Regarding social media use, 11 participants used Facebook, seven used Twitter, nine used Instagram, seven used Reddit, and seven used Snapchat. The one participant who did not use Facebook also did not use any other social media other than Reddit. Less common social media mentioned were: Tumblr (one participant), YouTube (one participant), WordPress blog, author hosted (one participant), LinkedIn (one participant), Muckrack (one participant), and a personal website (one participant).

Procedures

Recruitment took place at nearby universities and community gathering spaces in the Northern Virginia area, through local therapist and counseling groups, via social media platforms, and by word-of-mouth and snowball outreach using the recruitment scripts from Appendix A. Recruitment scripts were written and disseminated in email, social media, and paper flyer forms. Each format included the (1) Purpose of the study, (2) Inclusion criteria, (3) Compensation information, (4) Institutional affiliation, and (5) Main researcher contact information. Recruitment involved self-screening by potential participants based on the inclusion criteria outlined in each type of recruitment material. Each type of recruitment material stated

that potential participants could contact the main researcher by email or phone to ask further questions or to participate.

Upon contacting the main researcher, the researcher sent each potential participant a copy of the informed consent for them to review via email. Interviews were scheduled more than 48 hours from the time that the consent form was sent via email so that participants would have enough time to review consent before the interview. The researcher requested that the potential participant review the informed consent prior to the scheduled interview. The researcher then worked with the participant to schedule their interview in one of two ways. Interviews could take place in-person at Virginia Tech's Northern Virginia Center or via the phone or video call. All interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription, and interview recordings will be erased one year after the transcription has been completed.

Before conducting the interview, the principal investigator reviewed the consent form with each participant. The researcher asked each participant if they understood all the elements of consent and if the participant had any questions about the consent or interview process. The researcher then obtained informed consent from each participant. If the interview was done in-person, the researcher obtained written consent from the participant on the bottom of the consent form, and the researcher made a copy for the participant's records. If the interview was done remotely via phone or video chat, the researcher obtained verbal consent from the participant.

Data Collection

As stated previously, interviews were conducted either in-person at the Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center or by phone or video call. Interviews occurred between October 2019 and January 2020. Data collection began at the time of the interview after the participant gave informed consent. After giving consent, each participant was asked to fill out an online

demographic survey on the survey platform Qualtrics. This demographic data was used to provide contextual information on the participant.

Initial data collection consisted of a single open-ended, semi-structured interview with each individual participant. The length of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to two hours long. Each interview was audio-recorded on a recording device and was later transcribed for analysis. Audio recordings will be erased one year after audio transcription has been completed. Each interview followed the interview protocol attached in Appendix E. Protocol was centered around three questions (1) What does masculinity mean to you? (2) What has been your experience of hashtag feminism? (3) What effects has hashtag feminism had on you?

Additional questions covered participants' emotional and cognitive responses to feminist hashtag activism and influences on their concepts of masculinity and hashtag feminism. Questions included include how personal identity, context, and community influence participant reactions, and how hashtag feminism has in turn influenced personal identity, context, and community. Each participant was reminded at the start of the interview that they were free not to answer any questions. Each participant was also given a document of referrals to local mental health and emergency services in case the content of the interviews created unforeseen stress, a strong emotional reaction, or a crisis state for the participant. This list of referrals is provided in Appendix F. After the interview was finished, each participant was compensated with a \$20 Amazon gift card.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

In order to ensure participant anonymity, each participant was assigned a numerical ID that was associated with their interview data. All personal information was anonymized within the participant file to further ensure anonymity of data. Each participant was given a pseudonym

in the written analysis to protect their privacy. Participants' true names were removed from audio transcripts and were not used in the published study.

To ensure security and confidentiality of data, all digital and physical study materials were kept in locked locations. Digital participant data was stored in a password-protected file on the main researcher's computer, which is itself password-protected. Any written data and audio recording devices containing audio interview data were stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room at the Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center Campus. Audio recordings are to be destroyed one year after the transcription has been completed. Only those individuals on the study's IRB submission—the principal investigator, student researcher, committee members, transcriptionists, and coders—were allowed to access digital or physical study data.

Data Analysis and Reliability

Upon the conclusion of data collection, interviews were transcribed into written form and coded for themes. The main researcher analyzed both the content of the interviews and the structural and contextual elements of the interview process that held relevant information. Codes were recursively refined and sorted until data was saturated and themes appeared coherent and discrete.

Due to the large sample size, data analysis started with initial coding of all 12 interviews to gather preliminary codes across the corpus of data. Each interview was coded individually and independently. Codes were then compared across interviews in order to find areas of similarity and divergence. As initial coding was conducted, the researcher developed an initial cross-interview codebook. With preliminary themes then marked out, the researcher performed subsequent rounds of coding. The data was coded and re-coded until unique themes emerged and data was adequately saturated.

The coding team, which consisted of the main researcher and two student coders, used triangulation to increase reliability of the data results. What this meant is that all three team members coded the data and then compared their codes to ensure agreement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Padgett, 2008). The two students were enlisted as external coders in addition to the main researcher. These students agreed to keep all data and analysis confidential as per the transcriptionist confidentiality agreement attached in Appendix D. The main researcher and the two student coders shared, compared, and contrasted codes in order to provide multiple perspectives on data content.

Reflexivity and Bracketing

Consistent with phenomenological research methodology, the main researcher engaged in reflexive analysis while conducting data analysis. According to phenomenological methodology, investigators must develop awareness of their own perspectives, biases, and beliefs in order to examine how they may impact interpretation and discussion of data (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A researcher must then delineate and state her biases and lens through a process called bracketing (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Throughout this study, the main researcher engaged in reflection and journaling throughout the research and analysis process in order to develop awareness of her own lenses, biases, and preconceived notions as related to the study. Below are the bracketed results of the researcher's reflections.

I identify as a White, cisgender, bisexual woman. My ethnic and cultural background is Anglo-Saxon, Scotch-Irish, Russian, and Japanese. I have lived in a metropolitan area on the East Coast of the United States for most of my life, and I have spent significant abroad and lived in many different locations in the U.S. Because of this, I have always found value in my relationships with people who are different from me. I am pursuing a master's degree, meaning

that I have the privilege of education and the social and intellectual standing that it affords. I have had access to internet from a young age, and do not face any barriers to technological and social media engagement. I use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Tumblr, and Pinterest as my primary social media outlets, all of which inform my experiences with hashtag feminism and other social justice movements.

My ongoing training as a Marriage and Family Therapy intern means that I am constantly assessing the world through the lens of systems and context. I believe that we are creatures embedded in systems of various sizes. I value relationships and believe that our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and interactions are impacted by the systems we live in, and that conversely, our individual traits impact the greater system. I believe that we have a responsibility to ourselves and others to develop an awareness of our systemic contexts and the roles we play in them. As a feminist family therapist intern, I believe that it is ethically and civically important to reflect on and develop insight into systemic oppression. I believe that it is our civic and ethical responsibility to work as individuals and as a society to change systems when they are detrimental to human life, growth, and relationships. I also strongly adhere to Attachment Theory in understanding human behavior and its underlying emotional logic (Ainsworth, 1964; Ainsworth, 1970; Bowlby, 1958; Bowlby, 1969). This means that I value human relationships, vulnerability, compassion, and emotion. I value and prioritize creating emotionally safe spaces for people, as I believe that we all require safety in order to grow. I believe that difficult emotions like shame and fear drive violence, and I believe that safe, vulnerable spaces are necessary in order for people to acknowledge and process such difficult emotions in order to heal.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Findings

This study explored Millennial and Gen Z men’s experiences of hashtag feminism. Interview protocol aimed to capture participants’ experiences of masculinity, experiences of hashtag feminism, and the impact of hashtag feminism on their lives. Themes required statements from 4 participants in order to qualify. Overall, seven themes were identified (Table 2). Three of the themes were related to the men’s experience of masculinity: masculinity as providing a defensive role in society, men’s lived experience of masculinity, and the desire for an updated version of masculinity. One theme identified systemic influences on men’s concepts of both masculinity and feminism. The last three themes were related to hashtag feminism: how hashtag feminism worked, hashtag feminism’s goals of raising awareness and increasing accountability, and how the attacking tone within hashtag feminism served to undermine its cause. Table 2 presents themes and subthemes within the findings.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes Within Study Findings

Theme	Level 1 Subtheme	Level 2 Subtheme
1. Men: Defenders of society	1.1 Reliability and dependability	
	1.2 Protection and sacrifice	
	1.3 Invulnerability	1.3.1 Rules governing men’s vulnerability 1.3.2 Confidence 1.3.3 Competence and success 1.3.4 Strength 1.3.5 Stoicism
	1.4 Difficulties with vulnerability and intimacy	
2. Participants’ lived experience of masculinity	2.1 Awareness of their own masculinity	
	2.2 Power of masculine gender norms	2.2.1 Men incentivized to conform through rewards 2.2.2 Men pressured to conform through shame and not-enoughness

3. Systemic influences on men’s ideas about masculinity and feminism	3.1 Relationships	3.1.1 Family
		3.1.2 Partners
		3.1.3 Friends
		3.1.4 Role models
		3.1.5 Pop culture
	3.2 Intersections	3.2.1 Gender identity
		3.2.2 Ethnic and cultural background
		3.2.3 Religion
4. How does hashtag feminism work?	4.1 Social media amplified activist voices	
	4.2 In-person and online discourse were different	
	4.3 Levels of interaction with hashtag feminism	4.3.1 Learning about feminism
		4.3.2 Different understandings of feminism
		4.3.3 Level of involvement with hashtag feminism
5. The upsides of hashtag feminism	5.1 Hashtag feminism created awareness	5.1.1 Hashtag feminism started the discussion
		5.1.2 Hashtag feminism exposed problems previously invisible to the privileged
		5.1.3 Hashtag feminism personalized the problem
		5.1.4 Hashtag feminism created connection and understanding
	5.2 Hashtag feminism sought accountability	5.2.1 The need to take responsibility
		5.2.2 Accountability starts with small, actionable changes
		5.2.3 Not taking accountability
		5.2.4 Changing due to fear or desire for approval
6. The downsides of hashtag feminism	6.1 Even profeminist participants were turned off	
	6.2 Attacking further entrenched pro-sexist ideas and behavior	
	6.3 Men felt monolithic treatment denied their humanity	
	6.4 Men found it difficult to find a place in hashtag feminism	
	6.6 Attacking tone was not exclusive to hashtag feminism	
7. Moving towards a new masculinity	7.1 Men’s personal concepts of masculinity differed from traditional masculinity	
	7.2 Hashtag feminism created motivation to act differently	
	7.3 Men needed vulnerability	

Men: Defenders of Society

Every participant in the study reported that their social concept of masculinity is defined by performing the role of defender. Participants explained that this meant they felt their masculinity was defined by being a protector for others and someone that others can rely on. Participants used metaphors such as last line of defense, a rock for others to lean on, and a shepherd to define this role. Subthemes identified within these themes are: 1) reliability and dependability, 2) protection and sacrifice, 3) invulnerability, and 4) difficulties with vulnerability and intimacy (Table 2).

Reliability and Dependability

Participants reported that, as men, it was important for them to be reliable, dependable, and responsible to those around them. According to Julian, a man is “Somebody you should be able to rely on.” Zach described reliability and dependability as a relational aspect of masculinity. He reported that these values are so important to him that they help him determine which relationships to keep in his life:

For me personally I think it still has more of those aspects of stability, or sort of being available for people, or being around ... I potentially make an effort in order to be, say, more available or stable or organized ... Particularly in other men who I dislike I tend to see qualities of unreliability or instability. But it is sort of an element which can come into play with those ideas of stability and reliability. Or dependability. Dependability is a more accurate word.

Kai reported that, from his childhood, the primary masculine roles available to him were to become a father or a priest. Kai described these roles as two different ways of embodying the masculine ideal of caring and providing for others:

In terms of the idea of masculinity—of course, there's always a strong dude that took care of, the hero that took care of his family. But the idea, the more ... prevalent issue would be like, a man who can take care of their family and their needs in many different ways. Essentially, the other idea was like a spiritual guide in terms of, “Oh, you'll be a Shepherd to your people,” like being a priest or that sort of thing. And that was something that was very heavily instilled in terms of values. And so growing up as a kid, I didn't know whether or not I should be a dad, settle down and have kids, and have a decent-paying job ... and the other was the Catholic priest thing.

Brian said that it was important to be a reliable base for other people, and that conversely, it was important not to rely on others: “Being successful. Not really relying on others. Almost having others rely on you.”

Protection and Sacrifice

Participants also described the role of protector as an important part of masculinity. Charlie stated that the protector role extends into the physical realm, where it can involve physical labor and protection: “Physical labor and protection are the things I think of most often...I will be a body that will stand here and won't think twice if someone's being mistreated.” Thomas discussed the many contexts where men are expected to play a protective role. He described taking pride in the role of protector and what it means for him to be masculine:

For me, masculinity is around protection of the weak, which is very chivalric, but even like protector of the house, protector of the home, the family. And that's both in a physical form, but also like, the mental-political platform as well. So like thinking social media and mom-shaming, masculinity to me is actually like, defending your wife on

those as well. So it truly is like the circler of wagons, the one who kind of makes the stand...But that ability to kind of provide that rock is masculinity for me.

Brian reported that, for him, sacrificing for others is a primary characteristic of masculinity. He included being helpful and kind as important parts of this sacrificial role: "Doing the right thing, sacrificing yourself for someone else. Just like, putting others before yourself. Just like, help out...also just being kind every single day."

Invulnerability

Participants reported that masculinity is, in many ways, characterized by invulnerability. Invulnerability refers to the ability to withstand all attack and difficulty without being hurt or weakened in any way. According to participants, this invulnerability applied to men's emotional, financial, physical, and relational well-being. The men described how there is social pressure on men to be, act, and appear invulnerable in all of these spheres of life. Participants stated that this invulnerability was manifested through different traits men are expected to maintain, such as confidence, competence, strength, and stoicism. This invulnerability was related to the defensive, reliable, and protective role men are expected to play, as vulnerability would mean that a man had failed as a defender. Within invulnerability, five subthemes were identified that illustrated how invulnerability was enacted: 1) rules governing men's vulnerability, 2) confidence, 3) competence and success, 4) strength, and 5) stoicism.

Rules Governing Men's Vulnerability. The first subtheme related to participants' sense that their vulnerability as men had to conform to certain rules. Thomas reported feeling strict parameters around when he and other men are permitted to feel and express vulnerable feelings, such as sadness:

There's like five times where I think it's for a man to cry socially. The death of his dad, the death of his mom, the death of a kid, the loss of a job, and maybe the birth of his child. And those are kind of the only socially acceptable times.

Charlie stated that discussing vulnerable topics with other men feels un-masculine. He reported using mostly anonymous social media forums, such as Reddit, to discuss and share his feelings about masculinity and its behavioral requirements. Regarding whether he has discussed these sentiments with other men:

Sure, yeah. Less so in public because of the same pressures that we would feel [about not sharing too intimately and behaving un-masculinely], but definitely something that I see on social media, on Reddit and on other places. "I don't like that I feel nervous about doing X thing in public because I don't want to be judged." And it's pretty like, innocuous. Like, is it weird to go get ice cream by myself, and you can definitely get ice cream. Like some weird, sad stuff. And I was like, it sucks that it is so limiting.

Elijah reported his awareness that others see masculinity as tied up by rules around vulnerability. He described how this trait has come under fire from recent criticism of traditional masculinity and a new cultural emphasis on empathy and vulnerability:

Masculinity to me—it seems like someone who is the person who's, um, not exposing themselves to as much vulnerability. So maybe it's, it's really something that some.. the opposite of vulnerability? Um, but then again just like, the word um.. I think things do have.. different kind of coded meanings these days, so if someone said to me, "Yeah, this friend of mine has like, a very masculine personality," I'd also see that it's kind of a signal that maybe they are a little bit... um, like it would raise a little bit of a flag, like kind of,

"Okay, maybe this person is very, maybe they're very bro-y in a sense, maybe they're very, um, uh, you know, all about... Maybe they're dismissive or less empathetic. Um. Masculinity seems not empathetic is what it seems to be coded as these days.

Confidence. One way that participants felt invulnerability was to be expressed was through confidence. Confidence refers to a feeling of positive self-worth in relation to the world. This included their internal sense of self-confidence as well as the way men expressed themselves outwardly. Grant reported that he saw confidence as a strong aspect of socially sanctioned masculinity: "I guess it's just sort of like a way you carry yourself too. Like, just in terms of like, confidence is another big kind of cornerstone of that." Kai reported feeling different from other men because of how he comports himself in terms of confidence. Kai described other men he knows as possessing an extroverted, direct, and assertive manner of relating to others, whereas he is more laid-back:

I guess you know how some men are basically really forward with things? Introductions with like, handshake out, that sort of thing? My brother's been like, really good at that, and my best friend so far has never not been like that. And so it's like that forwardness that I do associate with masculinity and men that I feel that I don't have. I tend to be more laid back. And to use [laughs] video game terminology here, I've always felt more of a support character or a tank, if that makes any sense? And so that feeling has always been something I've been trying to work towards in terms of getting out of my own bubble and trying to do that. And so that's like, the one thing that I feel rather different from the way I carry myself in terms of masculinity and how others do so.

Thomas stated that he saw confidence, but not arrogance, as an important masculine trait. He associated confidence with strength and moral integrity: "Strength, but that's also

multifaceted. I've never associated raw power with masculinity for some reason. Like it's almost an air of self-confidence or a sense of like, uprightness. But not in an overly cocky sense.”

Competence and Success. Another way participants illustrated invulnerability was describing the importance of competence to masculinity. Competence meant that men had to feel like they were good at what they do, and success meant overcoming any obstacle or winning any challenge. Grant described his sense of his own masculinity as tied up in competence: “I expect myself to be like.. [pause] Competence and expertise are a big thing that kind of immediately pop to mind.” Elijah reported that masculinity and competence are mutually reinforcing. The more competent a man is, the more his masculinity is validated and reinforced; the more masculine a man is, the more his competence is assumed:

I could very easily see how someone could map that onto, "Well, are you someone who is in control and a decision-maker versus someone who's kind of vulnerable, slash not to be—you know, less—less competent in, you know, in a situation. So masculinity I'm sure runs through that ... People have all these ways of kind of construing it, but it definitely is a very urgent need it seems for people to have something they can attach to their sense of self-worth and competency. And a lot of times that is considered as like, “Oh, it's masculinity.”

Strength. Participants described strength, in its various forms, as an important signifier of masculine invulnerability. This meant that men have to possess physical, mental, and emotional fortitude. It also meant that men have to be able to withstand and overcome attack, criticism, and difficult emotions such that they will not succumb to any challenges. Zach described strength as both physical and emotional:

Probably the first thing that comes to mind is strength—be that in whatever form—either physical or emotional. In which phrases such as “be a man” are sort of equivalent to “buck up.” So inherently seeing strength and stability as masculine.

Paul also thought of images that evoke strength and athleticism, saying, “I mean you want to be—there's a manly man would, you know, be, uh, like strong, athletic... you know, like on the burly, uh, the toilet paper or paper towel or something. Like the lumberjack.” Thomas thought of images of tough guys, athletes, and soldiers when asked about images he associates with masculinity:

Think back to like classic John Wayne, that very stoic face I'd say. I'd say there's another one that's a black and white photo of Muhammad Ali in the boxing ring after winning a fight, that kind of resonates. Any war depiction, really, whether it's from the Medieval Times all the way up through like, *The Hurt Locker* or *Black Hawk Down*.

Stoicism. Participants universally stated that one of the biggest traits of masculine invulnerability was its stoicism and unemotionality. This meant that the expression of emotion was seen as unmanly, because emotions were seen as vulnerable and weak. Every single participant described masculinity as eschewing emotional feeling and expression. Julian talked about society's archetype of masculinity as unexpressive and emotionally stable. He reacted in a tongue-in-cheek manner to the idea that a men do not feel or possess emotions at all, laughing at what he perceived as the masculine ideal's absurdity and superhuman requirements: “Usually emotionally he doesn't show too much. He's more, how to say, emotionally stable, or he doesn't show too much of his emotions. He usually doesn't show [emotions], he keeps to himself. Or he doesn't feel at all. [Laughs]” Paul reported that this was the first trait that came to mind when thinking about masculinity:

What first comes to mind is the traditional notion, the stereotypical idea of being a man, which is [that] you don't really demonstrate much emotion. You know, you're strong and um, you're supposed to just be able to do what you've got to do and not be a wimp. You don't want to cry.

Liam described how, in his experience, emotions are devalued by society and that men are expected not to "give in" to the influence of emotion: "Most importantly I would say the stoicism is probably the biggest facet of it. Men as a whole, we're very much told it's not right to share our emotions, that's a weak thing to do. A lesser thing to do." Thomas elaborated on the pressure he has felt to keep his emotions to himself in order to appear strong and invulnerable. He reported that, in his experience, this pressure comes from both men and women:

Yeah, the biggest [pressure] I've seen—and this is, I think, through my entire life...goes back to that sense of stoicism. Is that ability to weather any storm, especially emotionally. And societal pressure, like we're getting better about talking about it, thank God. But the idea that men have to suffer alone and you cannot show an outward weakness I think is still something that weighs pretty heavily. And it's interesting because both sexes will decry, at least from what I've seen, a man who shows quote-unquote 'weakness' in that regard.

Difficulties with Vulnerability and Intimacy

A consequence of masculinity's requirement of invulnerability, participants reported difficulty finding outlets for and engaging in intimacy. This meant that men were so used to feeling that they could not be vulnerable that, when given the opportunity to be vulnerable in relationships, they struggled with how to connect with and feel close to others. Participants described difficulty developing intimate relationships in numerous contexts. Kai reported having

a positive relationship with his brother, but stated that they keep each other at arm's length so as not to get too close:

There isn't, even with my brother who I've lived with my entire life, remnants of like, what I perceive as the sisterly intimacy between women who know each other. And men, even in showing appreciation, like, "Hey, we're brothers," tend to be a little bit more standoffish. It's sort of like, even if neither of us consider ourselves "bros," it's that feeling of like, the slight distance in between even the best of bros.

Julian reported difficulty making meaningful connection with other men due to the distance and invulnerability required of traditional masculinity. He described it as alienating:

But even sometimes I feel out of place. Because when I'm going to talk with some men, they have these old-fashioned behaviors. I feel kind of lonely in this case, because I cannot communicate with those kind of people. Or I cannot agree with them, or try to get closer to them.

Elijah described the difficulty he feels being vulnerable in an intimate relationship. He connected his fears of intimacy to the invulnerability required by the masculine gender role: "Being needy in a relationship is definitely something I feel a huge aversion to as a guy. Even when part of me wants that—needs that. I don't want to be the person who's trying harder or who's wanting more."

Participants' Lived Experience of Masculinity

The second theme found in this study involved men's experiences of masculinity. Participants reflected on their lived experience of the male gender role, exploring awareness of masculinity in their lives, the power it held over them, and where they derived their ideas of masculinity. They also described how masculinity affected how they related to others and how

they related to masculinity as a cultural concept. Two subthemes were identified within the theme of lived experience of masculinity: 1) men's awareness of their own masculinity, and 2) the power of masculine gender norms (Table 2).

Awareness of Their Own Masculinity

The first subtheme of men's experience of masculinity involved their awareness of the role masculinity played in their lives. Awareness referred to men's ability to see the ways in which they acted as men and why they were drawn to act in those ways. Certain participants were acutely aware of how masculine gender norms impacted their lives, whereas others had not given it much thought. For example, Grant stated outright that, "I don't quite know how to answer that question...it feels like you're trying to have me like, perceive the imperceptible forces that have been at work in my life." Zach admitted that, "To be wholly honest, there haven't been that many times in my life when the idea has come up of, 'Oh, I should really take this opportunity to be a man'" Elijah expressed a developing awareness of the pressure to conform to a masculine gender role. He described a gap between his cognitive awareness of masculinity's influence and his emotional recognition of its impact:

Masculinity is something that I don't feel myself pressure to be like, "Oh I need to be more masculine." But maybe I'm learning to internalize that in other ways. Like, "Oh, I need to be doing something else," but what that really comes from is what people say is masculine.

And Kai reported that, despite his regular introspection and processing of topics related to gender and feminism, he had not given much thought to what it means for him to be a man: "Um, 'What does it mean to be a man?' Ah. [Laughs] Ah man, um, weirdly enough, like, I think that's one of those things that I haven't gotten to with my therapist yet. [Laughs]"

Power of Masculine Gender Norms

A second subtheme involved the power that masculine gender norms had over participants' lives. This referred to the ways masculinity held power over men's beliefs, feelings, and actions. These were divided into two subthemes: 1) incentives to conform to standards of masculinity, as well as 2) deterrents to breaking from masculine gender norms.

Men Incentivized to Conform Through Rewards. The first subtheme involved the factors that motivated men to perform masculinity. This referred to the positive things that men received as a reward for being or acting masculine. Participants said that they received validation from conforming to masculine ideals. Charlie reported feeling a sense of value and praise for conforming to masculine gender norms: "I guess being perceived as masculine by society will confer those sort of feelings [of being valued by society and praised for being masculine]." Elijah said that he felt that performing masculinity was tied to the very center of his self-worth. He described being employed as a major factor in his self-confidence and sense of manliness:

I generally I don't find myself asking, am I really a man? But I think things that really cut to the core of my self-worth—for instance, I got back from an internship and I've been looking for jobs—and not having that occupation I can attach to my name definitely is something that affects my self-worth.

Miguel described feeling motivated by positive sensations that came with performing masculine traits such as assertiveness, aggression, and competition: "I'm not saying that the old model was right, but it makes sense why they would motivate men. Giving benefits for being assertive or aggressive. It gives a good sensation. For men, it's a really good feeling." Thomas stated that proving his masculinity through masculine roles and work was important to gaining respect as a man playing masculine roles in masculine environments, such as his fraternity and career field:

I was not hazed, but I know plenty of men who were. There's a joke when you get in that the new guys got hazed with the late-night upgrades and some of the other unfavorable IT works to "earn the right," or put in their time. And engineering, IT, fraternity are all very masculine-driven areas, and it's almost like there's this sense of proof that has to come out of it. In my fraternity experience not being hazed, there was always this massive debate we had around, "Did a guy 'put in the time?'"

Men Pressured to Conform Through Shame and Not-Enoughness. Participants described ways that the masculine gender role pressured them to change and conform. Participants reported feelings of shame, not being enough, and fear that there was something wrong with who they were as people. Julian reported feeling a sense of being wrong or bad because he did not identify with traditional masculinity in his country of origin: "In Brazil I saw more traditional thinking. Sometimes I would feel out of place or wrong. Or the things I was learning about masculinity were wrong, or what I thought was wrong. So I had an internal conflict." Kai talked about the fact that he felt he did not measure up to standards of masculinity while growing up. He said that this was due to his interests and the way he looked and acted:

The weight that that word [masculinity] carries felt a lot heavier, because I've always felt like I've never really measured up to whatever standard that was. And honestly, I knew back when I was a kid there was some standard I wasn't meeting that would be different than the way I looked or passed or the way that I acted, anything that I like. All those invisible pressures are the first thing that word reminds me of.

Paul explicitly described feeling shame about the fact that he is unfamiliar with activities and hobbies that are seen as masculine. He went on to say that this sense of shame has been confusing for him, as he himself does not value this socially accepted form of masculinity:

I've definitely felt shame, so in some ways society's idea of a man has had me feeling like I don't measure up. I don't necessarily believe in that idea of a man, but just the fact that it seems generally accepted makes me feel like I'm not there.

Zach reported ways in which masculinity influenced his interests and behaviors, even at a young age. He discusses how this inhibition due to gender role constraints has left him feeling like he missed out on something he would have enjoyed and valued:

When I was younger I was more influenced by what I saw as “manly” versus “girly” activities. An example comes to mind: when I was young I liked horses, then went to school and discovered that many girls were into horses. I decided horses were girly. I decided I didn't want to learn how to ride horses. And now I really wish I knew how to ride horses.

Systemic Influences on Men's Ideas About Masculinity and Feminism

The third theme that emerged was that men's ideas of masculinity and feminism appeared to be formed by systemic influences (Table 2). This refers to the unique blend of relationships, systems, and contexts that each participant experienced in their lives. These systemic influences were broken into two subthemes: 1) relationships and 2) identity intersections. The following section will outline the different parts of these two subthemes.

Relationships

Nearly all participants described their relationships as having an important influence on their ideas of masculinity and feminism. Relationships appeared to have an impact on participants' socialization over their lifespans. Participants reported five types of relationships that are listed below as subthemes: 1) family, 2) partners, 3) friends, 4) role models, and 5) pop culture.

Family. Participants reported family as being a large factor in their ideas about masculinity, gender, and how they should orient themselves towards feminism. Participants discussed the roles of parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, and children in forming their self-concept, values, and gender expectations. Brian reported that family heavily influenced his orientation towards masculinity. He went on to state that his idea of what it means to be a man was formed by his father, who served as a role model: “My family has one of the larger influences on my views on [masculinity and feminism]. Basically just to follow in my father’s footsteps, because I think he’s a good man. Whatever he’s done, I want to copy that.” Sergio described the ways his family has shaped the way he sees gender roles:

I think the presence of a strong woman in my life has shaped it, because growing up, my dad wasn't the breadwinner. He worked, he was a professional, but at the end of the day, my mom worked a government job for decades. She's definitely been the pillar and kind of just ran things. And my grandmother—very strong, head-strong, confident woman, very supportive. She worked at a local college, community organizing and volunteering. My grandfather was a doctor. And just having those various presences in my life I think really kicked the whole Latino machismo thing.

Paul stated that his parents’ relationship modeled how a partnership between a man and a woman can be equal and respectful. He then reported that their relationship influenced his attitudes towards feminism: “My parents were—still are—happily married and treated each other respectfully. I've seen them make decisions as a unit, be completely equal partners in every way. So that probably influenced the way I see the world.” Julian reported that he feels his concept of masculinity is different from that of his peers because of the way gender was enacted in his family of origin:

Growing up, most of the people [I] had contact with were my family. And most of my family only had women cousins. So I ended up being a little less traditional [patriarchal] or thinking of women as objects. Mostly because I had to take care of women or children in my family...that I kind of developed a different behavior too.

Partners. Participants also described their partners as being influential in their view of masculinity and feminism. Participants reported that their partners served as representatives of women in their personal lives (participants reported only on their heterosexual relationships) and a person with whom participants could process information about gender, feminism, and current events. Paul reported that his relationship with his wife has given him an intimate understanding of what feminism means and why it is important. He also stated that his wife has been a safe person with whom to process what is going on in the world regarding feminism and gender inequality:

I have two very close relationships with Millennial women who identify with the feminist movement. One is my wife. Those relationships definitely have given me a bigger picture of feminism and what it means to women today, and therefore what it means to me. It's led to a lot of good conversation, and I think we've arrived at a point of mutual understanding and agreement.

Thomas reported that the non-traditional economic structure of his marriage has changed his perceptions of what it means to be a man, both in general and within a heterosexual relationship: "I'm not the breadwinner in my household, my wife is. So the idea of man not being the breadwinner has kind of changed it where I don't have a strong sense of 'man'—it's more a sense of 'partner.'" Elijah reported that his past romantic relationships left him confused and distressed regarding issues of gender and sexism. He described the shame he felt from the way

partners engaged in online discourse about social justice and what it meant about him and their relationship. He described how this led to an internal conflict regarding how he should engage with his intimate partners about social issues that manifest in their relationship:

There's times when I've had relationships in which people will constantly criticize White men, And they'll Tweet about it or post on Facebook saying dismissive things of White men. And I get that—where their frustrations are coming from. But sometimes part of me feels like, if I let that happen, if I don't tell my partner that it affects me in some way, then it makes me less of a person. It makes me more of a pushover. And here's the thing. It's funny because I'm someone who in general is very okay with people Tweeting about whatever they want. But let's say if I have a partner doing that and I can construe it as, “Oh, maybe it's reflecting badly on me,” then like I feel this pressure to be like, I need to raise an objection with this. I need to at least voice some kind of displeasure. Otherwise, it means that I'm endorsing it or condoning it. And saying, you know, "This is what I think of myself." When I don't think that of myself.

Friends. Friends served as another relationship that impacted participants’ experiences of gender and feminism. They cited friendships with men, women, and people with diverse identities as having an influence on the development of their gender norms and attitudes towards feminism. Thomas said that his fraternity brothers and membership impacted the way he saw and understood masculinity. He described how his experience there shifted his understanding from one of men deserving privilege due to their identity, but due to their actions and efforts:

It definitely framed masculinity in new ways for me during my experience. And it diverged heavily from other men's experiences that I knew at the time, and even now with my national organization. I think where it diverted my perceptions of masculinity

was, what value does this man bring in terms of a leadership role, capabilities, talents, and time? True devotion, not just, “He’s a senior and he gets it.”

Grant stated that his friends impacted his attitudes towards feminism more than any feminist messaging in the media: “It’s less that I took information in that changed my relationships with close friends. It’s more like I had close relationships with female friends that made me amenable to ideas and more receptive to them when I was online.” Sergio reported that the diversity of his childhood friend group and school setting helped him develop an open and empathetic stance towards other people:

I think the friends I grew up with are very open-minded people. I think that growing up I had a lot of friends who were women—girls at the time. It helped that I was fortunate to grow up in the city, where I was exposed to a lot of different people and cultures. I went to a school that was run by a lottery system, and brought people from all over the city, of all different socio-economic classes, ethnicities, and races. That helped me be more accepting of things because I got to experience a lot of different people and cultures.

Role Models. Participants also talked about the importance of male role models in their lives. These included role models for positive masculinity as well as models of how not to behave and treat other people. Zach stated that role models in the Boy Scouts and in his spiritual community served as role models of non-toxic masculinity:

I don’t see hashtag feminism as directly attacking masculinity, but as going after this generally toxic behavior that is associated with masculinity. By growing up with positive masculine role models in the Boy Scouts or at home or priests at church, I have been lucky enough to have male role models that didn’t exhibit any of those characteristics, as far as I’m aware. So that’s what I formed my perception of masculinity on. So it’s made

it easier for me to get behind the [feminist] message because I don't perceive any kind of personal attack. It's attacking things that I don't see as positive or aspirational or masculine or really anything to be hoped for.

Paul reported seeing examples of toxic masculinity in the media and described how these individuals served as role models of how not to be a man: "I don't want to be a Harvey Weinstein or Donald Trump. Society deserves better. I've never seen people like that as role models. But with the attention paid to people like that, I feel an obligation to be the opposite." Liam described how, while he was growing up, some of his mother's boyfriends exhibited sexist and patriarchal behaviors that he found confusing and uncomfortable. He reported that listening to his own instinctual discomfort led him to develop his own idea of what masculinity should be:

Certain of [my mom's] boyfriends that would come along, some of them were rather misogynistic. Not necessarily toxic, but stereotypical of what a man's role was, what a woman's role was, very conservative in that regard. And I always thought that was just a little black and white. A little strange, a little too simple. And belittling for women. And I don't want to say over-empowering for a man, but just strange.

Pop Culture. Several participants reported that their relationship to pop culture characters and phenomena were important in shaping their views of masculinity and feminism. Thomas enumerated various pop icons, such as Muhammad Ali and John Wayne, as examples of masculinity that immediately came to mind. However, when asked about what he strives for in his enactment of masculinity, he referenced the *Star Wars* character Mace Windu:

I would say Mace Windu from *Revenge of the Sith*, that I'm going to do the right thing to protect everyone I see. I would say pop culture references [to masculinity] used to be a

lot more about power and domination as opposed to defensive. It had an aggressive strength as opposed to that stoic strength that I've come to see it as.

Miguel mentioned Jordan Peterson, an academic and YouTube personality, as informing some of his views on gender and feminism. He discussed how some of his views derived from watching and reading Jordan Peterson's work: "Have you heard about Jordan Peterson? He was a popular figure on that topic [masculinity and feminism]. And then some ideas, at least what I agree with him [sic], came from his videos or stuff like that."

Kai reported that pop culture and animation in particular played a huge role in his understanding of masculinity and feminism. He reported that his interest in cartooning, art, and specific fandoms led him to online platforms such as Tumblr, where feminist discourse was interspersed and represented by artists and artwork involving some of his favorite characters:

I love cartoons and animation. I am a huge fan of anime, because that's the one type of cartoon that got to Asia before America. And when I got into the internet more I was on Facebook, I got onto Twitter. Tumblr wasn't really a thing. But basically got like, hey, the internet has so much stuff that you can find online. And weirdly enough I think one of the first things that I really latched onto was finding all these cartoons online. A lot of artists and people who worked on the show also posted their art online. And I was like why don't I join this thing called Tumblr? And when I started that I was basically inundated with a bunch of artists who did amazing art and stories and did good things. And because of that social media strain, I got treated to a whole bunch of feminist rhetoric. In between fanart of cartoon horses and Avatar the Last Airbender you can get this entire PSA about how wealth inequality works, how feminism deconstructs these terrible things that I'd been feeling about my own masculinity. How I don't measure up, that sort of thing.

Intersections

After relationships, participants' intersecting identities served as the other major systemic factor that informed participants' ideas of masculinity and feminism. Results indicated that the intersections of 1) gender identity, 2) ethnic and cultural background, and 3) religion were salient to their concepts of masculinity and feminism.

Gender Identity. One participant, Charlie, identified as a transgender man who had transitioned from female to male. He reported that his ideas of gender, masculinity, and feminism were influenced by his lived experience growing up being perceived as a woman as well as his lived experience as a man:

Since I'm a transgender man most of my lived experience is the world perceives me as a woman. So many of the experiences that women were talking about in #MeToo I had felt firsthand. So there was no obstacle of being like, "Does this really happen?" or, "Is it being overblown?" or anything like that. It was always apparent to me that that was not the case, because I had seen and felt it.

Ethnic and Cultural Background. Findings indicated that participants' ethnic and cultural backgrounds also informed how they experienced and perceived masculinity and feminism. Thomas acknowledged that, despite his background, he supports many tenets of feminism and other social justice causes. He reported however that his identity and cultural background often serve as barriers to participating as actively as he would like:

I get perceived as a very traditional white, Christian, conservative male. The few times that I've engaged in social activism—the best example was a big cancer research fundraiser at my university. [I] convinced my fraternity, like 10 of us, to go in letters to support. And we hung in the back and just kind of let everything roll over you, and it

opened up good conversations. But there was definitely an awkward contingency of people who—and I knew the woman who ended up saying, verbalizing it to us really well because I was an RA with her—but she felt she had heard that some felt uncomfortable having men in fraternity letters at that event because of all of the strong, masculine, generally negative stereotypes that included that. So it was interesting and I think that actual experience just framed a lot of how I feel and treat some of these things. Because you want to show that that intersectionality [sic] of stereotypes does have a contingent that supports you. But how do you, what's the best way of doing that without making others feel uncomfortable? And I think that's where I've always found it really hard.

Kai reported that his background as a bicultural Asian-American man informed his idea of masculinity and his openness to feminist messaging:

When I was growing up, I feel like masculinity wasn't enforced as much as it stereotypically would be by like, "Dad wants me to become a football star," that sort of thing. Only because we were back in the Philippines, and to a certain extent in the family structure now it was relatively—well, mostly matriarchal. With our aunts and my mom usually being the main breadwinner, and our dads, well, also doing a job, but not being the head honcho of the households. And so I feel like I took to a more flexible meaning of what masculinity was and is a lot easier than I would have had I had a more typical Western patriarchal upbringing.

Paul also described how growing up and living in very different locations in the United States showed him that there were multiple ways to view gender and gender inequality: "I grew up in two towns in the Midwest, so I've definitely seen a strong vein of political conservatism. But I don't identify with that reaction. It's just given me exposure to that flip side...I've never been in

one bubble.” Elijah reported that his experience abroad opened his eyes to the fact that masculinity is different everywhere, and that social activism is dependent on the context it takes place in:

I lived for a year in Tokyo, and you know, masculinity is both different and similar there than I've experienced here. I think the more places I've been, the more I've had my understanding of things reframed. And so like the more I've seen, the more I've realized how little I know? And so yeah, I mean, it's just like I guess don't get all your opinions from like, Twitter? [Laughs]. 'Cause it's such an echo chamber, but also don't get all your opinions from just one place, because everyone's so different on these things. And I think that would be comforting to a lot of people who feel that they're threatened when they're really not. There's this huge open area called the world where people are still figuring out and learning and going through all these evolutions of what they only feel on a personal level. So to imagine that the terms and debate are super constricted is like, kind of a false belief.

Religion. Findings showed that religion contributed to participants’ ideas of gender, relationships, and equality. Julian described how religion influenced his attitudes towards feminism and gender in different ways throughout his life. He reported that his attitudes towards Roman Catholic ideas changed as he got older: “When I was younger I was more Catholic. In this way, I would say the in the beginning I used to see feminist ways as really bad ways. Because of the way they say, "My body, my choice" and stuff.” Miguel stated outright that the gender hierarchy expressed in Roman Catholicism made him uncomfortable and that he disagreed with the ideas he had grown up with in the church:

I feel kind of sketch about religion. Like Christianity? I mean, they started the story of women being something that should help aid men. So there's a harsh vibe. And besides that, I think in other religions, there's levels. And women are considered lower than men. So I guess I think religion overall is pretty bad.

Paul reported that his upbringing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was an important influence on how he views masculinity and what it means to be a man:

I come from a very religious background and upbringing, and I believe in a loving God, a God who is a man, but loving and open and empathetic. And that means the ideal of what a man can and should be. You read about Jesus and it says he wept, he wasn't afraid to cry openly. And in my opinion he's the ideal man. I think that, rather than being unmanly, I think that should be part of what makes a man a man.

Paul also stated that his ideals around gender equality and respect were informed by his religious understandings of how God created men and women:

I believe that God created man and woman in His image, and He created them equally. I've never believed God endorses sexism. I've never believed that women are inferior to men, and I think that stems from my religious beliefs. So that's probably a big reason why I'm supportive overall of [feminism].

How Does Hashtag Feminism Work?

The previous theme reflected the ways by which participants formed their ideas about masculinity and feminism. This section will explore how hashtag feminism worked according to participant reports. Subthemes included 1) amplification of voices through social media, 2) difference between in-person and online discourse, and 3) levels of interaction with hashtag feminism (Table 2). Participants shared the ways online activism appeared to function, ways in

which it was distinct from activist messaging they had seen in other formats, such as in-person discussion or the news media, and how they engaged with hashtag feminism.

Social Media Amplified Activist Voices

Participants reported that the internet and social media specifically helped social movements like hashtag feminism through their ability to amplify voices of individuals who otherwise do not have a platform from which to speak. Participants also discussed how social media has a tendency to highlight the most emotionally charged posts, which had a complicated impact on hashtag feminist discourse. Zach shared how social media helped connect people who otherwise would not have had a platform on which to share their experiences, and how hashtag feminists leveraged social media's structure to make their voices louder:

Due to the interconnectivity with social media I would see stories about people I hadn't talked to or thought of in years. I would say the platform it created is a clever use of social media algorithms. If it didn't have the hashtag, there wouldn't be that repeated keyword. It wouldn't receive the same boost. Not that the technology has allowed it, but that the movement has seized upon features of the platforms in order to amplify themselves.

Paul talked about how hashtag feminism exposed and elucidated the cultural systems and power differentials at work in society: "For me it's highlighted the ways women are still treated as inferior by men. It's shed light on interactions, brought about conversation and awareness, made me more supportive now I know more about the cultural context we live in."

Despite his staunch support of feminism, Liam discussed how social media's structure tends to highlight the most negative and anti-social discourse. He explained why he actively avoids Twitter and similar platforms:

I find them to be rather toxic. They feel debasing from reality. They seem to feed narcissism and the image of what someone wants society to see. And I think that creates an unhealthy standard and unhealthy generalizations. I think it allows the loudest, most detrimental voices to be heard much louder than more level-minded heads. It unnecessarily brings discourse to an extreme and that's no way to fight an issue no matter where you find yourself on a spectrum.

Charlie echoed Liam's sentiments. Charlie said that he does not think the most virulent voices present an accurate or proportionate example of the general population of feminists. He said the fact that the movement is now largely represented by this smaller group of angry and aggressive people makes it more difficult to actually further the feminist cause:

It's just a subset, but it's the subset I see interact the most with men, which is unfortunate. If [men] didn't engage with that subset, [feminism] would be a lot more successful. But that's what people end up seeing. If you're looking into feminism for the first time and that's the first thing you see, that's not great. I think that happens a lot because that's the most vocal part.

In-Person and Online Discourse Were Different

Participants identified significant differences between online and in-person discourse about feminism. Numerous participants reported that they felt a negative emotional response towards and after engaging in hashtag feminism, though most of those same participants said that they agreed with or support a lot of general feminist messaging.

Sergio said that he has found in-person discussion of feminism to be helpful, open, and destigmatizing. He reported that these qualities have helped people connect and empathize with each other in new and pro-social ways: "Outside of the social circles I've found on social media

my experience has been really positive. People are very open. I think by bringing issues to light people are more comfortable discussing them.” Liam stated that he sees the majority of anti-feminist sentiment as stemming from the way feminism has shown up online. He spoke to how some online feminist activists have colored the movement as a whole:

I think predominantly it’s been misconstrued for what it is due to social media. I think where a bunch of the criticism comes from, rightfully or wrongfully so, is that some of the most ‘men-hating’ voices in feminism do exist. They get amplified and then become the stereotype for what feminism is. And I think that’s dangerous. It can destabilize a cause that is for equality and predominantly a positive thing and get it painted in a negative light.

Charlie reiterated that social media engenders the most negative discussions about feminism and gender inequality, whereas discussion outside of the internet appears more effective and based in empathy:

I think on social media what you see is the worst side of it. I think that without the face-to-face connection you're both less visible and more visible, and I think that's sort of ideal conditions for that reaction. You're not seeing whatever effect you're causing. People get into weird fights in person, but I see it more on social media. But I think outside of the internet, walking around you'll hear people saying, "I don't think that really happens," stuff like that. But sometimes I'll hear a guy elbow his buddy like, "Dude, don't say that," or people taking agency to modify their behavior. Which I think is obviously very valuable.

Participant Interaction With Hashtag Feminism

Lastly, participants described the ways that they interacted with hashtag feminism. This referred to how participants obtained knowledge of hashtag feminism, kept up to date with its contents, and engaged with discourse. Three subthemes emerged regarding their engagement: 1) learning about feminism, 2) developing their understandings of feminism, and 3) their levels of involvement with hashtag feminism. It is important to note that each participant's interaction with hashtag feminism was unique along each of these three subthemes.

Learning About Feminism. Participants described the ways that they had learned about feminism. Even in instances where participants did not actively seek out feminist information on social media, they reported that it impacted the way they learned about and thought about current feminism. Kai reported that participating in online platforms such as Tumblr and Facebook had exposed him to many different feminist messages over time, creating a pastiche that informed his current understandings of feminism and gender inequality:

There isn't a textbook or something that would have given me a more nuanced understanding a lot quicker. Just bit by bit learning more about it through a scattershot. I think that's my problem in terms of how I understand feminism. Because it's so scattershot in terms of all the sources, I can't pin myself to one book and say, "Hey, you should read this and you'd know all about X, Y, and Z." And even that is an issue, because there's multiple texts over time, various websites and resources.

Paul stated that his main connection to hashtag feminism happens through reading the news. Despite not actively engaging in discussions of feminism on social media, he still learns about what is going on in online feminist discourse through news coverage on the topic: "Most of the way that I've experienced online feminism has been through reading the news, whether it be

Apple News or the New York Times, and getting a sense of what people are saying.” Julian described how he had encountered feminist messaging both in person and online. He felt that feminists had used the exposure possible through social media to their advantage, and that the majority of the messaging he had seen was online:

I saw some of YouTube advertisements, and I saw some movements on campus. Then they just try to give pamphlets and stuff. I think marketing, dissemination of information is not their problem. They have been able to access a lot of social media stuff.

Elijah shared that online discourse on feminism was stressful and caused him to feel fatigue. He said he would find it helpful if people learned about gender inequality and reflected on it before engaging on social media: “Everyone should just read a ton of stuff about this and then sit and ponder a while. And then maybe come to their own grappling with it, because if you're just on Twitter, you'll be so exhausted, you know?”

Different Understandings of Feminism. Participants also described how their engagement with hashtag feminism influenced their understanding of what feminism is and what it stands for. Due to the ability for anyone to post on social media, participants heard and saw different things across social media posts. Additionally, the tone and affect of hashtag feminist discourse played a large role in their understanding of what contemporary feminism is and what it wants. Kai related how the many different voices he experienced on the internet brought him to a complex understanding of contemporary feminism. He lamented how others’ understandings may be more two-dimensional due to limited exposure or a lack of desire to explore more fully:

The social media that went in line with what I was experiencing online and in real life led me to where I am. With hopefully a nuanced understanding of what feminism means, as opposed to the response of “cancer, ugh.”

Grant said that he does not consider himself an expert on feminism, but that he definitely sees how systems of oppression play out in society and agrees that they should be deconstructed. He also distinguished between hashtag feminism and feminism overall: “I’m fairly left-leaning in terms of, not hashtag feminism, but feminism in general. I’m probably pretty misinformed, but I think the basic principles are there are power structures that disadvantage women and minorities. I’m on board with all that.” On a different note, Brian expressed confusion and disappointment about contemporary feminism. He stated that his understanding of feminism aligned more with 20th century feminist goals, and experienced current feminism as fighting essentialist qualities in men and women:

I always thought feminism was just equality. Some of the recent activism, it's been radicalized. Like, there's obvious difference between a man and a woman—physically there's gonna be a difference. And I think that a lot of the political action right now is just too far, they're trying to control things that are uncontrollable. If we're talking about feminism in history, I'm all for it, but this new wave of feminism is a little too much. Their goals are a little unrealistic.

Elijah reported confusion over the definition of feminism, and therefore ambivalence regarding whether he could say he truly supports it. Like Grant, Elijah also made a distinction between feminism and hashtag feminism, saying that the latter makes him think more of aggressive, shaming feminist rhetoric and people’s negative responses to it:

Even saying hashtag feminism, it sounds pejorative, less serious. I could totally see Tucker Carlson saying, "hashtag feminism," and everyone who's watching will immediately know what he's getting at, because to them it's this term that means the worst kind of person. But at the same time, fourth wave feminism embodies things about

masculinity and emotions and things I'm totally for. But what's hard is that in this day and age, terms—especially terms that live on the Internet—can't capture everything, because one audience sees it one way, another sees it as a totally different thing. So for people to say feminism is something that all men and everyone should agree with—I agree with that, but that's only when you're defining feminism in the way a lot of these components aren't.

Levels of Involvement With Hashtag Feminism. Participants discussed their level of involvement with hashtag feminism and what they consider engagement. Most participants did not consider themselves as actively taking part in hashtag feminism but described being observers or looking on from the periphery. However, they reported that hashtag feminism certainly had an impact on how they feel about feminism and where they would place themselves within a broader social context regarding gender and equality. Paul said that he feels well-acquainted with hashtag feminist discourse despite only seeing it through the news and occasionally on Facebook:

I would say I'm definitely more in tune with online discourse through the news than through my own social media use. So it's interesting because I do feel tuned in to the online conversation that's happening, and I occasionally get glimpses of it when I go on Facebook. So I guess I would say are the ways I access it.

Brian reported that he intentionally does not engage in hashtag feminism, but that hashtag feminism has influenced how he feels about contemporary feminism overall: “I don't really involve myself, but [hashtag feminism] has put a negative tone on feminism for me. I would just say that I wouldn't consider myself a feminist, but I believe men and women should be equal.” Charlie, who discussed at length ways he actively makes changes in his life to support gender

equality and safety, reported that he sees himself as an observer of hashtag feminism rather than a participant: “It would be accurate to qualify me as more of an observer than someone who’s doing a lot of actual interaction. I see a lot of strangers interacting through social media, but I very rarely would go so far myself.” Grant described his interaction with hashtag feminism as peripheral. He described seeing posts about it on the various social media platforms that he uses and how he reacted afterward:

Looking at the lens through which I look out of, basically those four social media platforms are basically it in terms of what I look at online. So if you look at Reddit, and that's one of your chief sources, half of your experience is gonna be people complaining about it and the other half posting something about like, how Emma Watson was big into #HeForShe. So it's not something where I'm being reached as sort of an audience. It's something where I'm looking at political news or something online and then some article pops up and it's just sort of lots of arguments. So I can't necessarily say that a lot of these hashtags really reach me in a way where it's trying to engage with me. It's like I'm looking at other people talk about it and then kind of moving on. It's really not even [observing]. Sort of just in the periphery.

The Upsides of Hashtag Feminism

The fifth theme that emerged during analysis involved the positive impact hashtag feminism had on men and what it actually communicated to them. Hashtag feminism appeared to do two things: 1) develop awareness of gender inequality, and 2) attempt to hold men accountable for the ways they perpetuate gender inequality (Table 2). This section is organized along these two subthemes of awareness and accountability.

Hashtag Feminism Created Awareness

First, hashtag feminism appeared to impact men by making them more aware of gender inequality. Participants reported that hashtag feminism increased their awareness of gender-related social issues. Subthemes included 1) how hashtag feminism started the discussion about gender inequality, 2) how it exposed problems that were invisible to the privileged before hashtag feminism, 3) how hashtag feminism personalized the problem, 4) how hashtag feminism helped create connection and understanding.

Hashtag Feminism Started the Discussion. One of the ways hashtag feminism increased men's awareness of gender inequality was by starting a conversation about it that men were privy to. Zach stated that his experience of #MeToo was that it served as an effective and efficient way of spreading information on gender inequality to those who otherwise would not have known about it: "I think in some cases it provides a good avenue to educate and inform, which I don't think was reaching some of us. I don't think was reaching me beyond in-person discussions with close female friends."

Liam echoed this sentiment, reporting that he believed hashtag feminism's impact was to draw awareness to issues of sexism and show men how they can better support women:

I would say awareness and equality are the descriptors that come to mind, in the sense of spreading real awareness of the struggles women face that we are not all the time aware of, and sometimes never aware of. And explaining how that can be better understood, better be allied with and empathized with, because I think there's a communication divide there. And I think that's the intention of those hashtags, their respective movements.

Grant expressed the fact that movements like hashtag feminism helped him see the size and scale of systemic problems like gender inequality and sexism: "It definitely increases my awareness of

something that, even if I know is happening to some degree, I don't know it's happening to that degree, if that makes sense.”

Hashtag Feminism Exposed Problems Previously Invisible to the Privileged. Another quality of hashtag feminism is that it attempted to raise awareness of gender inequality amongst men, who are rarely on the receiving end of systemic injustice regarding gender. Participants discussed what it was like for their eyes to be opened to what gender-based oppression looks and feels like. Others reported difficulties in understanding inequality because of its invisibility to them. Charlie expressed how inherently difficult it has been for men to see gender inequality, as they do not feel its effects: “Not that I feel particularly bad for us, but men are certainly at a disadvantage where it's hard to see social limits in place if they don't affect you because you don't feel them.” Zach echoed Charlie’s observation:

One striking moment of #MeToo was seeing a lot of posts on Facebook among people that I know. With specific stories attached. It makes it more concrete. Because it seems from a male perspective almost something that you just don’t encounter, or it’s not talked about. I think hashtag feminism has brought that to attention in ways that otherwise socially aren’t accessible.

Sergio illustrated how men sometimes struggle to see feminism’s pertinence due to their lack of awareness of the obstacles women still face in society: “One of the negative things is the reactions like, ‘Oh, why does this matter?’ But I think as a whole it's been helpful for moving society forward, even if individual reactions are not what people would like.” Miguel reported that he still was not sure if he believes systemic oppression of women really exists because it is hard to see. He reported being confused by the fact that some women have succeeded in gaining

power and privilege in society, which appeared counter to feminists' claims about systemic misogyny:

That's the problem, it's confusing for me. Because when I see a woman [who has] succeeded in the things she wanted to do, it's kind of hard to believe the things they say about how society works between men and women. So I really don't know, I would say some women have had some struggles. But those that has [sic] a better performance on whatever she's working on—she isn't really affected.

Hashtag Feminism Personalized the Problem. Another feature of hashtag feminism that participants reported is that it built awareness of misogyny by illustrating impersonal data in a personal way. Participants repeated that hashtag feminism took statistics on gender inequality—sexual assault, microaggressions, economic disparities, and others—and concretized these phenomena by showing participants how many people in their life had been affected by them. Participants reported that the personalization of these phenomena through online disclosure by friends and family had an emotional impact on them. In turn, this emotional impact caused them to re-evaluate the presence of systemic gender inequality in their own lives. Furthermore, participants reported that the emotional experience of awakening to the real phenomenon of sexism caused them to reflect on their own behaviors and attitudes.

Zach reported that seeing posts from his friends about their experiences of sexual violence and abuse made these phenomena more real to him. “There were so many people around me having experienced these things and I never would have guessed. I think it definitely gave me the impression that a lot more comes flying at women day-in day-out than I thought.” Similarly, Grant stated that hashtag feminism pushed issues to the fore that he previously had the privilege of ignoring: “It took something I already knew existed and made it more real. Or

something I knew existed but didn't have to think about." Charlie described how hashtag feminism made statistics on gender inequality and sexual assault and personalized them. He also described how it offered a chance for men to see the role they play in perpetuating these problems:

Even though I was aware of the different struggles that women face it is still something else to see people's individual stories. It's not just a statistic anymore. It's people that we know. It's your friends, your family, it's like celebrity people you might look up to sharing their story. Maybe they don't, but what I think of is what most people would know. I think that it has achieved its goals of making the problem harder to sweep under the rug by folks who would say, "Oh, that doesn't happen here," or, "It was just that one guy." Because women who participate are demonstrating like, no, it happens everywhere. It's not just a few bad eggs. It's a social problem that needs to be addressed or it's not going to go away.

Liam discussed how some men's negative or reactions to hashtag feminism have provided a live, systematic, and large-scale example of men's attitudes towards gender inequality, misogyny, and sexual violence: "It's sad to see [men widely invalidating women's stories of sexual assault], but it is validating. And that's represented on a national scale now, visible for all to see. And I think it is important to bear witness to."

Hashtag Feminism Created Connection and Understanding. The final way that participants described hashtag feminism as increasing awareness was through creating connection and understanding. Participants discussed how hashtag feminism helped foster understanding of how systemic sexism works. They also said it bridged communication gaps between people regarding the existence and experience of gender inequality. Kai described how

hashtag feminism clarified the ways that sexism is enacted in our society. He said that hashtag feminism helped groups of people understand the phenomena and how it affects them collectively. He acknowledged how it has helped both pro-feminists and anti-feminists to locate and connect with their respective supporters:

It's terrifying to know how much women put up with, but it's also nice to know there's a way for them to fight back. The fact is there is so much information that could be disseminated quickly through the various channels around internet. Communication has allowed more people to connect, and therefore understand and create bridges where there used to be none in terms of understanding the nuances of how things work. That's been really good. That's has always been a net gain in my book. That unfortunately has been equally balanced by how easily people could reach each other in a bad way.

Charlie stated that the increased “airtime” given to feminist issues helped women to connect and required men to confront the existence of systemic sexism: “It's bringing more awareness to women's issues that ordinarily might not get that airtime. They're letting other women know that they're not alone, that this is happening to them, too.” Sergio talked about how hashtag feminism created a space for people to talk about sexism and gender both on the internet and in non-internet communications. He described how it not only allowed people to connect with each other, but also decreased the stigma around discussing issues of gender and inequality:

By bringing issues to light people are more comfortable discussing them, and because of that, people who might not have experienced it are able to know what people have gone through. It's something that is in the world and happens every single day to countless people, but examples of it I might not know about. And then people starting to then say, yeah, a lot of people said, "Yeah, you know, I've experienced the same thing, so it's not

an isolated incident.” And I think that without that sort of, um, movement where people can be more open about it, in part because of the internet, it's less taboo to talk about and to confront.

Hashtag Feminism Sought Accountability

The second theme that emerged around hashtag feminism's impact involved the call for men to take accountability for their part in systemic oppression. Accountability referred to actionable changes that men could take in order to increase gender equality and reduce sexism and misogyny. This meant holding men accountable to the ways they enact sexism and the ways they perpetuate gender inequality, whether intentionally or unintentionally. While some participants welcomed the opportunity to change their behavior and environment as a response to feminist ideas, others reported feeling an aversion to doing so. Still others reported feeling that they needed to change their behavior due to fear of repercussions, or saw men changing in order to satisfy a desire for approval and validation. Four subthemes arose under the theme of accountability: 1) the need to take responsibility, 2) accountability starts with small, actionable changes, 3) not taking accountability, and 4) changing due to fear or desire for approval.

The Need to Take Responsibility. As a result of hashtag feminism, participants reported seeing the ways in which men do not take responsibility for systemic sexism. This led to participants asking questions about how they could take responsibility and developing their own conclusions about how to best take action. For example, Charlie described how it is important for men to take accountability for their contributions to a gendered system of oppression, because women cannot change the whole system on their own:

[Women are] doing that work, and taking care of us, and we're adults. We shouldn't need that. So hopefully we step up and take responsibility for ourselves, for all of our

interactions with women and other men. And take that, eh—responsibility's not the right word—but like, it shouldn't be women's job to do that. But it ends up being their job, because if they don't they often end up in danger. And even if they do, the wrong man will still do the wrong thing. So, taking responsibility for ourselves would be a great step.

Kai stated that his biggest takeaway from hashtag feminism was to use his power as a man to change the space around him to be safer and more inclusive of women: “The main thing I got from hashtag feminism is my role as a man was to basically create a more inviting space for women to feel safe.” Thomas discussed how having a daughter made him realize the need to take an active role in creating change related to gender inequality and violence. He reported that it made him think more deeply on the most effective ways to undertake such change:

It's the shift in, “What am I doing in my own sphere of influence?” I need to raise a woman in a world that has boys and men who weren't raised to respect, much less encourage women. So now, the question has become how can I mentor, teach, advocate for—I don't want to say inclusive parenting because that comes off as almost like, finger-waggy—but tactics, techniques, conversations that would prevent some of these hyper-masculinity traits that have negative impacts.

Accountability Starts With Small, Actionable Changes. Participants who decided to answer the call to hold themselves accountable reported finding small, actionable ways to make change. Zach stated that his awareness of the subtle ways sexism is enacted has led him to find ways to try and mitigate the impact of misogyny, however small:

I am in a physics department, so if I heard, say, an older male professor being more critical of a younger female student, I was more sensitive to if there was unfair treatment there. I don't know if it's translated into anything more concrete than commiserating with

female colleagues afterward or being sufficiently aware to acknowledge discomfort. The most I can think of is when, say, a female presenter is being interrupted more often. Seeing someone I'm familiar with and exchanging a glance like, "Yeah, this is this is messed up."

Julian reported that he lost a friend after making jokes about sexism and feminism, which made him realize that his actions had stronger repercussions than he had previously thought. He said that he stopped making such jokes soon afterward: "It only happened once, mostly because I made jokes. I stopped making those jokes and just tried to talk a little bit. Then if we agreed, I just try to go something in between [sic], just let it go." Kai described how he has used his presence as a man to protect women and others in social contexts where sexual assault and violence are common: "I've seen someone go into fight or flight mode whenever some man approached them. I know I have to be more aware of that, because I don't want to be a bystander in terms of how men communicate with women." Charlie reiterated the fact that small, concrete changes on an interpersonal level are critical to counter systemic gender inequality. He gave examples of different ways to intervene and make a difference given how escalated the situation might be:

My big takeaway is trying to be proactive and focusing on the small everyday things.

Because I think there's something to be said for showing up to the marches, to doing the big visible stuff. But all the marches in the world won't change what happens at your office or your bus stop. It has to be people have to change. So I try to look for those small, everyday opportunities. That's the stuff that you can control.

Not Taking Accountability. Some participants reported seeing men skirt accountability or deny that they had a role to play in gender equality. Others explained or demonstrated how

and why they themselves struggled to play an active role in deconstructing gender inequality. Not a single participant stated that they did not believe in or agree with the basic tenets of gender inequality. Their reasons for disengaging from or opposing feminism was therefore more complex than simply believing that gender inequality was acceptable or preferable.

Liam said that seeing men dig their heels in and ignore women's perspectives simply validated women's struggles more. He reported frustration and anger about these men's responses: "It's a bother seeing how many of my peers were willing to write that off versus how many are willing to say: 'Hey, this is unacceptable.' It's validating for a lot of struggles I've been told about by female peers." Charlie stated that he too sees men ignore complaints about sexism. He said he has seen men counter feminist statements by talking about the difficulties that men face. However, he made the point that men's unique struggles do not invalidate women's, and that men's struggles do not then require men to treat others poorly as a result: "It's pushing off the blame. 'Women don't understand how hard it is to be a guy trying to put yourself out there.' Sure, there is pressure on men to make a move. But it doesn't make you be a jerk."

Zach discussed a nuanced aspect of #MeToo. He described how #MeToo had the effect of allowing women to concretely describe specific instances of sexual violence they had experienced without calling out individual men. Zach said that this was both a benefit and a drawback to #MeToo, as it exposed systemic violence without causing a defensive backlash, but also left men with a high amount of deniability:

It's not that it didn't highlight the behavior well, but it left it abstract. So you couldn't say, "I don't know any woman who has experienced sexual assault." But because of its abstract nature it left the door open for statements like, "Yeah, but nobody I know would do that." So I don't think it addressed that in the same way.

Grant also discussed the confusion men have when reflecting on their own behaviors and how they contribute to systemic sexism. He reported that it is easier for men to see systemic gender inequality as a matter of “good” men and “bad” men, despite the subtlety of how sexism is perpetuated and complexity of individual character. He summarized his conclusions succinctly by saying that sexism is something that all men have a relationship to, rather than it being a character trait:

There’s a definite impact I hadn't considered where it's definitely shaped my views in terms of thinking about misogyny as more insidious than before. I think a common attitude that men can have about feminist issues is that there's good men and bad men. And like, "I'm one of the good men, and these are problems that bad men have." There’s an idea that crept in through social media or interactions with other people in my life where it got easier over time to acknowledge those things as something more insidious, something that could impact my interactions and my relationships with people. And just looking at other men the same. The roots of problems like that aren't black and white, like some men are assholes and other guys are fine. It now occurs to me feminism and misogyny are something that men have a relationship with.

Changing Due to Fear or Desire for Approval. Some participants talked about the ways men changed their behavior in response to hashtag feminism, but not because they were trying to conform to pro-feminist behaviors. Participants described feeling the need to change out of fear of negative repercussions, such as shaming and ostracization. Others described the phenomenon of seeing men change in order to gain approval or social standing due to their participation in the feminist cause.

Elijah expressed anxiety about his perception that, according to the feminists he interacted with, he had no choice but to adopt certain viewpoints and behaviors in order to avoid repercussions: “It’s hard to align myself with, ‘This is the only right way.’ And sometimes I feel pressure that I *have* to look at things a certain way. And if I don't, I run the risk of huge social repercussions.” Brian described feeling censored in what he can and cannot say, both in real life and on the internet. He specifically pointed to the permanent and public nature of posting on social media: “It's the same thing about thinking before I speak. The internet is much more severe because it is out there forever. So it’s made me think more of what I'm about to say on the internet. It's like censoring myself.” Liam spoke to this aspect of social media as well. He said that instead of reflecting on their behaviors and changing, many men feel afraid of public shaming and therefore become defensive when faced with hashtag feminism:

I think that certain men that may need to be more cautious of their behaviors, that they may not have been concerned about prior to hashtag feminism, MeToo, what have you, I think they feel threatened. And I don't necessarily think that's what they should -- to use the should word -- should be feeling, I think they should feel remorseful. I think they should feel desiring to seek education in corrective action. But I think a lot of people feel threatened all of a sudden, you know, they're afraid to have their face on social media.

They're afraid have their name out there.

Charlie mentioned the way some men will perform feminism in order to avoid negative consequences or to feel good about themselves:

You'll see men doing things that feel performative, and people are not sure whether they're trustworthy or they're just adopting language to avoid punishment. I certainly fall into this trap sometimes—it’s sort of the White Knight complex. Like, your job isn’t to

be the hero, it's to be there if you need to be. It doesn't help. If you're always looking out for the big way to be a hero, you're going to miss a hundred other opportunities and that opportunity may never come. And of course it's normal for it to feel good to do good. You don't have to squash that impulse. But if you get tied up with wanting people to think you're great, you're gonna make that kind of toxic for yourself.

Elijah expressed confusion and anxiety about what to visibly support on social media. He reported an internal conflict about inconsistencies between his political beliefs and his personal life, which caused him stress about how to engage in feminism. Moreover, he felt a cognitive dissonance about publicly expressing disdain or condemnation of men similar to him, fearing that he would be seen as fake or lacking in self-confidence:

I've been in multiple relationships where my partner would post things, and I didn't want to make it into a fight because I didn't feel that strongly about it. But at the same time I felt like I needed to. I felt like I ran into a dilemma of, "Do I like this post? Do I Tweet it? Do I ignore it? What do I do?" Because the conflicting aims of 1) I want to support what this person says, I agree with it politically, but 2) I don't agree with it personally. So how do I navigate that as me? How do I engage with their politics without also saying "Yeah, I suck." Because even the exceptionalism of "Well everyone else of this category sucks except me"—it's also something that gets mocked on Twitter. People are very aware of that hypocrisy. So I run into this dilemma of how do I engage with a certain kind of politics when part of me feels willing to agree with it, and another part of me feels I need to defend some part of myself. And if I don't, then I'm just kind of being maybe a loser or something.

The Downsides of Hashtag Feminism

Nearly every participant reported that hashtag feminism contained what they saw as flaws that undermined its message. Five subthemes emerged that described the problems participants identified: 1) even profeminist participants were turned off, 2) attacking further entrenched pro-sexist ideas and behavior, 3) men felt monolithic treatment denied their humanity, 4) men's difficulty finding a place in hashtag feminism, and 5) attacking was not exclusive to hashtag feminism (Table 2).

Even Profeminist Participants Were Turned Off

The first subtheme explores how even profeminist participants reported feeling reticent to engage with hashtag feminism that used an aggressive tone. In fact, they specifically stated that the reason their reaction to hashtag feminism was so different from their reaction to feminist ideas overall was the tone used by online activists. Some participants identified feeling ambivalence towards the movement due to the conflict between discourse tone and the value of the ideas themselves. Multiple participants saw that the tone of some online feminists turned away men who otherwise might be willing to discuss feminist issues.

Julian reported feeling positive about feminism, but indicated that hashtag feminists' methods produced a negative effect for him: "I know the idea behind the movement is good. But the problem is I think they are doing it the wrong way. I don't like the women who put too much effort in trying to make men feel bad." Paul agreed that feminism and talking about gender inequality was important, but acknowledged that he is turned off by the aggressive tone some feminists use:

I think for the most part it's a good thing, the #MeToo movement has definitely been a good thing. I applaud the women who stand up and say stuff about it. That being said,

there are some ways the message is communicated that can be detrimental. The aggressiveness of it in some cases is a bad thing. If you have a good message and you're promoting it in an aggressive, mean-spirited way, then I don't care how good your message is. I'm going to be turned off by the way you're presenting it.

Miguel also liked feminist ideas, but stated outright that the negative feelings engendered by feminist discourse have made him reluctant to engage further in the feminist cause: "I have seen this idea as a good thing, but it has been a bad experience for me. Mostly because some people who try to particip[ate], they do it like negative participation. And it has a bad feel for me."

Elijah specified that he has felt terrified to be grouped in with openly sexist and violent anti-feminists, despite himself being appalled at their views:

It's amazing to think that those people exist because I can't even fathom occupying that state. These people, they're not being misconstrued. They mean exactly what they say and it's so hard to think how diverse of opinion people can have when it's so obvious that one way makes more sense if you're a human with any degree of empathy. But it's crazy how some people can be so out there. Yet at the same time I live in eternal fear of something I do lumping me into that category of a red pill person. And there doesn't seem to be much of a degree, like you're either in this elect of woke-ness or you're pretty far out in the Boondocks, and I think people like me are afraid of being in that category.

Attacking Further Entrenched Pro-Sexist Ideas and Behavior

Participants also described seeing some men react to the aggressive tone of discourse by becoming closed to feminist ideas and actively opposing it as a result. This included seeing already anti-feminist men become even more staunch in their views and taking aggressive feminist messaging as proof that feminist ideas are invalid or dangerous. Some participants

discussed how, despite the importance and validity of feminist messaging, angry feminists' methods were counter to the basic ways that humans work. Paul described how attacking and shaming sexist men is only going to result in alienating and pushing them away:

Let me put it this way: if I'm a staunch sexist person and I believe that like, a woman's place is 'in the kitchen'—and you come to me and start putting me down and slamming me and telling me I'm a horrible person, I'm not any more—I'm probably *less* likely to believe in your message because of [the way you're approaching me].

Brian, who acknowledged his traditional views on gender and feminism, described how present-day feminism feels violent and closed to actual discourse: “This new wave of feminism seems much more violent than the past. And like, if you have a political discussion with one of the activists, it seems like they will call you names instead of discussing ideas.” Julian stated that the aggressive tone of some feminists helped the movement successfully get people's attention but specified that it was negative attention. He described it as counter-productive to feminist aims of inviting men to join the feminist cause: “I mean, if you make someone angry, [they] usually pay attention. But at the same time, it's creating their negative response. So the men ends [sic] up paying attention to the movement, but they're going to the opposite way.”

Grant reported that men already predisposed to disagree with feminist messaging would certainly not feel invited or convinced by the way some feminists approach feminist messaging:

I guess the biggest problem I have is you have some posters or opinions where I agree with the sentiment of what you're going for, but there's some aspects of arguments where I think, is that something that I could convince a man of if they were less sympathetic to those views in the first place?

Men Felt Monolithic Treatment Denied Their Humanity

Participants reported that online discussion of hashtag feminism often represented issues related to gender inequality in monolithic or simplistic ways, making generalizations about men and masculinity. When this occurred, participants felt that criticism of systemic gender inequality labeled men as wholly toxic. This caused them to feel defensive, angry, and ashamed, which reduced their desire to engage in feminist discourse. Instead, they reported a desire to see humans as complex rather than lumping all men into limited, good-or-bad categories. On this account, some participants expressed difficulty reconciling a systemic understanding of sexism with the need to break down monolithic views about whole groups of people. Other participants did not see all of masculinity as problematic or oppressive, but acknowledged that within masculinity there are negative behaviors, traits, and perspectives that are distributed systemically within the construct of masculinity.

Brian described his views of men as non-monolithic, where there are men who do good and men who do evil. He did not attribute it to systemic sexism, instead seeing it as a matter of individual morals and behavior: “[Hashtag feminism] hasn’t really affected my view of men. Before the movement I recognized that there are evil men, but not all men are evil.” Julian reported that he does see how people engage in cultural systems of oppression, though he still felt that people should not be assessed based on their identification with a particular gender. He discussed how he sees men with patriarchal beliefs as the individuals who tend to contribute more to gender inequality and violence: “I believe there are men who are bad, they would rape women or use violence against their wives because they have patriarchal thinking. But I try to believe that they don't have the same ideology. They had a bad orientation.” Thomas described

how some participants of hashtag feminism lumped toxic and healthy aspects of masculinity together, condemning all of it equally as part of patriarchal oppression:

I find #SmashThePatriarchy interesting because I've typically seen it in contexts that are almost so generalized that the echo doesn't allow for nuance. That experience has framed some things around hashtag feminism where you see this decryment [sic] of maleness as a form of patriarchy, and even turning on some of the good things that exist within traditional masculinity. Like I said, some of that protector role. Again, there's a dark side to [the protector role], but what I see as the echo chamber disallows for nuance. And if you disagree with the generalization, it's an immediate cast-out. So there's this sense of binary that exists especially with online hashtagging that, to me, doesn't allow for safe and effective communication. And that's where I've struggled heavily as a male with the hashtag feminism pieces.

Elijah hoped that people were more able to see each other as complex in offline spaces than they are on social media. He also stated social media allows people to easily and rapidly make judgments about each other, and it is hard to contextualize one's own assessment of self against others' assessments:

I mean, that's how it feels on Twitter, man. I mean, you hope that people can be more nuanced about it in the context of a relationship. I think a lot of people live in fear of being branded as a certain kind of person, and then being like, "Maybe I *am* this kind of person?" Because I bet these red pill people probably don't think of themselves as this radical person. They probably think, "I'm just a simple person who hates political correctness," or something. So yeah, that's how I feel."

Men Found it Difficult to Find a Place in Hashtag Feminism

The fourth subtheme under the downfall of hashtag feminism describes how participants struggled with how to engage in the hashtag feminist movement. Some reported that it was difficult to find a place for themselves in hashtag feminism. This was usually due to feeling inauthentic about joining hashtag feminism as it existed or feeling unsafe in the hashtag feminist environment. These participants wondered how to participate as an ally without feeling or appearing hypocritical or without betraying their own sense of identity.

Thomas expressed complicated feelings about how, despite identifying as a conservative, White, Christian male, he supports contemporary feminism and its ideas about gender and gender equality. He reported feeling, however, that there is no space for him in the online feminist movement, because he has seen others like him be criticized and shunned when trying to help:

Where I've struggled is, how does someone make sure that he's doing the right things in his spheres of influence? Because I feel like those who get on the soapbox on social media and berate do a disservice. And even the fear of wanting to engage in that space, again, seeing the binary-ness that exists—I know I do not fit the criteria for my political views and my history to be part of the movement. So I never wanted to engage because I saw myself as being ostracized. And maybe I'm making a presumption and seeing things pessimistically, but while my intersectionality is being a White heterosexual male, trying to advocate for the #MeToo movement feels odd.

Elijah expressed anxiety and confusion about how to take action within the sphere of hashtag feminism. He reported feeling that his identity as a White man was inherently not allowed in the movement, and that he therefore felt paralyzed to make a move of any kind:

You're supposed to shut up and go to the sidelines, and that's hard to distinguish [from] being someone who's ignoring and not engaging or on the "right side of history." I haven't figured out yet how to have discussions, because even when I try to have these discussions like I've tried in these relationships to be like, "Okay, well what am I supposed to do when like I see these statuses, what am I supposed to do?" It's only led to arguments that I wish I wasn't having. I'm not trying to put the blame on those people. I just don't know how to engage with it in a way that doesn't come off as hostile.

And I'm not hostile to those ideas. I just don't know how I can be involved without being accused of some kind of bad faith.

Miguel described how the way that hashtag feminists approach men already partly shapes men's responses. He explained that hashtag feminists' attacking, damning posture intrinsically puts men on the defensive instead of inviting them into a collaborative discussion: "The approach they take is not as inviting as you would expect when they want people to support their cause. If you blame people before explaining everything, you're already limiting how people read and would engage with this cause."

Attacking Tone Was Not Exclusive to Hashtag Feminism

Several participants discussed how the attacking tone noticeable in hashtag feminism was not exclusive to the gender equality movement. Instead, participants described this as a common feature of online activist movements in general, whether in support of social justice or its opposite. These statements were significant with regards to men's understandings of hashtag feminism as compared to other online social movements and felt important to include because of their indications regarding hashtag activism of other types. For example, Paul distinguished the issues at the heart of feminism from the qualities of social justice culture: "I'm having trouble

disentangling it from woke culture at large. If I were to disentangle feminism, I would say that thread is probably a good thing. But if you entangle it with all that other stuff, I see problems.” Grant expressed distaste for engaging in online discourse on any topic due to the unpleasant nature of interactions therein:

In general I'm not a huge fan of online discourses and the trends they're currently taking. It feels counterproductive. People are almost trying to bulldoze through people even if they are fighting for a cause I believe in. I think it happens in a way that leaves a lot of people who otherwise could be more sympathetic to kind of entrench themselves. I guess I'm talking just about increases in polarization, where people get entrenched in ideas, like against feminism, because all they see is a pretty aggressive online version of it.

Charlie described how he has seen the same negative features of hashtag feminist discourse occur in other social activist movements online. He explained why it is something all proponents of social movements should pay attention to, because it hinders their cause:

I think this isn't exclusive to hashtag feminism. It's when you're dealing with any sort of social issue online, parts of it are less helpful than others. Where someone may be coming from a good place, but use the wrong terminology. Instead of someone taking the time to go, “Hey, we would normally say this,” like they get where you're coming from, they might jump down their throat about the phrasing. And not address that the person was trying to be better. It ends up turning a lot of people off. And that shouldn't matter, you should be adult enough to be like, “Hey, I wasn't wild about the tone, but I get that I made a mistake, and I can do better.” But unfortunately it's my feeling that men tend to be quite defensive when something like that happens, and usually end up taking a couple steps backward in response as opposed to taking it as a learning experience, even if they

didn't like the method of delivery. I think people are trying to do better, and they get met with sort of vitriol or disdain. That's not helping anyone, and it might, you know, it'll probably just make things worse.

Moving Towards A New Masculinity

The final theme that emerged described how participants stated a desire for a new kind of masculinity. This meant that participants wanted to replace old, traditional masculine gender norms with new ones that better fit their ideas of how men should be. Participants described their concepts for a new masculinity. They also discussed how they arrived at their conclusions. Subthemes within this section include 1) men's personal concepts of masculinity differed from traditional masculinity, 2) hashtag feminism created motivation to act differently, and 3) the importance of vulnerable space for men (Table 2).

Men's Personal Concepts of Masculinity Differed From Traditional Masculinity

First, many participants reported that their personal ideals of masculinity differed from broader social norms. In the earlier theme regarding systemic influences on men's ideas of masculinity and feminism, results showed how different relationships and intersections in their lives formed their concepts of what it means to be a man. The following quotes will provide examples of participants' personal concepts of masculinity versus the ideas of masculinity present in society that were discussed in the first theme of the results. For example, Julian described how his concept of what masculinity means differs from more traditional ideas he has seen in culture and history:

I'd say he doesn't have to bear everything alone. The most impactful trait would be trying to take care of other people. It doesn't have to be aggressive, he doesn't have to rely only on himself. He can be agreeable, depend more on his partner.

Paul explained how his personal definition of masculinity incorporates positive aspects of traditional masculinity while adding traits such as empathy, vulnerability, and emotionality:

I have a different idea of what it is to be man. I think reliability, dependability would play a part, which does hark back to the traditional stereotype. In my opinion it's more manly to embrace your emotions, understand them, and be able to process them in a healthy way rather than push them out of the way.

Kai went into detail on how he felt sadness and shame about masculinity for a long time, feeling that masculinity was, perhaps, all bad. However, he reported relief and a new sense of shared identity when exploring how toxic masculinity can be divorced and removed from masculinity to create a new, positive archetype:

There was a period of time where I felt like all men could do was wrong. But I've realized what those values of masculinity could be in terms of different role models. Essentially, it's the idea that masculinity needs a makeover to fight toxic masculinity. I have a poster in mind by an artist called Karen Hallion. She has one particularly for men. The list is like, Lavar Burton and Seth Rogers, Jim Henson, Barack Obama, Robin Williams, Yo-Yo Ma, David Bowie, José Andrés, and Lin-Manuel Miranda. I have some issues with some of these men, but so far it's like—positive role models. They don't rely on the notions of masculinity that involve strength, violence, and dominance.

Hashtag Feminism Created Motivation to Act Differently

While participants reported feeling the restrictions imposed by traditional masculinity throughout the lifespan, they also reported that hashtag feminism had inspired them to change how they perform masculinity. This meant that hashtag feminism encouraged them to change how they saw themselves as men and how they behaved as a result. For example, Paul expressed

displeasure about the ways he sees men participate in gender violence and inequality. He said that it drives him to want something healthier for men and society:

One way hashtag feminism is influencing our society is we're starting to develop a new idea of what a man is. I think as a society we're saying, okay, we need to re-evaluate. And that I completely get behind. Why don't we write a new definition? We've had this old one for a thousand years. Why don't we write a new one that actually is good?

Kai said that he feels the weight of hegemonic masculinity's consequences throughout history, which adds even more incentive to change what masculinity means in the present:

The other [examples of toxic masculinity] I've been trying to shake off for the longest time, almost as if to make up for all the terrible things men have done throughout history. Learning the history of [systemic sexism] has been why I've been struggling with masculinity, and there needs to be a better version of that. Or to embody that sort of masculinity without harming anyone.

Charlie reported that he wanted to take his own stance from one of minimizing harm to one of maximizing the good that he can do:

I already sort of have practices in place to be like, "Well, I'm going to do my best to try to behave in a way that doesn't hurt people." And that was my goal, which is easy to do, but still something I think about to make sure that I wasn't zoning out one day and standing too close to someone. But now I try to be a little more proactive. Like great, I'm not hurting someone. That's the standard for minimal decency. I don't want to be minimally decent. I want to be what I think of as a good man. That means getting uncomfortable, and if you see something that is harmful, pointing it out and trying to move things in a

better direction as best you can. So, I'd say it made me think more proactively about “What can I do?” instead of “What should I avoid?”

Men Needed Vulnerability

In describing how they wanted masculinity to change, participants reported wanting masculinity to be more vulnerable. This stood in direct contrast to the invulnerability at the heart of traditional norms around masculinity. Participants also described the value and importance of having a space where they could be vulnerable regarding issues involving gender and sexism. Elijah reported that it was much easier to accept and process his feelings about hashtag feminism in the context of the research interview because he did not feel the pressure of maintaining the relationship. He reported that many of his difficulties with hashtag feminism derive from the fact that he does not feel he can be vulnerable in his relationships, or that he will be permanently seen as a bad person for making a mistake:

When I'm talking to you, this neutral person—I mean, that's the whole difficulty with relationships. You don't want to say something that then someone hears and the scales fall from their eyes, and then suddenly they think of you as this person who's been thrown into that problematic pool. I definitely feel a need to censor myself around someone who I'm with in a personal relationship...I think personally what I feel like is that like every man, just like every person, has to go through the course of learning how to, like, express their like, their sexuality and their relationship to others and like, how they see themselves and what they, how they comport themselves and I think that like, along the way it—it can be very hard because like, people... I think are afraid of making any mistake and there, their, um... being like, it being like, kind of like a permanent branding on who they are as a person.

Miguel reported that his girlfriend is one of the few people with whom he can vulnerably connect with over questions regarding gender inequality and sexism. He stated that, while others in his social circle or on the internet are intimidating to talk to, he has an open dialogue with his girlfriend: "My girlfriend, she tells me some about the news, but she's one of the girls that takes it really well, you know? She's really open about it. Try to tell me about things, so it's pretty inviting for me." Liam was emphatic in his statement that men must be recognized for their achievements at the same time as being held accountable for their actions. He explained that not allowing men that space is something that happens in feminism, but it does not allow for men to see the benefits that occur when they change their behavior:

There needs to be room for amends for progress to be made. Not avoiding punishment, not writing off punishment. Punishment is a very valid part of this process. But then progress also must be recognized where it has been truly made... [Not recognizing how people have made progress] just precipitates more aggression, more defensiveness, more punching down. Because that's the natural response to fear. And I think we want to bypass that on the way to progress.

Charlie shared how it is necessary to draw men's attention to the ways that they make mistakes or engage in sexist behaviors, but that it must be done in a way that recognizes the efforts they are making:

There are lots of opportunities that end up getting missed for anyone becoming a better person if the activist doesn't take the time to be patient and meet the person, acknowledge the intention. There's almost always going to be some correction, like, "Hey, that phrasing is offensive or gives the impression that you hold this belief, which from your behavior I don't think is true." So it would come from that perspective. Like, I'm trying to

help you present yourself to the world the way you want to be and the way that you believe you are, that you're a good man. So, you're just trying to help if you come at it from a place of like, "I'm trying to help you navigate in a way that reflects who you are." I think when you come at it from that perspective you'll be more successful. And in the end the world's a better place, whereas if you stick to a hard line and come out people with anger, even though the anger is justified for sure, ultimately it doesn't help.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to capture the phenomenon of Millennial and Generation Z men’s experiences of hashtag feminism and masculinity. This chapter will begin with an exploration of how study findings compare to the masculinity framework posited by Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel (2017). It will continue with a summary of the study’s contributions to the literature. Next, it will discuss the clinical implications of the findings. Last will be a discussion of this study’s limitations and suggestions for future research.

Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel’s Masculinity Framework

Table 3

Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel’s Masculinity Framework

Dimension	Perspective	<i>Defensive</i> Supports patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity	<i>Expressive/Relational</i> Critiques patriarchal values and restraints of traditional masculine gender norms	<i>Radical Profeminist</i> Criticizes patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity
<i>Ontological</i> Beliefs about innate sex characteristics		Essentialism	Dual	Social constructionism
<i>Psychological-Axiological</i> Internal emotions, beliefs, and thoughts		Stoicism	Expressive/reflexive	Anti-oppression
<i>Interpersonal</i> Attitudes about how men should act towards others		Provider-protector	Communicative	Anti-sexism
<i>Social/Legal</i> Attitudes about men’s roles in society		Men’s discrimination	Egalitarian	Women’s discrimination

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of men’s experiences of hashtag feminism and their own masculinity. Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel’s work on masculinity (2017) established a framework of how this phenomenon might appear. Interview data yielded complex information about participants’ identification with the Defensive, Expressive/Relational, and Radical Profeminist perspectives outlined by Ben Salah, Deslaurier,

and Knüsel (2017), which are depicted in Table 3. Findings from this study were similar in the sense that the primary attitudes towards masculinity and hashtag feminism appeared to reflect these three perspectives. In contrast to their findings, however, results from this study indicated that participants usually expressed alignment with more than one perspective. The vast majority (11 out of 12) appeared to express sentiments from more than one of these three perspectives, showing a that multiple perspectives occurred simultaneously within each person. Findings from the current study also reflected that men's perspectives change depending on their context. For example, a participant aligned with Profeminist views in the context of religion, but expressed Defensive characteristics when confronted with hashtag feminist rhetoric. The following paragraphs will review each of the three perspectives (Defensive, Expressive/Relational, and Radical Profeminist) and how they appeared within the current study.

First, Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel's (2017) Defensive perspective was characterized by a defense of traditional hegemonic masculinity. It was anti-feminist and proposed that men's rights are curtailed by profeminist views and policies (Ben Salah et al., 2017). Defensive dimensions were characterized by 1) essentialism (ontological), 2) stoicism (psychological-axiological), 3) provider-protector (interpersonal), and men's discrimination (social/legal; see Table 3). The Defensive perspective and its dimensions were visible throughout participants' understandings of traditional masculinity. However, when participants described their personal views and preferences for masculinity, only one aligned himself exclusively with the Defensive perspective along all dimensions. The other participants expressed Defensive sentiments only in regard to particular scenarios or regarding a specific dimension. For example, men reported feeling greater Defensive alignment when confronted with what they perceived to be hostile rhetoric from hashtag feminists.

Second, Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel's Expressive/Relational perspective prioritized men's emotional lives and relationships and criticized traditional masculinity's emphasis on stoicism, competition, and distant relationships (2017). Expressive/Relational dimensions consisted of 1) dual essentialism and constructionism (ontological), 2) expressive/reflexive (psychological-axiological), 3) communicative (interpersonal), and 4) egalitarian (social/legal; Table 3). The majority of participants (11 of the 12) participants made statements congruent with an Expressive/Relational perspective, which also differed from Fox (2004) and Yun (2018)'s findings in which men holding Expressive/Relational views were generally isolated from Defensive and Radical Profeminist groups. In fact, the results from this study indicated that the majority of participants held Expressive/Relational views about masculinity and how masculinity should change, regardless of their perspectives on hashtag feminism. These participants were able to express Expressive/Relational views while also holding Defensive and Radical Profeminist stances towards cultural and political issues regarding gender.

Rather than appearing as a separate perspective, the Expressive/Relational stance appeared to underlie most participants sociopolitical perspectives because it related to their ideas about masculinity. The participants who supported an Expressive/Relational stance towards masculinity reported dissatisfaction with traditional masculinity. Participants stated that these instances of conflict with traditional masculinity created a space where they reflected on masculinity. When reflecting on masculinity, these participants generally critiqued traditional masculinity and, in some cases, visualized an alternative form of masculinity. This alternative version of masculinity aligned with Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel's (2017) Expressive/Relational perspective.

Finally, Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel's Radical Profeminist perspective encapsulated a critical perspective towards heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, and systems of oppression that privilege men (2017). Radical Profeminist dimensions were summed up by 1) social constructionism (ontological), 2) anti-oppression (psychological-axiological), 3) anti-sexism (interpersonal), and 4) women's discrimination (social/legal; Table 3). Notably, Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel's framework (2017) depicted Defensive and Profeminist views as mutually exclusive. However, findings from the current study showed that men frequently held both views in different contexts. A majority of participants in the current study expressed Radical Profeminist views along multiple, if not all, dimensions. However, a majority of participants also expressed Defensive perspectives. This especially occurred in response to what they perceived as hostile feminist rhetoric, or when feminist criticism came closer to them personally rather than being an abstract idea. This finding differed from previous studies that found Radical Profeminist and Defensive views to be opposed and non-intersecting (Ben Salah et al., 2017; Fox, 2004; Yun, 2018). Instead, results of this study indicated that the majority of participants held a combination of these two views simultaneously depending on the context.

Dimensions: Ontological, Psychological-Axiological, Interpersonal, and Social/Legal

Outlined here are how study findings compared to Ben Salah, Deslaurier, and Knüsel's dimensions (2017; Table 3). In terms of the ontological dimension, only one the 12 participants interviewed for this study expressed an essentialist understanding of gender. The other 11 described gender in a way that conveyed social constructionist views of gender and masculinity. For the one participant who held an essentialist understanding of gender, this ontological view conflicted with fourth wave feminist ideas and led him to feel to confusion and defensiveness

towards fourth-wave feminism. All other participants reported seeing gender and masculinity as a construct shaped by history and culture that could and should be modified.

Regarding the psychological-axiological dimension, all participants described their experience of traditional masculinity as stoic and unemotional. A majority explicitly stated a personal desire for cultural standards of masculinity to become more expressive/reflexive. They said that a new masculinity should incorporate more emotionality, vulnerability, and empathy. The others indicated frustration with the impact of stoicism on their lives even though they did not clearly say that they wanted masculinity to change.

Participants described the interpersonal dimension of masculinity when discussing how they understood social roles within traditional masculinity. Participants all reported that they were socialized to see men's role as defensive, protective, and reliable, which aligned with the provider-protector dimension that aligned with Defensive masculinity. The majority of participants who wanted masculinity to change still expressed valuing the provider-protector dimension. Instead, they expressed a desire for communicative (Expressive/Relational) and anti-sexist (Radical Profeminist) perspectives to be incorporated into the provider-protector role to create an integrated, updated masculinity.

Finally, the Social/Legal dimension showed up in participants' descriptions of their views on sexism and hashtag feminism. Most participants expressed a mix of egalitarian (Expressive/Relational) views and women's discrimination (Radical Profeminist) views, which they did not see as separate. It was difficult to interpret whether participants' defensiveness and negative reactions towards their perceptions of aggressive hashtag feminism constituted a men's discrimination social/legal (Defensive) view. While some participants' defensiveness appeared to be directed towards the content of feminist messaging—that is, feminist criticism and demands

of men—some of the defensiveness appeared to be related more to the tone and mechanics of social media discourse. This ambiguity surrounding the social/legal dimension is therefore an area that would benefit from further research and analysis.

Contributions to the Literature

The following section will review what study findings suggested regarding Millennial and Gen Z men's interactions with masculinity and hashtag feminism. It will discuss implications about 1) how gender identity and concepts are formed, 2) men's experiences of traditional masculinity, 3) how masculine norms are changing among some men, and 4) how masculine gender norms impacted their engagement with hashtag feminism. It will also review contributions to the literature regarding 5) features of hashtag activism and their impact on the movement and 6) the difference between feminism and hashtag feminism according to study findings.

First, results suggested that men's systemic positioning was how they developed their gender identity and views on gender equality. The primary way men reported developing their social position was through relationships and men's other intersectional identities. This finding was consistent with previous literature that indicates the importance of relationships and intersections in construction of identity and sociopolitical beliefs (Fullam, 2017; Harnois, 2017).

Men's experiences of traditional masculine norms echoed previous research saying that masculinity was defined by stoicism, invulnerability, independence, and protectiveness (Kimmel, 2012; Levant, 2011; Schermer & Holmes, 2018). Participants said they felt pressure to live up to these norms of masculinity. Interviewees discussed ways that masculinity norms had negatively impacted them by making them feel shame and isolation. This was consistent with theoretical and empirical research on *gender role strain*, a theory that describes the distress that results from

men's attempts to comply with masculine gender norms (Kilmartin, 2000; Levant, 2011; Moss-Recusin et al., 2010; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016; Vandello & Bosson, 2013).

As a result, most participants said they wanted a new cultural definition of masculinity. Primarily, men wanted masculinity to become more emotional, vulnerable, and humanistic, which reflected findings from previous literature (Elliott, 2015; Schermer & Holmes, 2018). However, participants also voiced valuing certain aspects of traditional masculinity, such as supportiveness, reliability, and kindness. Rather than repudiating masculinity entirely, participants reported a need to redefine masculinity to expand its pro-social traits. Participants' desire for an updated masculinity norm was consistent with previous research concerning problems with outdated and dysfunctional masculine norms (Kimmel, 2012; Schermer & Holmes, 2018). However, participants also voiced valuing certain aspects of traditional masculinity, such as supportiveness, reliability, and its family orientation. Rather than repudiating masculinity entirely, participants reported a need to redefine masculinity to expand its pro-social traits.

We found that the pressure from masculine gender norms impacted men's engagement in gender-related social issues. Results suggested that hashtag feminism challenges invulnerability, a part of traditional masculinity that constitutes the core of masculine self-esteem. We therefore found that it was difficult for men to want to engage in hashtag feminism, which supported previous literature that found lower rates of male support of hashtag feminism (Casey, et al., 2012; Conlin & Heesacker, 2018; Kunst et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2016; Vandello & Bosson, 2013).

Findings indicated that hashtag feminism called upon men to engage in vulnerability, which is prohibited by traditional masculine gender norms (Elder et al., 2012; Hartman, 2017;

Kilmartin, 2010; Schermer & Holmes, 2018;). Previous literature has discussed how manhood is not a fixed trait, but a status that men must constantly strive to achieve and maintain (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Gilmore, 1990; Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Vandello et al., & Weaver, 2008). Considering men experience significant negative impacts to their self-esteem when their masculinity is challenged (Hayes & Mahalik, 2000; Kilmartin, 2000; Levant, 2011; Moss-Recusin, et al. 2010; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016; Vandello & Bosson, 2013), it appeared that the risk of engaging in vulnerability deterred men from taking part in hashtag feminism.

Additionally, most participants felt that social media was not an emotionally safe space. They reported experiencing online spaces as unsafe, critical, lacking in nuance, and non-humanistic. They attributed this danger to the attacking discourse that they encountered within hashtag feminism. Participants' experiences of this attacking tone were echoed in literature about *incivility* in online discourse, which refers to hostile, aggressive rhetoric often encountered on social media (Anderson et al., 2014; Borah, 2014; Chen & Abedin, 2014; Chen & Ng, 2016; Chen & Ng, 2017; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011).

Importantly, these findings suggested that men's fears regarding incivility within hashtag feminism appeared to heighten their perception of the harmfulness of hashtag feminist beliefs while lessening their support for the cause. This was reflected in the way that the majority of participants reported supporting feminism overall, but saw hashtag feminism as flawed.

On this note, we found that participants did not see hashtag feminism and feminism as the same thing. They described how online and offline interactions around feminism felt different to them, with offline discourse providing a more pro-social, humanizing experience. Conversely, participants reported that hashtag feminism took on a negative or pejorative connotation. They

saw hashtag feminism as espousing more extreme views than feminism, and even reported feeling it might be detrimental to the feminist cause overall.

Participants stated that their negative associations with hashtag feminism were due to specific features of social media, such as online algorithms privileging inflammatory rhetoric (Krishna, 2017), negative emotional reactions to uncivil discourse (Anderson et al., 2014; Borah, 2014; Chen & Abedin, 2014; Chen & Ng, 2016; Chen & Ng, 2017; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011), fear of public perceptions (Hunt & Gonsalkorale, 2014), and confusion around how to engage in allyship (Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Wiley & Dunne, 2018).

Study findings therefore indicated that the nature of social media poses obstacles to pro-social engagement around social problems. Despite social media's unique ability to connect marginalized and oppressed voices (Bogen et al., 2019; Clark, 2016; Dixon, 2014; Fullam, 2017; Ikizer et al., 2018; Jackson & Welles, 2015; Jackson & Welles, 2016; Keller et al., 2018; Kende et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2007; Reicher et al., 1995; Schumann & Klein, 2015), it appeared from the study these other aspects of social media's structure made it hard for people to engage in emotionally challenging discussion. In sum, even men who reported agreement with feminist messaging or a desire to reflect reported how scared, angry, and shut down they feel when engaging with or reading about hashtag feminism. This finding has practical implications, as pragmatic, humanistic feminists would benefit from this knowledge about the functions and features of online discourse.

Clinical Implications

Clinical implications from this study range from client exploration of gender and social norms to processing client experiences of social media, identity politics, and civic engagement. Below are recommendations for clinical practice in light of study findings. I start with a

discussion of the interview sessions and their implications on clinical work. I then include a discussion of how postmodern therapies, such as Feminist Family Therapy and Narrative Therapy, and relational therapies, such as Emotionally Focused Therapy, would provide a good theoretical fit for the challenges described by study participants.

To start, it is important to discuss the nature of the interviews, regarding both the topics discussed and the implicit data conveyed throughout the interview process. In analyzing the data, it was important for me to pay attention to both the *content*—that is, what was being said—as well as the *process*—how things were being said. Attending to participant process was relevant for both research and clinical ends, as much of the data conferred involves non-verbal and implicit communication. This is clinically important, as much of therapy requires the clinician pay attention to what is left unsaid in the room to gather important information. Noticing participant process involved paying attention to things like participant emotion, tone of voice, confidence or reticence in making a statement, qualifying or distancing rhetoric, and other structural features of the conversation.

Process data supported participant statements about the importance of safe space for acknowledging and exploring their thoughts and feelings. While several participants explicitly stated that the anonymity and freedom of the interview space helped them reduce anxiety related to the topic, their tone and manner of speech also supported evidence that a safe space would be helpful. Throughout each interview I would reflect my understanding of what the participant said in order to check that I was understanding them correctly. This served a triple purpose of 1) minimizing miscommunication, 2) validating and reflecting participant thoughts and feelings, and 3) allowing them to provide more data as they were able to free their thoughts from judgment within the interview space. While reflection is an important research interview skill, it

is also a fundamental therapeutic intervention. Its therapeutic effect was evident in participant reports and decreases in non-verbal signals of anxiety and distress, and supported evidence that men need a space to be vulnerable in order to make sense of their experiences.

This important process data supports clinical implications from previous research on men and masculinity. Literature has long indicated the importance of exploring masculinity with male clients due to the strong impact that male gender norms have on men's mental health (Banyard et al., 2007; Hayes & Mahalik, 2000; Levant, 2011; Mahalik et al., 2012). Study findings supported this literature, as participants reported finding value in a non-judgmental space where they could process their emotions. Participants reported that therapists, partners, and even anonymous media forums all served as spaces where participants could acknowledge their emotions and give voice to their thoughts without fear of retribution or relational consequences. Several participants verbally expressed relief at being able to process their experiences in the context of the interview. Given that previous findings that men find it difficult to be vulnerable (Elliott, 2015; Levant, 2011; Kimmel, 2012; Schermer & Holmes, 2018), therapy is an important resource for men in today's crisis of masculinity.

According to previous research, men struggle to relate to themselves and others because of the emphasis traditional masculine norms place on invulnerability (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Elder et al., 2012; Gilmore, 1990; Hartman, 2017; Kilmartin, 2010; Schermer & Holmes, 2018; Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Vandello et al., & Weaver, 2008). Participants from this study indicated they felt the need to maintain a strong, confident position to maintain their self-esteem as men. They described an internal conflict between the need to be invulnerable and their awareness of their relational needs and emotions. They reported feeling the negative impact that gender norms around invulnerability had on their relationships and ability to open up to others.

This is an important finding as it relates to relational therapy, as Marriage and Family Therapists are uniquely positioned to help male clients and their loved ones work through the challenges posed them by masculine gender roles.

This finding was emphasized by participant statements about the importance of having close others with whom they could discuss and process their reactions to social justice activism. Men reported that having no way to discuss their reactions to hashtag feminism had an adverse impact on their mental and relational health. They described experiencing anxiety, defensiveness, fear, shame, and anger when they felt they did not have a safe space to explore, learn, and grow. This highlights the value of the therapeutic relationship as a nonjudgmental space where clients can make sense of their reactions to politics. It also highlights how family therapists can work with clients on how to make room in their relationships for exploration and growth despite the contentiousness of current gender politics.

Postmodern therapies such as Feminist Family Therapy and Narrative Therapy are recommended models for working with male clients around issues of masculinity and online social activism like hashtag feminism. To start, Feminist Family Therapy (Hare-Mustin, 1978) could help men make sense of the pressure they feel from hegemonic masculinity. It may decrease male clients' distress by developing their sense of how they too are impacted and harmed by patriarchal systems of oppression. This could help them differentiate their identities as men from hegemonic masculinity as a values system. Furthermore, developing men's understanding that hegemonic masculinity negatively impacts all people, regardless of gender, may aid in decreasing men's relational fears around hashtag feminism. Study findings indicated that this is important, as some participants reported considerable fear and defensiveness due to their perceptions that hashtag feminism was attacking their personhood. Lastly, Feminist Family

Therapy could also help clients gain a better sense of how they can work effectively and relationally to dismantle toxic masculinities to create a more humanist, egalitarian system. Considering some participants felt overwhelmed in the face of systemic sexism, therapy could be a helpful place to process feelings of powerlessness and apathy, as well as the trauma men face when becoming aware of systemic sexism. Other participants' reports that small, local actions were the most effective way to counter systemic sexism in their lives provides a guide to how therapists can effectively help male clients find ways of developing anti-sexist agency and accountability.

Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990) emerged as another therapeutic model that could be helpful for men struggling with issues related to masculinity and hashtag feminism. The examination of dominant discourses about men, gender inequality, and systemic oppression could be helpful to clients dealing with issues related to gender and social activism. This could include helping men understand the shame that may arise when men feel like they are not living up to the role requirements of traditional masculinity. It could also help them understand the perspectives of others who are impacted by gender inequality, such as women and transgender individuals. Helping male clients externalize their emotions and experiences as they relate to gender norms and social activism can create space to process and make sense of their experience. For men who struggle with shame and defensiveness regarding their role in perpetuating systemic sexism, re-conceptualizing themselves within the context of dominant patriarchal discourses may help externalize guilt and shame so that men are better able to move forward with profeminist accountability. Additionally, Narrative Therapy's focus on creating support networks of safe and trust-worthy individuals would be helpful for reducing fears of social isolation and ostracism as related to gender and social justice activism.

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988; Johnson, 1996) is another model that could provide benefits to male clients struggling with masculine gender norms and social media discourse. EFT is an attachment-based experiential model that prioritizes emotions and vulnerability. Given the limited vulnerable space afforded to men by society and by internet activism, a therapy model that focuses on vulnerability and establishing relationships with safe and secure others could be a good fit for these clients. As a relational model, EFT could help men understand their own roles and needs within their intimate relationships. In relation to men's experiences of online activism, understanding human emotional reactions could help clients make sense of what they perceive and feel when seeing hashtag activism. EFT's psychoeducational focus on attachment and emotion could also prove helpful given this study's finding that men felt angry, defensive, fearful, and ashamed in response to hashtag feminism. Providing clients with an understanding of how secondary emotions and defense mechanisms function as a way to protect people from primary emotions and unmet attachment needs could reframe their experiences of social media activism. Finally, strengthening men's relationships and emotional self-awareness could lead to the creation of the safe space that study participants reported needing in order to process experiences related to gender and feminism.

In addition to helping clients relate more clearly to themselves, these therapeutic models and interventions can help clients make sense of how others react to gender and feminism. Having a greater understanding of systems, social position, and relationships can help clients better understand their context and how to interact with other people, whether online or offline. As a systemic therapist, it is just as important to help individuals understand themselves in relation to others as it is to help them understand themselves intrapsychically. Given the fraught

nature of hashtag feminism and social activism more broadly, systemic therapy is certainly indicated for clients of all backgrounds and configurations.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Throughout study procedures and analyses it became clear what the limitations of the current study would be. This was due to the constraints of study design and methodology and due to particularities of implementation, participant demographics, and the timeframe in which this study was conducted. Outlined below are limitations to the current study and recommendations for future research to take these limitations into account.

First, while unintentional, study participants all had experience in higher education. Several were in the process of working on their bachelor's degrees, while others had or were working on postgraduate degrees. This was likely due to limitations on where and how recruitment was able to take place—for example, difficulty finding areas to publicly post recruitment flyers other than university campuses and difficulty finding listservs or other networks on which to post social media or email recruitment information. As a result, further studies could purposively target participants without experience in higher education.

This study also yielded more participants who self-identified as supportive of feminism than it did participants who were opposed to feminism. This was likely due to recruitment strategies, such as on-campus recruitment at universities and snowball sampling. A study that recruited more participants with anti-feminist views would have likely yielded very different results. The literature would certainly benefit from studies focusing specifically on men who identify as anti-feminist, as it is important to understand the granular experiences of men with many different viewpoints on feminism and gender.

Regarding participant intersectionality, sexual orientation and race came up as noticeably absent in study data. This study yielded more straight men than gay or bisexual men. Interestingly, sexual orientation was hardly discussed by any of the participants in their experiences and views on masculinity and hashtag feminism, including the two participants who identified as bisexual. While there may or may not be significant reasons why sexual orientation was not particularly present in this study's data, it would certainly be important to intentionally explore the mutual impact of sexual orientation and views on gender and hashtag feminism. Similarly, the participants in this study were predominantly White, with four participants who identified as men of color. Three participants identified as racially Asian, and one identified as racially Latinx. Three participants identified as culturally and ethnically Latinx, and one as Asian. There were no Black participants in the study at all. This limits the study in terms of ethnic and cultural diversity and the depth to which findings could explore the intersections between race, culture, and ethnicity with masculinity and hashtag feminism. Future research would benefit highly from studies that explore the experiences of BIPOC men (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). This is especially important given the lack of focus in the literature overall on BIPOC, as well as the importance of examining BIPOC experience during the current civil rights movements going on in the United States.

Lastly and importantly, this study's focus on masculinity and gender disparities between men and women made it difficult to acknowledge non-binary and gender non-conforming experiences in a way that felt adequate or ethically appropriate. In many ways this appears to reflect much of the binary focus of contemporary cisgender feminism, which privileges men and women and fails to center non-binary and genderqueer people and experiences. While the study design intentionally focused on cis- and transgender men's experiences, it is important to

acknowledge the ways in which this study failed to adequately incorporate the important issue of queer and non-binary gender inclusivity. Future research designs could better incorporate non-binary gender perspectives to more accurately reflect the variety of gender identities present in society.

In addition to research recommendations based on study limitations, study findings also highlighted areas where future research can further outline our understandings of masculinity, social justice activism, and online discourse. The following are recommendations for further studies as a result of study findings. First, this study was designed and implemented by a female researcher. A study with a male investigator could potentially yield different results than those of this study, especially during the interview process. It is possible that participants self-selected to participate in the study based on their views of feminism, feelings about speaking to a female interviewer, and perceptions of the study when seeing recruitment material. Seeing how participation and findings would differ if this study were replicated by a man would possibly provide useful information on participant interactions and assumptions about gender.

Second, future studies could also focus on the difference between online and offline feminist discourse, as well as the perceptions of feminism of men who do not or rarely use social media or do not have the privilege of access. It could be enlightening to explore differences and similarities between men with and without access to internet and other technologies, as well as how these men perceive each other and the technology in question.

Third, the considerable ambiguity about whether participants' defensive reactions to hashtag feminist rhetoric were related to the content or structure of messaging, indicates the need for further research on men's interactions with feminist discourse. Fourth, since profeminist men are an understudied population, it would be beneficial to explore men's development of stances

on feminism. Next, analysis of online feminist discourse as it occurs on platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter would provide more data on the process and mechanisms of social media activism.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, findings furthered my grasp of the deep cultural divide happening in the United States today. I have heard numerous conversations, lectures, and articles discuss the widespread confusion many people—systemic therapists included—feel about how we have gotten here as a society and how we should change our dialogue in order to better accommodate the needs and views of all people, especially those facing oppression, marginalization, and need. As a relational therapist, approaches that favored an “us versus them” framework felt lacking, even when my own morals, ethics, and personal lenses solidly fell on one side of the court. Looking at the existing literature showed that the apparent lack of systemic thinking had infiltrated the research as well. While there were, justifiably, many studies on women’s reactions to hashtag feminism, there was only one on men. And while I could talk to friends and colleagues theoretically about why we thought this was happening, I felt an urgent need to explore this problem empirically.

Several individuals approached me asking why I would want to study men’s voices when, from a critical perspective, women’s voices are the ones that have historically been silenced. Some questioned my loyalty to feminism given my framing of the problem and research question. This made me even more curious about what was happening and how our own biases were concealing important data regarding how we could move towards a more constructive, though hopefully critical, dialogue.

In the end, I am glad to have taken a qualitative look at what it was like for my participants to be men amidst critical discourse about gender. While this study by definition was

only able to capture the experiences of a few, it yielded an in-depth picture of young men's emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and relational responses to the current cultural climate. Moreover, in context their responses made sense. The results fit most of what I knew as a therapist about emotion, attachment needs, relationships, and the importance of environment to a person's understanding of themselves in the world. This study may not have delineated a clairvoyant picture of what needs to happen to make our discourse and society change, but it certainly helped me see some of the challenges to be met along the way. And for that, I am very grateful for my participants' willingness to take part and share their thoughts and feelings with me.

My hope is that future research and thought will focus on ways to help men engage with themselves and others vulnerably and enlist men's help in creating spaces and programs to help them do so. While from a critical perspective it is certainly important to hold men accountable for their actions, as a therapist I know the importance of hearing people out and creating safe space before they can ever possibly grow. My hope is that we can change how we talk about gender inequality by helping men feel empowered to step into the conversation rather than reinforcing the defensiveness that keeps them locked in patriarchal patterns of thought and behavior. Without this step, I do not see a way to shift our conversation towards something more constructive and see only the possibility for temporary, first-order change. However, by reframing and externalizing the problem of sexism and repressive gender norms as something we can face together, I see a way forward to a new way of interacting that will help people on every side of the conversation.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Materials

Email Script

Hello,

My name is Sophie Kosar and I am a master's student in Virginia Tech's Marriage and Family Therapy program. I am currently recruiting participants for my master's thesis, titled *Millennials and Generation Z: Men's Perspectives on Hashtag Feminism*.

The purpose of this study is to explore Millennial and Generation Z men's experiences of hashtag feminism. Data collection for this study will consist of a demographic survey and a 60-90-minute initial interview (\$20 Amazon gift card compensation) and a 15-45-minute followup interview (\$10 Amazon gift card compensation). Interview questions will explore the participant's experiences of hashtag feminism, how their other life experiences influence their perceptions of this form of activism, and how online feminist messaging has influenced them in turn. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential.

To be eligible, participants must

- 1) be at least 18 years of age,
- 2) identify as male,
- 3) be born between 1981 and 2001, and
- 4) use social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, etc.).

If you or anyone you know fits these inclusion criteria and would be interested in participating, please contact me via email at sakosar@vt.edu or via phone at (703) 424-4273.

I am conducting this study to satisfy the program requirements for Virginia Tech's M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy, located in the Human Development and Family Science Department.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sophie Kosar
Master's Candidate, Marriage and Family Therapy Program
Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center
7054 Haycock Road
Falls Church, VA 22043

Social Media Script

Hi, my name is Sophie Kosar and I am a master's student in Virginia Tech's Marriage and Family Therapy program. I am currently recruiting participants for my master's thesis, titled *Millennials and Generation Z: Men's Perspectives on Hashtag Feminism*. I am conducting this study to satisfy the program requirements for Virginia Tech's M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy, located in the Human Development and Family Science Department.

The purpose of this study is to explore Millennial and Generation Z men's experiences of hashtag feminism. Data collection for this study will consist of (1) a demographic survey, (2) a 60-90-minute initial interview (\$20 Amazon gift card compensation), and (3) a 15-45-minute followup interview (\$10 Amazon gift card compensation). Interview questions will explore the participant's experiences of hashtag feminism, how their other life experiences influence their perceptions of this form of activism, and how online feminist messaging has influenced them in turn. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential.

Participants must

- 1) be at least 18 years of age,
- 2) identify as male,
- 3) be born between 1981 and 2001, and
- 4) use social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, etc.).

If you or anyone you know fits these inclusion criteria and would be interested in participating, please contact me via email at sakosar@vt.edu or via phone at (703) 424-4273.

Thank you for your time,

Sophie Kosar
Master's Candidate, Marriage and Family Therapy Program
Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center

researchers approved for this study by Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board will have access to any of the protected data.

The main researcher will contact you via email or phone after data analysis is completed to schedule a second interview lasting between 15 and 45 minutes. The purpose of this interview is to see whether you feel that research findings accurately represent your experiences. This process is known as member-checking. This process will occur between September 2019 and February 2019. Should you agree to participate in this study, you agree to be contacted for this second interview. After compiling initial findings from initial interview data, the main researcher will contact you in order to provide you with a copy of findings for your review. The main researcher will then schedule a time to speak with you over phone or video chat to gain your feedback on the initial findings and their accuracy. This conversation will be audio recorded and transcribed so that it can be added to the body of data. All processes described above relating to anonymization and confidentiality of data also applies to data from the followup interview.

III. Risks

A risk associated with participating in this study is that the interview topic may potentially elicit feelings of emotional discomfort or stress. In an instance where you feel that you are experiencing emotional or psychological distress as a result of the interview, the researcher will have a list of available resources in your geographic location so that you may easily seek appropriate, accessible, and affordable mental health services. Expenses accrued for seeking or receiving treatment will be the responsibility of the subject and not that of the research project, research team, or Virginia Tech.

IV. Benefits

A benefit of participating in this study is that you may help add to the literature on the subject of masculinity, masculinity politics, hashtag activism, and feminism. The results of this study may help counselors, therapists, other health practitioners, policy researchers, and cultural researchers better understand the effects of hashtag feminism and the lived experience of being male amidst contemporary gender politics. By participating in this study, you may help others who are affected by contemporary gender politics and help researchers, mental health practitioners, activists, and policy analysts better understand men's experiences of hashtag feminism.

A potential personal benefit of participating in this study is the fact that the interview process may allow you to process your experiences surrounding masculinity, hashtag feminism, gender politics, and social media use. The interview process is not considered counseling and will not be structured as a counseling session. However, the act of speaking about your experiences with the researcher may help you process these events, and in the event that you wish to pursue counseling services, the researcher will be equipped with a list of local counseling resources (as mentioned in Section III).

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

No data that we collect from you will be connected to any name, email address, phone number, home address, social media username, or any other identifying information. Your name and the names of any individuals mentioned in interviews will be changed to ensure anonymity. Identifiable information will be stored securely and separately on an encrypted, password-protected, private hard drive that is not internet accessible.

Only the primary investigator and the three IRB-approved committee members will have access to this information. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than the individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

Note: in some situations, it may be necessary for an investigator to break confidentiality. If a researcher has reason to suspect that a child or elder is abused or neglected, or that a person poses a threat of harm to others or him/herself, the researcher is required by Virginia State law to notify the appropriate authorities.

VI. Compensation

Should you participate in the interview process, you will be compensated for your time with a \$20 Amazon gift card after completion of the first interview. Should you participate in the second, followup interview, you will be compensated with a \$10 Amazon gift card after completion of the second interview.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free to not answer any questions that you choose and to not respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact the research investigator whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board at irb@vt.edu or (540) 231-3732.

IX. Subject's Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____ Date _____
Subject signature

Subject printed name

(Note: each subject must be provided a copy of this form. In addition, the IRB office may stamp its approval on the consent document(s) you submit and return the stamped version to you for use in consenting subjects; therefore, ensure each consent document you submit is ready to be read and signed by subjects.)

APPENDIX C

Demographic Survey (Qualtrics)

Age

- Write in

Sex (sex you were born as)

- Male
- Female
- Intersex
- Other (please describe)

Gender (gender you currently identify as)

- Male
- Female
- Genderqueer
- Agender
- Other (please describe)

Ethnicity (list as many as you identify with)

- Write in

Race

- Black
- White
- Latinx
- Asian
- Middle Eastern
- Indigenous
- Other (please describe)

Education level

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school
- Undergraduate
- Graduate
- Post-graduate

Employment status

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Student
- Currently unemployed
- Cannot work

- Other (please describe)

Career field

- Write-in

Relationship status

- Single
- Dating
- Married
- Divorced
- Other (please describe)

Relationship orientation

- Monogamous
- Polyamorous
- Aromantic
- Other (please describe)

Sexual orientation

- Heterosexual
- Homosexual
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- Other (please describe)

Household income

- \$0-24,999
- \$25,000-49,999
- \$50,000-74,999
- \$75,000-99,999
- \$100,000-149,999
- \$150,000-199,999
- \$200,000 or more

Social media sites used (including apps)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Reddit
- Snapchat
- Blogging (if yes, describe which platforms)
- Own website
- Other (if so, please describe/list as many as possible)

Political identification

- Republican
- Democrat
- Conservative
- Liberal
- Libertarian
- Authoritarian
- Anarchist
- Socialist
- Other (please describe)

APPENDIX D

Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionist

The following paragraph contains the policies to which the participants in this study agreed. Please read it carefully, as you will be required to help us protect the confidentiality and rights of the study participants.

Every effort will be made to keep the information you provide strictly confidential. All identifying information provided in the audio-recorded interview will be removed and replaced with aliases in the typed transcript and study report. Individuals with access to the audio recording and original transcript include the researchers and committee members. The audio tapes will be destroyed as soon as they have been transcribed and checked. Any identifiable information will be stored separately and securely from the coded data to protect your confidentiality. Portions of your interview text may be used verbatim in the thesis report and/or in subsequent publications, however, your name and other identifying information will not be disclosed on any reports or publications. Please note the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human participants involved in research.

I, (*print name*) _____, understand that through the experience I will have in working on this research study, that I must maintain strict confidentiality as to any identifying information of the study participants; any information as to the participants and/or their families must remain within strictest confidence in order to protect the privacy, rights, sensitivities, and feelings of the participants involved in this study.

My signature below signifies that I will abide by this confidentiality agreement.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

1. What does masculinity mean to you?
 - a. When you hear the phrases “manhood” or “being a man,” what do you think of?
 - i. What kind of traits are associated with being a man?
 - ii. What kinds of behaviors are associated with being a man?
 - iii. What kinds of emotions are associated with being a man?
 - iv. What kinds of ways of thinking are associated with being a man?
 - b. What does it mean for you personally to be a man?
 - i. How do you feel that you are similar to other men you know?
 - ii. How do you feel that you are different from other men you know?
 - iii. How do you think society’s ideas of being a man affects you?
 1. How it affects your traits?
 2. How it affects your behaviors?
 3. How it affects your emotions?
 4. How it affects your ways of thinking?
2. What has been your experience of hashtag feminism?
 - a. What is your understanding of the following hashtags?
 - i. #MeToo
 - ii. #HeForShe
 - iii. #HowIWillChange
 - iv. Can you describe your experiences of these hashtags?
 - b. What are your attitudes towards hashtag feminism?

3. What effects has hashtag feminism had on you, if any?
 - a. How has hashtag activism affected your view of men?
 - b. How has hashtag activism affected your view of being a man?
 - c. How has hashtag activism affected your view of women?
 - d. How has hashtag activism affected your view of how men and women interact?
 - e. How has your background influenced the way you perceive hashtag feminism?
 - i. Examples include upbringing and family attitudes, religious identity, sexual identity, gender identity, etc.
 - f. How has hashtag feminism influenced you personally?
 - i. Identity?
 - ii. Relationships?
 - iii. Views about others?
 - iv. Views about society?
 - g. What has changed in your life as a result of hashtag activism?

APPENDIX F

Referral Resources

National and Local Resources

Metropolitan Suicide and Crisis Hotlines

1. **Crisis Link-** (703) 527-4077
2. **Fairfax County Emergency Services-** (703) 573-5679
3. **DC ACCESS Helpline-** 1-888-7WE-HELP
4. **Crisis Link Text Line-** Text "CONNECT" to 855-11 and a PRS Crisis Link volunteer will respond within minutes

United States National Suicide and Crisis Hotlines

5. **National Hope Line Network -** 1- 800- Suicide
6. **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline –** 1-800-273-Talk

HIV/AIDS

1. **AIDS Treatment Information Services-**1-800-HIV-0440 (1-800-448-0440)
2. **AIDS National Hotline-**1-800-342-2437
3. **Centers for Disease Control AIDS Info-**1-800-342-2437

Violence

1. **Fairfax Co. Domestic & Sexual Violence Services-** (703) 360-7273
2. **VA State Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline** (800) 838-8238
3. **National Domestic Violence Hotline-** (800) 799-7233
4. **Rape, Abuse, Incest, National Network-** 1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-656-4673)
5. **Child Abuse Hotline-** 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

Contraceptives

1. **Emergency Contraception Information-**1-888-NOT-2-LATE (1-888-668-2528)

Substance Use

1. Cocaine Help Line-1-800-COCAINE (1-800-262-2463)
2. 24 Hour Cocaine Hotline-1-800-992-9239

3. Drug Help National Helplines-1-800-378-4435