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From Hostility to Vulnerability: Twitter's Shifting Discourse on Masculinity and its Implications

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Abstract

Toxic masculinity refers to negative attitudes and behaviours including aggression, violence, dominance over other genders and weak, restricted positive emotional expression typically associated with men. It further includes marginalising any other who doesn't believe or abide by these values. Through triangulating qualitative methods including thematic analysis, sentiment analysis integration and in-depth interview analysis, this study seeks to conceptualise the multifaceted nature of toxic masculinity on Twitter(X). Furthermore, the research explores the harmful influence of toxic masculinity while also highlighting the instances of resistance and the emergence of evolving discussions on masculinity within online communities. Repositioned masculinities and sexualization of women, aggression and intimidation, emotional suppression, and constructing and constricting gendered frontiers emerged as the main themes of the study. Despite the algorithmic bias,–social media offers great potential to provide insights towards identifying the issues and possibilities of developing inclusive and safe online spaces. The environments where vulnerability finds acceptance and harmful norms are effectively challenged. Thereby, this research paves the way for further investigation by employing diverse methods and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration to shift the narrative and promote safe spaces. Moreover, it attempts to fully grasp the evolving tapestry of masculinity in the digital age and address its complex manifestations.

Keywords: gender norms, hegemony, hegemonic, masculinity, misogyny, social media, toxic, traditional masculinity, twitter, X

Introduction

The concept of masculinity on Twitter is in truth, a fluid space full of net memes, debates and flippant statements but is rampant in the pernicious strands of toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity refers to notions and behaviours that are hostile, violent, aggressively assertive towards other genders, and possess little or no positive emotions, are stereotypically natural to males (Harrington, 2021). Banet-Weiser (2018) engages with the contemporary context exposing the gaps between the two narratives, that is, misogyny and empowered feminism, believing them to coexist in the digital space. The present survey is of four main thematic strands discussed in detail here.

Belligerence and Malevolence: A Veil of Anonymity

The analysis details the aggressive content and harsh language that thrive within Twitter's anonymity settings, a point that aligns with Poland's (2016) findings on cyberbullying as a form of harassment. The patterns of threats and aggression, whether from individuals or groups, are often deeply concealed within seemingly innocuous comments and statements on social networks. The interviews bring to light the emotional and psychological impacts of this content experienced by the victims, as pointed out in Banet-Weiser's (2018) work.

Beyond the Hashtag, Unfolding Objectification

This analysis identifies objectification of women in subtle forms, extending beyond hashtags like #sexy. In consonance with Larke-Walsh's (2019) study which explores the increasing awareness of the negative impacts of the 'dominant' masculine traits, this study identifies how users may be starting to develop a different narrative within these online communities.

Vulnerability: Beyond the Stoic Facade

This analysis uncovers an emerging counter-discourse directed against the imposition of men to be stoic. Men engaging in emotional advocacy as portrayed in tweets under #MenToo are supported in the development witnessed by DeMilt (2023) addressing the transforming nature of Twitter from a platform of information communication to active social engagement and emotional communication. Further trends depicted in the interviews suggest a movement towards greater emotional authenticity

Reconnoitre of Gendered world

One discovers policing of gendered boundaries through a wider spectrum of keywords without resorting to explicit language. The discrediting, challenges and advocacy for the insinuation of masculinities go along the characteristic that Skeggs (2019) points toward intersectionality within masculinity studies. However, the interviews for the research highlight the unending harassment that women experience on the web which calls for acute intervention as observed by Massanari (2020).

As Harris (2021) noted, stimulated by the norm, toxic masculinity might also help individuals feel a sense of comfort while fighting the norm. Nevertheless, such advantages risk being covered by adverse consequences regarding the reinforcement of the existing gender imbalance, the sustaining of harmful stereotypes, or the proliferation of the online environment. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) "hegemonic masculinity" theory suggests that there are some acceptable forms of toxic masculinity where aggression, emotional repression or dominance are perceived as positive examples of male characteristics. Hegemonic masculinity reinforces change but in a clockwise manner, restraining that change, as well. Gender was understood by Butler in 1990, as mentioned by Kirby (2006), through the lens of an active process rather than something static and fixed. One can guess that the rigidity of masculinity accompanying the cyclical and mechanical practice of masculine gender roles may lead to ridicule or ostracism, which in turn, lays a basis for the examination of toxic masculinity in the internet space.

Horlacher (2015) believes masculinity is a social construct derived from social norms, expectations and behaviours. Conventions for traditional forms of masculinity tend to be associated with aggression, dominance and emotional restraint. This concept of masculinity is believed to be instilled rather than natural, as men are shaped by their environment from childhood when they are conditioned to live up to the standards of social expectations (Horlacher, 2015). Schwalb (2015) contributed to research by emphasizing societal and cultural influences on toxic masculinity formation and perpetuation. By accepting the fact that masculinity is socially constructed, it dismisses the notion that such destructive acts are instinctive or biological; instead, it allows one to focus on how human socialization constructs this attribute wherein men learn to suppress emotions and strictly adhere to gender roles while reinforcing dominance over power. Schwalb

(2015) went further than just analysing the theoretical point to prove to the world how to curb toxic masculinity and instead embrace healthier alternatives. Safe spaces, open dialogue, reduced emotional vulnerability, and deconstruction of negative gender norms was advocated. The perspective of Kevin Foss MFT (2022) unveils how toxic masculinity affects the individual because of its "man-up" mentality that leads to a lack of empathy, labelling nurturing tendencies as acts of cowardliness and ignoring one's nurturing needs altogether. It highlights how toxic masculinity keeps a person from receiving mental and physical health therapy whenever emotionally troubled, sending him down a perilous road of emotive agitation and despair (Pleck, 1981; Good et al., 1989; Real, 1998).

Even though researchers have reported the extent of the embodiment of toxic masculinity in physical settings, a gap, at least by scarcity, is displayed in assessing the manifestation of such cases in online systems. The first study regarding the phenomena in online settings was conducted by Moloney and Love (2018), in which the researchers examined the 'The Fappening/Celebgate' incident of 2014, where hundreds of private photos of celebrities were stolen and published online. They conducted a text analysis on Twitter and determined the virtual masculine acts of aggression in the themes of 'sexualization of women,' 'signalling possession of heterosexual male,' 'homosexual/heterosexual space,' and 'humour as a tool of oppression.' This establishes the standard through the development of the bridge from theory-based masculinity construct to actual online practices of men. It identifies a requirement for future research due to its deep understanding of the manifestations of masculinity on social media (Haase, 2021). Indeed, the Fappening study by Moloney and Love (2018) was a response to an extraordinary incident where the public on social media was reacting to an invasion of the privacy of mainstream celebrities.

Parent et al. (2019) examined the psychological relationship of social media/social network (SM/SN) by integrating it with depression and toxic masculinity. The research concluded that positive SM/SN use and toxic masculinity were associated with depression, whereas negative SM/SN interactions mediated the relationship between toxic masculinity and depression through correlational research. Moreover, Rubin et al. (2022) found through surveys that men with the self-perception of being less masculine than others were likely to endorse harassment of weak on social

media, where toxic disinhibition and conformity to traditional masculine norms mediated this relationship. Anwary and Istiadah (2024) explored the narratives of toxic masculinity in internet mediated research through the posts, quotes and pictures posted on Instagram account @thegentlemanrising that endorses positive masculine characteristics to inspire young boys to foster a balanced outlook on masculinity. Their findings highlighted the role of social media in shaping masculinity and users' experiences, contributing to wider conversations about gender and identity. Waling (2023), examined the discourses and subject position in masculinity #Metoo debates analysing 163 media articles and identified the key framings of men are positioned as inherently 'good' or 'bad' being the victims of masculinity, boys and men are lost and need to be found, men are performative in their 'awakenings', and men's tendency to adopt the role of protector or ally may in fact be attempts to be false heroes depicting an overall lack of coherence and agreement regarding men's engagement with and roles in the #metoo movements.

The research in the domain has varying definitions of masculinity and toxic masculinity and uses a variety of the quantitative methods to explore the existence and relationship of these with psychological constructs. In this deep sociological exploration, the issue of toxic masculinity has been studied using a mixed method approach. The current research, which explores the complexities of toxic masculinity on X (formerly known as Twitter), is a significant part of another major research project that is reconsidering and redefining masculinity through internet mediated research across various social media platforms (such as Reddit, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram) and real-world data through triangulation. The choice of Twitter, among other social media platforms, was based on its openness to gender-related issues, its history of controversies related to gender discrimination, its facilitation of anonymity and disinhibition, real-time data availability, its global reach, and most importantly, its influence on shaping public opinion. The current research addresses the gap in literature around the illustration of toxic masculinity on social media along with user experiences and perceptions around toxic masculinity in social media spaces because toxicity in masculine roles is not only detrimental and fatal for the others (Núñez, 2013) but also, for the men experiencing, manifesting and expressing it (Rasmussen et al., 2018) both in real world (Nigam, 2018) and on social media (Wright, 2020). With an understanding of the potential boundaries that may be encountered due to social media, as well as the

benefits that may be gained, the current research seeks to highlight the need for the development of strategies oriented toward decreasing the aggressiveness of interactions among internet users and increasing the chances to identify, rethink and readdress the harmful norms around the very construct of masculinity and is expression.

This research offers many avenues for further study through various methods and interdisciplinary engagement as proposed by DeLisle et al. (2016) toward a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic tapestry of masculinity in the digital age and the unfolding complexity of its expressions in society. It will address the interpersonal and structural power dynamics and inequity around gender norms. It aims to create safe space where individuals are free from constraints of toxic masculinity to express their authentic selves without guilt and shame.

Research Question

- How is toxic masculinity represented and reinforced on social media platforms, specifically Twitter?

Research Objectives

- To discern and classify illustrations of toxic masculinity as reflected in user-generated content on Twitter.

- To explore the themes and patterns encompassing toxic masculinity in online conversations on Twitter.

- To gain insight to the users' experiences and perceptions around toxic masculinity in online spaces.

Methodology

Using a qualitative research design, the current study avoided the approach of using only keywords and hashtags directly associated with toxic masculinity. It further includes a more comprehensive range of keywords and hashtags encompassing associated concepts. This broad approach captured the subtlety of expression and lack of explicit labelling in displaying an instance of toxic masculinity. The study was performed in two phases.

Phase I: Online Exploration of Toxic Masculinity

This phase aimed at examining toxic masculinity online. It involved identifying applicable hashtags, keywords and popular discussions centred around masculinity on Twitter.

Data Collection

Keyword and Hashtag Expansion. Instead of merely relying on hashtags in direct connection to toxic masculinity, the broader range of the keywords in the line of aggression, dominance and stereotypes to capture the subtle instances of toxic masculinity were used. It helped in identifying and collecting data that manifests it without direct and clear labels.

Gender-related offences were used to capture instances where toxic masculinity might take on subtle forms or even instances where it manifests without necessarily labelling itself clearly.

Sentiment Analysis. Example tools such as sentiment analysis tools were used for the identification of language patterns associated with the emotion attached to potential toxic behaviour. This unveiled the differentiation between the mere reporting of toxic masculinity from actual expressions of it.

Community Targeting. Some discussions, concerning masculinity, gender roles, and the likes were particularly concentrated towards Twitter communities. Working through these communities greatly enriched the data on how toxic masculinity played out in a distinctive online context.

Phase II: Exploring Experiences and Perceptions of Toxic Masculinity

This phase aimed at a more in-depth familiarity of toxic masculinity and focused on Twitter communities known for conversations enveloping masculinity and gender roles. This provided richer data on contextual terms of toxic masculinity, i.e., from the participants who were aged 18 or more irrespective of gender, actively engaged in masculinity-related discussions on Twitter. Individuals under 18 years of age, who were not aware of discourse on masculinity on twitter and did not use twitter were excluded from the sample.

Data Collection

Complementary Interviews. This stage consisted of a sample of ten adults for whom the snowball sampling method was used to recruit

participants for this study. Four were university postgraduate students and six were working in corporate organisations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using this purposive sample of Twitter users to achieve more profound insights into the user experiences and perceptions.

Thematic Analysis. Through a Twitter account, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the social media data. It involved hand coding relevant comments, assigning colours to attach the data for thematic classification, and finally, it involved reviewing the coding frequently, with the coder iterating several times over their codes to obtain coherence and reliability.

Sentiment Analysis Integration. Results of the sentiment analysis were combined with thematic analysis to deepen the understanding of how emotional undertones were tied to various aspects of toxic masculinity, thus making it possible to distinguish between simple reporting and actual performance of toxic masculinity.

Qualitative Interview Analysis. Interviews were also qualitatively analysed through the thematic coding of key themes and patterns aligned with user experiences and perceptions concerning toxic masculinity on Twitter.

Using a mixed-method strategy, the study confined several methods of gathering and analysing data in addition to the adoption of hashtags and keywords. Seizing such manifestations of toxic masculinity by integrating real-time interaction, through research of sentiment and context, this study attempts to demonstrate how comprehensive and nuanced the representation and reinforcement of this phenomenon is on Twitter.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of this research, ethical concerns remained crucial in carrying out this study. All data collected from Twitter or interviews were fully anonymized, ensuring the identities and confidentiality of participants were not compromised. Consent was taken from the interviewees who were also thoroughly briefed on the purpose, content and context of the study. Furthermore, the participants were informed of their rights regarding withdrawal at any given time. In the process, this study followed the ethical guidelines from the British

Psychological Society and the American Psychiatric Association for internet-mediated research. This ensured maintaining transparency, participant autonomy, responsible data storage and handling, and responsibility in running the study safely.

Results and Discussion

Regarding the research question, four major themes were identified. Each of the themes is discussed individually below with subthemes.

Theme 1: Aggression and Intimidation

This was examined through iterative thematic analysis of both Twitter posts and interview data. Analysis of posts using more comprehensive keywords and hashtags merged with sentiment analysis, highlighted how online aggression manifests subtly. Interviews provided a further understanding of user ventures and the perceptions of this toxicity.

Online Harassment

The digital storm is formed on Twitter. Tweets, sharp and venomous, fly like arrows, each one aimed at a specific target. Twitter discourse has gone beyond the casual routine conversations to conversations instilled with wickedness, aggression and hostility. Insults, threats and derogatory slurs are used to demand and subjugate the victims.

Such tweets are not stand-alone shots; they are a series of balderdash, an orchestrated circus of wrongdoing, a digital mob mentality fuelled by anonymity and distance. What might seem like a harmless jest from one keyboard warrior can trigger an avalanche of negativity, drowning out reason and compassion.

Through sentiment analysis within the perspective of a hard and cold stone called an algorithm, these tweets are aggressive and antisocial. These are not merely lexical items, but cursing phrases directed against, to inflict pain, to silence, and to ostracize.

This online oppression isn't some abstract concept; it is an assault, and it attacks and traumatises physically, emotionally and psychologically. However, the psychological and mental damage that such bullying inflicts is far more damaging than the physical damage. This kind of bullying is pragmatic and sometimes causes considerable damage to boys both in cyberspace and in real life.

Cyberbullying

> '*When I opened my Twitter account, I felt scared and hated clicking on some links. Ever since I started using social media, I have the imprints of words that did not look harmful but were so full of poison and I feel angry every time I see people retweeting them. Hashtags were for affiliation, I remember quite well, now they have almost become bombs. Such cruelty should not be an annoyance. For me, it was like a boulder resting on my head. One very distressing phrase from one of the users remained with me: This makes it very clear why social media can be depressing and soul-crushing*'.

It is astonishing to see how mean and violent people can be to each other. The extent of harm caused by these seemingly innocuous comments is evident from the interviews. It wasn't only about cowed and abused people; it also shows the deterioration of the capacity for compassion and being connected within the society that these acts were causing.

Every nasty tweet was a fragment of shattered glass that gave a warped image of civilization. The mask of virtual reality appeared to bring forth the most gruesome parts of our inner selves as faceless strangers became vicious attackers. To watch such plays in real-time and in 280 strokes of the digital pen was as if bearing witness to a public execution taking place in front of one's eyes complete with all the horror that entails. The facts reflected how the situation with cyber bullying continues to be grim. Aggression patterns were extracted using algorithms, and the psychotraumatic effect was also presented in numerals. However, statistics cannot render how awful it feels to watch someone's virtual participation get abused as their pain was aggravated by the retweets and likes they received in that closed attack.

So, against such a background of oppression in cyberspace, the idea of witnessing emerged with a different purpose. It was not only witnessing but instead, it was witnessing and refusing to feel dull. It was about seeing who people are beyond the walls of the screen, their common weakness that exceeds the trends and the anger. And more importantly, maybe it was sticking to the unshakeable belief that no matter how bleak the circumstances may get, even one fair voice, even one kind act must surely reach through and show properly how it is to feel and how to relate.

Trolling and Incitement

Interviews with first-hand witnesses of electronic court jesters reveal that trolls are not just mischievous and roguish rather they bring out many faces of hostility. Through provocation and spreading chaos, words have turned into more than weapons of sarcasm and pomposity. Sentiment analyses revealed expressions that apparently seem humorous but have actual goals of mocking and belittling, using the exaggerated words in incendiary comments. Being anonymous, people seize the opportunity to spread chaos and enjoy this liberty with the possibility of additional attention seeking motives to get validation for their creativity based on number of likes and reshares. Doxing, prejudice, hate speech and racist comments are a few of the examples in this regard. They attempt to transform civil conversation to a battle ground with the intension to instigate anger, and reinforce hostility by normalizing it in online spaces like twitter. By examining these subthemes, the analysis uncovered the various manifestations of aggression and hostility on Twitter, underscoring the necessity for strategies to address and combat such toxic behaviour.

Theme 2: Repositioned Masculinities and Sexualization of Women

The triangulation of different methods and data sources highlighted the mechanism of change experienced in men and the denigrating idea of the sexualisation of women rooted in the patriarchal structure of control.

Challenging Societal Norms

The rich data drawn from the hashtags and then corroborated with the interviews evoked the need to challenge the archaic notion that men had to be chiselled from a meld of stoicism and strength, their emotions locked away in some mythical vault.

Men negotiating their emotions and not ascribing to the traditional ideal of masculinity was discussed in the data. One significant tweet sparked a debate. It crackled with a question, simple yet profound: "*Why does a 'real man' must bottle up emotions? Vulnerability is the collective humanity rather than a weakness. Let's break the chains of stereotypes and embrace our collective yet distinct individualities*".

The message was amplified owing to retweets and reshares for innumerable times, echoing like tuning forks from the hearts of several men. This was the cogent evidence for the deep yearning for change. i.e., a step

towards the fundamental reshaping of masculinity offering men compassion, empathy and freedom to be unapologetically themselves.

The idea was to redress and redeem the reality of men by reclaiming the digital space as a place for activism and advocating for men and their emotions.

Redressing Online Sexualisation

A constellation of condescending remarks overwhelmed with anger and hostility produced as a by-product of the digital mob mentality fuelled by anonymity and distance. Building on this the sentiment analysis validated the restrictive interaction between silence and violence. It underscored the verbal, symbolic and communicative nature of violence reflected in linguistic expression and culture of silence perpetuated by victims.

The narratives shared by participants were redolent with remarks about perpetrators sexualizing their body image. Their voice, echoing the collective sentiment of the victims of cyberbullying and the power of anonymity that gives agency to the perpetrators. Sentiment analysis confirms the element of mockery and provocation by analysing different inflammatory statements. The intention is to gain attention by evoking a sense of negativity at a micro level and waging a digital war at a macro level. One participant shared: "My body isn't a medal, it's not a canvas, a sensuous and exotic art piece for fleeting gaze. We're more than flesh and bone, let's connect on deeper levels"

Rejecting Stereotypes

This is beginning to set off a revolt in the digital space. Tweets, sharp and swift, pierce through the dusty image of the emotionless, stoic male. Interviews, like intimate conversations, peel away the layers of vulnerability and complexity behind the mask of masculinity. It's not merely a condemnation; it is a song from the Men of the Year demanding recognition of the full spectrum of the male experience.

A tweet: "men cry, men laugh, men hurt" shatters the decades-old image of macho robots bred only for strength and suppression. It is not a single tweet, but a call for understanding and empathy from people for men.

Men with a long-standing symbol of unflinching strength confessed and reflected about their weak and vulnerable moments in interviews i.e. fragile pleas for reconciliation cries only heard in solitary sons' whispers of dread

that eat away at their souls. They shared the stories of love and loss, dreams, hopes and disappointments – revealing a portrait of manhood considerably more complex, even gentle than the traditional and stereotyped one.

This is not about dismantling the idea of masculinity but the traditional social reality around it. This is about rebuilding, reshaping and an attempt of redefining masculinity which is based on the reality encompassing fluidity, vulnerability, diversity, inclusivity to help men heal from unrealistic social norms and provide the future generation with a safe space to experience world as humans. It is a revolution fought not with hands but with languages, through tweets and interviews that erode awareness of the process, chipping away at stereotypes, and exposing the multifaceted men underneath. It's a statement to humanity, refusing to fit into small boxes, and grovelling to be released and seen, in all our anarchic splendid variety.

Examination of these subthemes illustrates how Twitter users are pushing back against objectifying, sexualizing ideologies that will ultimately culminate in creating online spaces that are more accessible and respectful for all people.

Theme 3: Emotional Inhibition

This theme was derived through the thematic analysis of both Twitter posts and interview data. Using sentiment analysis and thematic coding, the result, through language features, suggested withholding emotions. Interviews further sought to understand societal pressure toward traditional notions of masculinity.

Dismantling the Macho Façade

The air crackled with a quiet rebellion. The 'Macho Man' standing the culmination of traditional masculinity in a blinding state, was swaying on shaky ground. Masculinity was no longer referred as being stoic or emotionally locked down, the new counter-message to that narrative finally began to emerge and encouraged men to allow themselves to embrace vulnerability. One tweet resounded throughout the canyons of social media: "The strongest men I know aren't afraid to cry or ask for help. Real strength is about vulnerability, not the mask society forces us to wear." It hit a tuning fork and echoed down to deeper tones in the male collective consciousness.

With the newfound vulnerability, men who could once not admit to a chink in their armour were now sympathizing with others, opening their

scars and comforted by the fact that they were not alone in their struggles, a unifying call for those exhausted from combatting an unseen adversary within themselves. They talked of tears that had brought them closer to their sons, the laughter they shared and shed tears in between. It was not disassembly, ripping-up, but a casting-off of skins exposing resilience in them. Through the cracks in the old homogenous exterior, a fresh sprout of something more humane, masculinity was taking root.

Redefining Strength

In another perspective, Twitter was once the playground for flexing physical feats and instead became a platform to flex hearts. The new label for shedding physical weight is inclusive: courage, empathy and vulnerability oscillated alongside fitness hashtags, challenging the age-old equation of strength with six-pack abs. The data mirrored this change, as the cold logic of algorithms confirmed the warmth resonating from this shift. Men wanted an unfolding story in which a mental bicep showed up to parade next to the other kind.

It was not just a keyboard crusade it reverberated in the real world as well. Cutting free from the ironclad moulds of traditional masculinity seems to have other real, liberating benefits, as it was vividly expressed in interviews from men. The low-pitched, ravelled experience voices softened by self-acceptance announced a change in well-being. A man whose own words were imprinted with the urgency of his newfound truth said, "Embracing my vulnerable side has made me a stronger, more authentic person." He is a voice of men quietly reshaping what it means to redefine strength.

He did not say this was a matter of throwing out the old but rather threading through the new. The physical feats did not disappear, rather they were set alongside the silent heroism of confronting your fears, the unfeigned willingness to reach for support, and the brave standing in one's fully human self. And in this recasting, a new breed of men learned they not only gained muscle but also a mission. Not just might but peace as well.

And that the next time you see a tweet heralding emotional baggage or listen to a man proclaim his need for tissues know it is not an empty sound in thin air but a boom echoing through the trenches of masculinity, an epic ballad of change rewriting the definition of strong one weepy heart at a time.

Mechanism of support, care and resilience in men

Men, Affect and Emotions is an emerging topical concern on the digital media. The media discourse on men's health has been gaining traction recently. Platforms like Twitter are vital for interweaving threads of vulnerability and support into hashtags such as #menshealth. The participants also shared about different online communities and support networks that have emerged recently in the digital media, acting as a safe space for men showing resilience. It is instrumental to allow men spaces for support and care, especially those who need to rationalize their vulnerabilities, in order to create an inclusive future backed by broad humanitarian values, sentiments and emotions. A quiet revolution in masculinities is taking place and men redirecting their emotions (from hostility to compassion and care) is a part of this change. The study found out that there are tweets against oppressed emotions, and testimonies about depression and anxiety experienced in men, when they try to conform to the toxic masculinity ideal. With the support network at their disposal, they are able to cope with these mental challenges in an effective way. The change is important to make an inclusive society.

Envisioning a Culture of Empathy

Developing a Culture of Empathy against the culture of toxic masculinity was offered as a counter narrative by participants. Compassion was preferred over competition in men. Empathy as a trait was endorsed and prioritized over other emotions. The participants conceptualized empathy as a tool to build unified sensibility in men to work together in a convivial way. It was a change agent and the most sustainable emotion in men, producing cataclysmic results not only for men but marginalized women as well.

Another tweet elucidated: "Let's set ourselves free of the toxic cycle of competition and strive for empathy. Supporting each other makes us all stronger, not the constant need to outdo one another."

Theme 4: Constructing and Constricting Gendered Frontiers

The triangulation of different methods and data sources highlighted the deeply rooted and orthodox conceptualization of masculinities as well as the denigrating idea of the sexualisation of women rooted in the patriarchal structure of control.

Subtheme 4.1: Interrogating the ideal, conformist male

Men negotiating their emotions and not ascribing to the traditional ideal of masculinity was discussed in the data. One significant tweet sparked a debate. It crackled with a question, simple yet profound: "Why does a 'real man' must bottle up emotions? Vulnerability isn't weakness but humanity. Let's embrace change and individualism over collective stereotypes."

They shared, retweeted, and amplified the message to redress and redeem authenticity of men symbolically reclaiming the world by reclaiming the digital space for activism and advocating for men and their right to express true and authentic emotions. i.e. men standing for men.

Pervasive Harassment.

Internet came into existence as a realm for social connection among people. Its ominous side is harboured for women making it far from ideal as it was expected. The immense hate and discontent are propagated towards women through the misogynistic content. A woman shared in plaintive expression '*I am afraid to show my existence on social media as my words in a post received constant barrage of hatred, personal attack on me… also through attacking on individuals associated with me; It took away my confidence on my word, even on my thoughts… I feel unsafe at a space where I could connect with many others.*'

Incidents like these call for telling off misogyny and reclaiming of online spaces as safe, inclusive and reverent. It is a call for change which is way more than the 'technical' security i.e., a rebuild of an online culture – a cyberspace governed by civility and mutual deference in every single exchange and interaction.

Gender Pay Parity; Expression of Discontent

Twitter was brimming with the ardent outcries against the glaring and constant pay disparity. Echoes of #Eqalpay (equal pay) and #CloseTheGAP (Close the gap) resonate with the frustration and indignation of users over inequity at the workplace. Others using the political tool of sarcasm and humour for their critique on entrenched disparity and inequity. '*It's 2024, and gender pay gap jokes are still the only ones that pay me equally.*' -a biting wit subtle wisecrack in a clever interplay of words by one user to express the utter discontent on economic disparity. However, a courageous call for action was seen in several other tweets, where voices demand the

immediate, tangible resolution of the issues to dismantle the inequities. The suggested solution ranged from overhauled legal frameworks and transparent income ranges on equitable basis. The digital discourse encapsulating loaded amalgamation of astute whimsicality and sardonicism not only registers amplified frustration, but also the calls for meaningful and practical change. This twitter discourse also serves as an awareness avenue, making users cognizant of the myriads of statutory rights practiced globally, so they stand up to claim theirs.

While the current analysis successfully illuminated four prominent themes surrounding the representation and reinforcement of toxic masculinity on Twitter, the inherent challenges of capturing this complex phenomenon through data collection remain. Online expressions, particularly on a fast-paced platform like Twitter, often cloak deeper beliefs and motivations behind fleeting remarks, posing difficulties in fully comprehending the nuanced tapestry of human behaviour.

The subtle manifestations of aggression were unearthed, with sentiment analysis identifying patterns of language, suggesting intimidation and antagonism, mirroring Poland's (2016) research on online harassment. These findings resonated with interview data depicting the emotional impact of such online encounters, further confirming (Banet-Weiser, 2018) observations of the co-existence of empowered feminism and popular misogyny in online spaces.

Tweets questioning traditional masculinity expectations and advocating for emotional vulnerability, evident in hashtags like #MenToo, suggest a growing awareness, and challenge the hegemony of toxic masculinity within online communities, as noted by Larke-Walsh (2019). This counter-narrative, often fuelled by viral calls for empathy and shared vulnerability, underscores the potential of social media for positive change, aligning with (DeMilt, 2023) analysis of Twitter's evolving nature as a platform for social interaction.

Despite these glimmers of hope, the pervasiveness of online harassment, objectification, and gender policing paints a stark picture of the persistent challenges. Tweets highlighting the constant barrage of misogyny and sexist slurs faced by women online, corroborated by interview data depicting the emotional toll of such experiences, emphasize the urgent need for intervention, as stressed by Massanari (2020). While Twitter data offers a

valuable snapshot into contemporary understandings and negotiations of masculinity, it remains a partial and dynamic representation, echoing Dym and Fiesler's (2020) argument about the limitations of social norms in addressing online issues.

To fully grasp the multifaceted nature of toxic masculinity in the digital age, further research employing diverse methods is crucial. This includes incorporating critical theoretical frameworks like Skeggs' (2019) intersectionality of masculinity to understand how various identities and social positions intersect with toxic masculinity's expression. Also, X's modulation from a chronological feed to a machine learning-driven personalized timeline in 2016 has inspired discourses around the impact of the content (Hong & Kim, 2016; Freelon et al., 2020). The algorithm filters and ranks show the tweets based on the users' activity, profile/social connections and content features, consolidating biased versions of the things that can be detrimental to drawing fixed conclusions (Huszár et al., 2022). Therefore, to manage this algorithmic amplification, the content from and users of other platforms like Reddit, TikTok, Facebook and Instagram should be studied and reviewed for a more holistic view of the masculine toxicity in online spaces. Additionally, the need for collaborative efforts across disciplines, from psychology, sociology, media studies, and computer science, specifically artificial intelligence models of machine learning and deep learning, is vital in developing comprehensive strategies to address this complex issue. Each field has a unique perspective and contribution to make, in line with the emphasis of DeLisle et al. (2016) on the interplay between the internet, social media, and societal changes. By acknowledging the limitations inherent in data collection while emphasizing the valuable insights gleaned from current research, the authors strive to contribute to a nuanced understanding of toxic masculinity and redefine masculinity on a spectrum. Current findings underscore the need for continued exploration and proactive interventions to combat the harmful effects of toxicity in online spaces. The research further highlights the need to foster a safer, more inclusive online environment for all, aligning with the focus of (Kevin Foss MFT, 2022) on the mental health impacts of toxic masculinity and Haase's (2021) investigation of its enactment on social networks.

Online behaviour is the depiction of personality traits of the individual, and their real-world interactions (Ivcevic & Ambady, 2013). To improve

and create safe spaces behaviours online, the first focus should be on the practical steps towards the open and honest discussions with friends and significant others about the pros and cons of traditional gender norms. Where encouragement in offering and participating the tough discourses around masculinity, toxic social norms around gender roles should be questioned.

Accepting and supporting individuals for who they are regardless of their gender identity, requires courage to listen and understand their experiences and perspectives respectfully without the obligation of consensus.

The willingness to learn, grow and celebrate diversity by taking steps towards amplifying positive voices and creating environments promoting inclusive masculinity is paramount. The broader social and cultural implications of combating toxic masculinity online can be achieved through challenging the narrative on twitter through more awareness. Users make it common practice to retweet positive messages that promotes healthy masculinity, normalise vulnerability and encourage empathy for people beyond genders.

Also, bystander intervention on aggression, hostility, and harassment is necessary with respectful but firm assertiveness, appropriate use of humour and creative content creation to highlight the absurdity of harmful stereotypes. It is quintessential to utilize Twitter's reporting mechanisms to flag hateful content, harassment and bullying, and encouraging others to do the same, holding the platform accountable for promoting a safe and inclusive space. Moreover, supporting others by showing solidarity with individuals targeted by online hate and abuse by offering words of encouragement and amplifying their voices can initiate a more positive online culture. Being mindful of one's own language and avoiding perpetuating harmful stereotypes or engaging in aggressive online behaviour with respectful and empathetic communication, even in disagreement, is necessary. One must follow and engage with accounts promoting awareness and positive change. Aiming to create a safe space for users by contributing to online communities promoting healthy norms for emotional well-being for both genders is needed. Use of hashtags like #MenTalkHealth, #MenSupportingMen and #WomenSuppotingMen builds positive connections and support networks.

The creators and owners of social media platforms also have a responsibility to strengthen moderation through AI driven tools operated by graduates of social sciences. These tools can simplify and make reporting more effective, ensuring that issues are addressed quickly. Continuous algorithmic review can abridge extremist content from influencers like Andrew Tete. Working with think tanks to educate the masses, especially the youth, can build critical thinking skills. The researchers and scholars can work on designing self-help and mentoring rehabilitation programs for the victims and perpetrators through social media. Beyond everything, all the sections of society ranging from parents to educators, all forms of media to all levels of educational institutes, must celebrate diversity, promote equity and ensure inclusion, making everyone feel valued and respected for their humanity, regardless of all other variables.

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