

**The Role of Hegemonic Masculinity in Male University Students' Perspective of the  
#MeToo Movement**

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### **Abstract**

The #MeToo movement has brought much attention to sexually transgressive behavior. Since its start, there has been an increase in the reporting of sexually transgressive situations in the Netherlands, but it has also been met with a great deal of backlash, mostly from men. Because of this, it has been proposed that critique on #MeToo is a result of hegemonic masculinity, as it would be perceived as a threat to the heteronormative and patriarchal society. The current study investigated how hegemonic masculinity is reflected in men's perspective of the #MeToo movement by conducting semi-structured interviews with ten university male students.

Participants reported more positive than negative aspects of the #MeToo movement and felt supportive towards it and feminism in general. Furthermore, they showed a clear understanding of sexually transgressive behavior and low adherence to rape myths. Hegemonic masculinity plays a role in the male students perspective's because they try to actively distantiate themselves from its negative and toxic characteristics, which they associated with the type of men that engage in sexually transgressive behavior. Because of that, their sense of competitive victimhood is low, as they do not feel that the movement is a threat to their own identity as a man. These findings bring a nuanced view to a polarized discussion, showing that male students actively reject hegemonic masculinity norms and, in doing so, do not feel threatened by the movement.

*Keywords:* competitive victimhood, hegemonic masculinity norms, #MeToo movement, rape myths, sexually transgressive behavior.

## Introduction

In 2007, the now global #MeToo movement brought much attention to sexually transgressive behavior against women. In one single day, after the hashtag was first shared on Twitter, as much as twelve million victims had the opportunity to recount their own experiences and stand in solidarity with one another by engaging with the hashtag on Twitter (Garcia, 2017; More than 12M, 2017). The movement gained momentum once again in 2017 with accusations against Harvey Weinstein, and it has been a much-discussed topic around the globe since then (Anderson & Toor, 2018; Atwater et al., 2019). Because the #MeToo movement focusses on rape culture and the discussion of sexually transgressive experiences, it has been proposed to be central in the fourth wave of feminism (Andersen, 2018). This wave started in the early 2000s with the emergence of the digital space and focuses on intersectionality and the online representation of women (Zimmerman, 2017). Some argue that it is bringing issues to the public space that have never been as thoroughly and publicly discussed as in the last decade (Rampton, 2008).

In the Netherlands, the #MeToo movement has been a pertinent topic in the last five years, with multiple male figures being accused of sexually transgressive behavior (Segers & Schmale, 2022). The movement has brought attention to a nation-wide problem, seeing as one hundred thousand people fall victim to sexually transgressive behavior every year (Kootstra et al., 2020; Wat je moet weten, n.d.). Sexually transgressive behavior refers to all sexual behaviors that have, both physically and/or non-physically, crossed the boundaries of a victim (De Haas, 2012). It can be divided into sexual violence (sexual assault and rape) and sexual harassment (Rutgers, 2015; Van Berlo & Van Beek, 2020). Both rape and sexual assault are punishable by law if there is evidence that the perpetrator used any type of coercion, manipulation, or physical violence, or if the victim was unable to provide consent (De Graaf et al., 2017; De Haas, 2012; Rutgers, 2015). However, other types of sexually transgressive behavior that fall under sexual harassment have not yet been clearly criminalized, such as

unwanted dating pressure and sexual conduct (Rotundo et al., 2001). Regardless, it is argued that these situations are unpleasant and undesired by the victim and should therefore be regarded as criminal acts (England, 2020; Rutgers, 2015). Fortunately, since the start of #MeToo, the past few years have been marked by an increase in awareness and reporting of sexually transgressive cases in the Netherlands (Maatschappelijke Discussie, n.d.; Van Berlo, 2022; Vijf Jaar, 2022). This is a vital advancement, considering that most cases of sexually transgressive behavior go unreported, especially under university students (De Graaf et al., 2017). Next to that, female university students also have the highest risk of falling victims to sexually transgressive behavior (Dills et al., 2016).

Despite the movement's advances, #MeToo has received an overwhelming amount of criticism defined as anti-feminist backlash, which is resistance from people who do not agree with feminist views because they perceive the movement as a threat to the heteronormative, patriarchal society that has been present throughout history (De Maricourt & Burrell, 2022). It is no surprise, then, that despite anti-feminist backlash not being exclusive to men, it is men who more often criticize the movement and believe feminism to be harmful (Beaver, 2022; Bos & Rusman, 2018; Brown, 2022). For example, some radical men's movements claim that feminism has overthrown the power and privilege first attributed to men and are working towards reclaiming the superior position of men (Ging, 2019). Some go even further by claiming feminism to be rooted in misandry, i.e., the dislike or hatred of, and prejudice against men, and that it is, in fact, a witch hunt against men (Galla, n.d.; Giesen, 2018; Infantino, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). What was once intended as a movement that aims at raising awareness of sexual violence and bringing more attention to the victims, is now seemingly portrayed as a campaign against men (Greenfield, 2018).

Some find this sense of competitive victimhood from men to be detrimental, as it puts a stop to the conversation about violence against women perpetrated by men, instead shifting it to how it is, supposedly senselessly, harming men (Rennie, 2022). However, not all men criticize

the movement, and it should be noted that this level of anti-backlash often comes from extreme men's rights movements themselves (Ging, 2019). In fact, opinions seem to be divided on the matter, as Brown (2022) found that 52% of men under the age of thirty do support the movement. Male university students specifically, have been shown to show less support for the #MeToo movement than female university students, alongside being less knowledgeable about sexually transgressive behavior in general (Nodeland & Craig, 2019).

Regardless of male opinions being divided on the matter, men still criticize the #MeToo movement more often than women. Because of this, it has been proposed that the anti-feminist backlash is a result of hegemonic masculinity due to it being perceived as a threat to the heteronormative and patriarchal society (Trott, 2022). Connell (2005) also added that a crisis (created by a movement such as the #MeToo) pushes society to reconstruct the idea of masculinity and the existing gender hierarchy, which adds to the sense of threat in hegemonic masculine men. Next to that, hegemonic masculinity is widely associated with the perpetuation and tolerance of sexual violence (e.g., Basow & Minieri, 2011; Cantalupo, 2011; Jewkes et al., 2015), and sexist beliefs, including rape myths (Davies et al., 2012; Glick & Fiske, 1997). Because of this, Reinicke (2022), claims that the issue of sexually transgressive behavior lies in traditional, hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, and therefore, #MeToo it is a problem that pertains to all heterosexual men, regardless of whether they actively engage in this type of behavior or not. However, no existing study has investigated how hegemonic masculinity norms (including rape myths) and competitive victimhood are reflected specifically on men's perspective of the #MeToo movement, be it a negative or a positive one. In fact, the large majority of research on men's opinions on feminism and the #MeToo movement focusses on the negative critique, so there is no concrete knowledge on how hegemonic masculinity norms play a role in men who view the movement in a positive way (Beaver, 2022; Bos & Rusman, 2018; Nodeland & Craig, 2019).

All in all, this study aims at filling this gap in the literature by investigating the perspectives of heterosexual male university students of the #MeToo movement. The research question is as follows: how is hegemonic masculinity reflected in men's perspective of the #MeToo movement? Gaining insight into how hegemonic masculinity norms play a role in men's view of the movement and how rape myths and competitive victimhood are related to this in men with both positive and negative perspective of #MeToo contributes to a better understanding of how a man's masculinity affects his degree of tolerance and support for a necessary movement. Furthermore, knowledge gained from this study can possibly be used to implement new approach strategies of the #MeToo movement as to be able to connect to more men and gain their support.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### **Hegemonic masculinity norms**

Connell (1987) first coined the term hegemonic masculinity when describing men who have a dominant position in a specific historical context. It includes elements of heterosexuality, power relations, hierarchical order between men, and the patriarchal subordination of women (Connell, 2005; Hearn et al., 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015). Moreover, heteronormativity is at the core of hegemonic masculinity, as it asserts heterosexuality as being superior to all other sexualities, with traditional gender roles as the norm (Robinson, 2016). In this sense, hegemonic masculinity sets the cultural standard for what is considered appropriate masculine behavior and how men and women are supposed to live their lives (Whitehead, 1999).

This standard is not problematic in itself, and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have warned against reducing the term to toxic traits of traditional ideas of masculinity. For example, a man with hegemonic masculinity norms often sees himself as the head of the family, with the duty to provide and protect (Hearn et al., 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015). However, this ideal of what a man should be, i.e., one who is dominant and powerful over anyone else, can promote gender inequality in certain circumstances, as some men feel the need to assert their domination over

women through sexual violence (Connell, 1987; Jewkes et al., 2015). It is these negative traits of hegemonic masculinity that uphold the dominant and oppressive position of heteronormative men and the violence against and hostile domination of women, as well as sexist beliefs (Baptist & Coburn, 2019; Kupers, 2005). These heterosexual sexist beliefs are, in turn, at the core of hostile sexism, where hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity intersect, such as that women are sexual objects and men can therefore take sexual control over them (Begany & Milburn, 2002; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick & Fiske, 1997). In the matter of sexually transgressive behavior, hegemonic masculinity norms work in different ways. For the relevance of this study, two processes will be discussed: rape myths and pressure to adherence to hegemonic masculinity norms.

First, heterosexual sexist beliefs are often reflected in rape myths, which are negative and detrimental beliefs about sexual violence and intimidation, such as that women who wear revealing clothes put themselves at risk (Chapleau et al., 2008; Burt, 1980). Rape myths are a way in which male sexual violence against women is not only minimized (or completely denied) but justified (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Important to the construction of rape myths are rape scripts, which pertain to what a person believes happens during a rape. These rape scripts paint an aggressive picture of sexual violence, something that would not occur in daily life. Moreover, they create unrealistic expectations of a specific type of perpetrators and victims (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). In this sense, the idea emerges that sexually transgressive behavior only occurs in exceptional circumstances, that predators are violent men by nature, and that female victims play a part in their victimization (Hockett et al., 2016).

As a result, rape myths and rape scripts lead to a misunderstanding of what sexually transgressive behavior entails – something that has been called the grey area of sexually transgressive behavior (Gunnarsson, 2018). Because of this, a person is more likely to adhere to rape myths (Cantalupo, 2011). Overall, men have a higher tendency than women to endorse rape myths, but this is especially true for hegemonic men with hostile sexist beliefs (Davies et

al., 2012; Glick & Fiske, 1997). These men are also more likely to have a higher tolerance for sexual violence, and more often have a negative opinion of female rape victims, some engaging in victim-blaming (Basow & Minieri, 2011; Cantalupo, 2011; Kunst et al., 2018). On the other hand, men who do not adhere to hegemonic masculinity norms and as a consequence have a lower endorsement of rape myths, have been found to show more support for the #MeToo movement. These men also identified more with feminism than hegemonic men (Kunst et al., 2018; Riquelme et al., 2021; White et al., 1998).

Second, the intersection between hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity affects how men form their own sense of masculinity and go on to interact with each other, as hegemonic masculinity becomes the standard against which all men are compared, i.e., a standard of the dominant, heterosexual man (Coles, 2008; Kimmel, 1994). This standard makes it possible for men to police each other's level of conformity to hegemonic masculinity norms (Trimble et al., 2015). As Kimmel (1994) argues, men want the approval of other men and to feel that they are as equally masculine as their peers, and to not be excluded by other men. Supporting a movement that undermines the superior and dominant position of men does not reflect hegemonic masculinity norms, therefore, a hegemonic man would be more critical of men who support #MeToo (Hooper, 2001). This is especially true if they already perceive feminism to be negatively stereotyped (Percy & Kremer, 1995).

As a result, some men might feel pressured to conform to hegemonic masculinity not only because this is the norm with which they have been brought up, but also because the men in their lives monitor whether they are acting as 'real men' (Currier, 2013; Kahn et al., 2012; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). So far, no study has examined how men feel pressured to adhere to hegemonic masculinity and how this relates to their perspective of the #MeToo movement. However, based on theory, one can hypothesize that, regardless of a man's opinion of the #MeToo movement, he might feel reluctant to share his positive opinion on the #MeToo movement not because he, himself, adheres to hegemonic norms and, for example, as a



consequences believes in rape myths, but because he is afraid of the judgement of other men. On the other hand, men who do not feel pressured to adhere to hegemonic masculinity or outright reject its norms, might have a different perspective of the #MeToo movement.

### **Competitive victimhood**

The endorsement of rape myths by men has been a common pattern in news articles and online discussion on the #MeToo movement. For example, an article by Het Parool discussed how men, especially, think that the discussion on sexual harassment is exaggerated (Indrukkwekkend Wat Zo'n Hashtag, 2017). This narrative that the #MeToo movement is an over exaggeration extended to claims that it has become a witch hunt against men, with feminists unable to distinguish rape from awkward attempts at flirting (Giesen, 2018). Moreover, radical men's movements went on to claim that sexual violence is a gender-neutral problem, and that rape culture does not exist and was only created by feminists as a way to ensure moral panic. Furthermore, these groups hold the movement responsible for shifting the focus away from men's experiences of victimization (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). According to this point of view, the #MeToo movement is actually harmful towards men as it is, supposedly, rooted in misandry (Galla, n.d.; Giesen, 2018; Infantino, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018).

This type of response is defined as competitive victimhood, where one group claims to suffer more than the other (Young & Sullivan, 2016). Competitive victimhood is crucial to conflict resolution, as it has been associated with less empathy for the other group, justification of prior violence by group members, and less willingness to solve the problem (Young & Sullivan, 2016). Noor and colleagues (2012) explained how members of the different groups (victims vs. perpetrators) have different motivations to compete for victimhood. According to their theory, the victim-group wants to restore their respect, power, and control, while the perpetrator-group wants to restore their moral image and, consequently, social acceptance.

Competitive victimhood in men arises, then, when a movement such as the #MeToo presents itself as a threat to the moral and social identity of men as a group (Bilewicz &

Stefaniak, 2013; Leach et al., 2007). Thus, defending the groups moral image can be equally or even more important than the need for power (Kahalon et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2012).

Competitive victimhood has also been found to be reflected in members of a high-status group through stigma reversal: the sense that a person is guilty of the harm caused to the other group simply by being a group member (Kahalon et al., 2018). Thus, men who feel victimized might believe that they are expected to feel personally guilty for sexual violence against women simply because they are a man, going back to the need to defend the groups morality status discussed earlier (Sullivan et al., 2012).

This has tremendous effects on the harmful beliefs of the perpetrator-group regarding the victim-group. For example, Bilewicz and Stefaniak (2013) researched how competitive victimhood was related to anti-Semitism in Poland in relation to the Holocaust and found that the higher the level of competitive victimhood, the more their beliefs leaned towards anti-Semitic. On the other hand, Adelman and colleagues (2016) found that Jewish Israelis reported less competitive victimhood when they read a text that acknowledged the suffering from both Palestinians and Israelis, but this was only the case for Israelis who were not concerned about receiving international support. Furthermore, they found that people who had a lower sense of competitive victimhood also gave less support to aggressive policies. These findings emphasize the relevance of competitive victimhood in conflict resolution as it is directly related to the perpetrator-group's perception of the victim-group (Young & Sullivan, 2016).

As of writing this thesis, there is no known study that has investigated competitive victimhood in men in relation to the #MeToo movement. Based on the theory, it is possible that a man's perspective of the #MeToo movement does not necessarily reflect their hegemonic masculinity norms and need for domination over women, but rather a sense of threat to the moral values of the group they belong too. On the other hand, there could be an intersection of hegemonic masculinity and competitive victimhood that is reflected in a man's sense of threat from the #MeToo movement, which this thesis aims at investigating.

## Methodology

### Procedure and data collection

Participants were eligible for the current study if they met three inclusion criteria: (1) identified as a heterosexual man, (2) were aged between 18 and 29 years old, (3) and were attending a Dutch university. Participants were recruited via the researcher's network ( $N = 6$ ), through the sharing of a flyer with information about the research ( $N = 2$ ), or by being approached on the campus of the Erasmus University ( $N = 2$ ). Before taking part in the study, participants signed an informed consent form (see appendix A).

For this study, the method of interviewing was chosen as it provides an in-depth understanding of men's perspectives, opinions, and feelings about the topics of interest. Interviews took place online via Microsoft Teams, at the participant's house, and at the Love Lab of the Erasmus University over a period of three weeks in May 2023. The Love Lab is an ideal location for conducting interviews on sensitive topics, as it provides a calm and confidential space where interviews can take place uninterrupted. These semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, and participants were asked questions regarding their knowledge of the #MeToo movement and their opinions on the movement, specifically, and feminism in general. They were also asked questions regarding their understanding of sexually transgressive behavior and their views on both the perpetrators and the victims of sexually transgressive situations, as a way to identify rape myths. Additionally, they were asked about having conversations with friends regarding #MeToo. Finally, they were asked questions regarding their own sense of masculinity, gender roles, and (adherence to) traditional masculinity norms.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and its risk of eliciting both questions and doubts in participants regarding their own behaviors and experiences, participants were sent a document with a list of Dutch and English resources after the interview, such as websites and phone

numbers, where they could look up more information on sexually transgressive behavior, as well as how to identify it and report it to the authorities.

It is important to discuss the difficulty that was encountered whilst recruiting participants. Around thirty men were approached on the campus of the Erasmus University and given a brief introduction of the research project. The majority of these men showed hesitance to participate in the study, and reported they either didn't feel comfortable talking about the topic at all or that they were scared of saying something wrong. Almost all of these men requested time to think about their participation in the study but did not reach out afterwards. In fact, only two of these men ended up participating in the study.

### **Privacy and ethics**

Several steps were taken to ensure anonymity of participants, which can be found in the Ethics Checklist in appendix B. First, participants were attributed a participant number with which they were identified for the rest of the data analysis. During data analysis, it was decided alongside with the supervisor that participants would be given a pseudonym as to have a clearer overview of the results. Second, recordings of the interviews were done on my personal phone, which were then deleted as soon as the transcript was finalized. Third, all transcripts and demographic information on the participants was stored in a password protected One Drive file, which will be deleted at the end of this project.

### **Sample characteristics**

A total of ten heterosexual male participants participated in the study, aged between 19 and 29 years old ( $M = 24.10$ ,  $SD = 2.81$ ). Table 1 shows the participants socio-demographic characteristics.

Table 1

*Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants*

Participant	Age	Nationality	University	Relationship
Pseudonym			programme	status
David	29	Dutch	Psychology	In a relationship
John	24	Dutch	Psychology	In a relationship
Michael	26	Dutch	Sociology	Single
Paul	25	Dutch	History	In a relationship
Andrew	23	Dutch	Sociology	In a relationship
Peter	23	Dutch-Brazilian	Sociology	Single
James	26	German	Psychology	In a relationship
Robert	21	French	Analytical Decision Making	In a relationship
Stephen	19	Dutch	Applied Physics	In a relationship
Thomas	25	French	Psychology	Single

**Data processing and analysis**

The current study performed a thematic analysis in ATLAS.ti, in which the experiences of the participants were collected, identified, and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This was done through inductive coding, which makes possible to develop and identify concepts and themes in the interviews, and then relate them to the theoretical framework by interpreting their underlying meaning (Chandra & Shang, 2019). First, the interviews were transcribed, and open coding was done, where concepts were first labeled and later organized in themes (Wijngaarden, n.d.). The process of coding was done whilst the interviews were taking place, which allowed for emerging concepts and themes in earlier interviews to also be discussed in later interviews. The thematic analysis produced five main themes, namely: the participant’s perspective of the #MeToo movement (positive and negative aspects), knowledge on sexually transgressive

behavior (including rape myths), adherence to hegemonic masculinity norms and competitive victimhood (sense of threat).

### **Operationalization**

Hegemonic masculinity norms were identified as they were first described by Connell (1987; 2005), i.e., characteristics of domination and oppression over women, heteronormativity, hierarchical order between men, and traditional gender norms (Hearn et al., 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015; Robinson, 2016). Rape myths were identified using the extensive work of Burt (1980; 1988), who provided an analysis of rape myths that fall under different categories, such as ‘nothing happened’ and ‘no harm was done’.

### **Validity and reliability**

The current study faces challenges to the validity and reliability. First, results may have been compromised due to the fact that I am a woman interviewing men regarding a gender-sensitive topic. The participants might have felt inclined to give socially-acceptable answers, because they perhaps feel ashamed for their opinions or due to fear of being judged. To prevent this as much as possible, I informed the participants before commencing the interview that they may speak freely and honestly, and that I am solely there to listen to their experiences and not to form judge their opinions. Second, results may not be generalizable due to participants being recruited from my own network, who perhaps share similar norms and values as myself, which would affect reliability. To minimize this bias, I talked about this prior to commencing the interview with these participants, and once again after the research, in order to investigate how they felt throughout the interview and whether they felt that they could be honest with me. The participants reported they felt at ease and comfortable to be completely honest with me. Furthermore, I tried to recruit as many participants as possible from outside of my own network, such as by handing out flyers and going up to random male students on the campus of Erasmus University.

### **Researcher’s own positionality and ethics**

I have been researching sexual violence against women since my minor in criminology during my bachelor's in psychology. For my master thesis in Clinical Psychology, I am currently researching the role of inequitable gender norms in the perpetration of both physical and online sexual harassment. This is my field of interest and for this thesis, I wanted to continue doing research on it. However, my previous experiences have been with questionnaires that focused on victim's and perpetrator's factors, so currently I am focusing on a broader aspect that I find to be very interesting, namely, the current societal discussion relating to #MeToo. I also wanted to conduct interviews this time around as to gain in-depth understanding, which I wasn't able to obtain in my previous research.

Furthermore, as a woman who has dealt with sexually transgressive behavior herself and is surrounded by other women who have had similar experiences, I have experienced and seen first-hand how detrimental such experiences can be and how debilitating the consequences are for victims. Therefore, I am, myself, a supporter of the #MeToo movement as I believe it sheds light onto a very serious issue. However, I am often confronted with backlash on the movement, and my motivation for this thesis is to gain more insight into all sides of men's perspective of #MeToo. Moreover, I wanted to investigate how the adherence to hegemonic masculinity norms is related to men's perspectives of #MeToo, as masculinity has been central to my previous research. I am aware that my own positionality and opinions can affect the interviews and outcomes of the current research and have therefore reflected on my research's goal and have worked thoroughly on an unbiased interview guide so to maintain my impartiality during interviews.

## **Results**

### **Men's perspective of the #MeToo movement**

Participants reported their first interaction with the #MeToo movement to have happened in the last three to ten years, citing highly publicized cases, such as "the Harvey Weinstein case", as the moment they became aware of #MeToo. All participants became acquainted with

the movement through (social) media” and Paul explained how “there wasn’t any getting away from it (...) [as] it was everywhere on the news”. John went on to explain how social media played a role in his awareness and knowledge of the movement:

At the beginning I felt more indifferent about it, not that I didn’t care, but I thought [that] this is just another thing happening in the world. But because of social media, things were brought to my attention, and I realized this really happens much more often than I thought. And that’s how I started learning about it.

This first reaction to #MeToo was also reported by other participants, who further stated feeling “sympathy for the victims” or feeling “really bad about the situation”. Andrew added that he also “felt shocked at that moment (...) [and finds] the women really strong for coming out”.

In general, participants described the #MeToo movement in similar ways and showed a clear understanding of the movement’s purpose, albeit that two participants, namely, participants 3 and 6, stated they were “not too familiar with the movement itself”. Most commonly, the movement was described as one that “creates awareness for sexually transgressive behavior and how prominent it is”, as “it happens more often than we think”. Moreover, multiple participants added that the movement “is also concerned with making sure those things do not happen again” and that it aims at “creating a safer world”. Michael also said he believes the movement goes beyond victims, as it is also “for people who don’t condone the behavior (...), to ask for support and awareness”.

What participants understood to be the purpose of the #MeToo movement was interrelated with what they found to be its positive aspects. Overall, participant’s reported more positive aspects than negative ones. The number one positive aspect reported was that #MeToo “brought awareness to the issue of sexually transgressive behavior”, as mentioned above. Peter explained why awareness is important:



I think the #MeToo movement was very good at bringing attention to how often this happens. Because, as a man, if I never do it and never see it, then it doesn't exist for me. But if a woman comes up to me and tells me, hey, this happened to me, then I think [that] there is more going on than I realized. And I recognize that it is a big problem.

Participants related this awareness to the fact that "it is now easier to talk about it than when the movement didn't exist" and that #MeToo has "given [victims] the courage to come out and share their experience". Robert felt that "the movement brought voice to the people that couldn't say anything (...) because before they were just muted". Consequently, as Paul discussed, this shed "light onto how also people from your environment deal more with it than not and (...) it opens a conversation about what boundaries and consent mean". Participants themselves reported having more conversations about sexually transgressive behavior with their friends because of #MeToo. Interestingly, those conversations were mostly with female friends, who "shared what happened to them".

Almost all participants related these conversations to their increase in knowledge about sexually transgressive behavior, such as John who said, "the more [he] talked about it with others, the more [he] learned". They found that #MeToo creates an opportunity to "educate people" and push society to reflect on their stance on the issue because "there is now something that forces you to face it and develop an opinion on it, regardless of which side of the spectrum you find yourself to be". David discussed why he finds it important to reflect on the issue of sexually transgressive behavior:

There are things that are normalized and there are things that are normal. They are not the same. Sometimes, things that have been normalized are completely not normal. The movement sheds light on the fact that this is currently the norm, and that it has to change.

Consequently, participants believed sexually transgressive behavior itself but also victims "gets taken more seriously" than prior to the existence of the #MeToo movement.

Because of this, victims are now “able to fight for justice” and “hold [perpetrators] accountable”, what participants found essential to “combat the injustice that keeps happening”.

In contrast to the high amount of positive aspects, participants only mentioned a few negative aspects of the #MeToo movement. First, five of the participants talked about how the #MeToo movement has created an opportunity for “certain women [to] falsely accuse men of sexually transgressive behavior” and that men are “more vulnerable to accusations than before”. James discussed how this “is really hard [for the accused men] because even if it’s not true, [they] have lost [their] respect and integrity in society forever”. Tomas also found false accusations to be a serious problem:

Accusations become incredibly powerful and are often enough to ruin people’s careers and lives. You want an environment where people who are genuine victims of sexually transgressive behavior can come forward without the stigma. But the problem is, where do you get enough nuance so that bad faith actors don’t just jump on the train and start saying, well, this person did this to me?

Participants who believed false accusations to be detrimental, also believed this to “affect the movement’s image”. However, there was a nuance to this debate, as discussed by James, who described false accusations as a “touchy topic” and that he believes “there are more genuine victims than men who have been falsely accused”. Furthermore, he “[doesn’t think] false accusations are a direct consequence of #MeToo because this was happening before [it] existed”. However, he believes #MeToo has made false accusations “more profitable”. The remaining two participants who talked about false accusations also didn’t credit them as a direct result of the movement and went on to say it “shouldn’t take away the attention from real cases”. Peter explained that “in the grand scheme of things, one false accusation here and there, does not compare to the thousands of legitimate accusations where nothing happens. It’s not in proportion”.

Second, participants found the movement to have, in a certain way, contributed to the “polarization of societal views” on the topic of sexually transgressive behavior. Some believe that extreme views on the #MeToo movement result in the “loss of nuance” as these people are “the loudest” and the media “focuses on them”. However, participants found that this is due to the “media not [being] interested in nuanced discussions”, despite them believing that “most people are in the middle”. Stephen explained how “every controversial topic gets polarized nowadays” and how the media “only amplifies the extreme right and the extreme left side of the story”. Additionally, participants also reported feeling bad for victims because “the media did not always take them seriously”, such as James who said that a “lot of it was trivializing (...) and it has also diverged from what it was originally about. The emotional and physical damage that it might have done to the victims (...) was not talked about enough”.

Finally, despite most participants agreeing that “not all men commit acts of sexually transgressive behavior” and that “it’s not good of people to generalize [the problem to] all men”, two participants felt significantly more negative towards this generalization. Stephen found it to be “a very negative aspect [of the movement]” and Robert, who also felt more negatively about false accusations said he felt “judged and betrayed” as he “didn’t do anything to be in [that group] of men”. He related it back to the extremism, saying “it’s insulting to the men that help you and are not doing anything against you”. On the other hand, all participants regarded men to be overwhelmingly the perpetrators of sexually transgressive behavior, some relating it to the “superior physical strength of men” and others to “toxic masculinity” and “a bad culture amongst men”. Because of this, the majority of participants reported understanding “which men the movement is referring to” and therefore did “not see generalizing comments as a problem”.

All in all, despite its negative aspects, participants found the #MeToo movement to have contributed to a “positive change in society”. For example, James described the movement as one that “is putting pressure on politics and [bringing] the topic into the public eye” which was often related to the reason for their support of feminism in general. In fact, all participants

reported feeling supportive of feminism in general, as they believe in “gender equality” and “the emancipation of women”. Paul explained his reason for supporting feminism:

I accept that we live in a patriarchal society with certain historical, cultural, and social norms that have negatively influenced women compared to men. You can still see it in medical, job, and economical discrimination. (...) Despite all the work done by feminists there are still some formal and a lot of informal issues that still need to be worked out.

Even though these issues are less explicit then they were in previous generations.

Similar reasons were given by participants for their support of the #MeToo movement, such as John who said, “there is something morally wrong happening that [he wants] to see corrected”. Other reasons for supporting the #MeToo movement were wanting “gender equality” and “women to be treated right” as well as agreeing with claims by the #MeToo movement regarding the seriousness of the problem of sexually transgressive behavior. These results do not reflect previous studies that found that men, and specifically, male university students, showed less support for the movement (Brown, 2022; Nodeland & Craig, 2019).

### **Knowledge on sexually transgressive behavior and rape myths**

When asked what participants understood to be sexually transgressive behavior, all of them mentioned “going over someone’s boundaries” and “doing something of a sexual nature that the other person isn’t comfortable with”. Peter expressed how he feels there is spectrum from “sexual violence, where there is assault or penetration, to sexual intimidation on the work floor”. Because of sexually transgressive behavior not only being about physical acts, Andrew found it to “not [be] as simple as it seems”. As a result, “there can be moments when a man is really not aware that he is being [sexually] transgressive”, as expressed by Michael. Other participants reciprocated that feeling, such as James:

Sexually approaching and exchanging behavior is a very fundamental part of our being. (...) But before there is a clear limit set by the [other] person, I think there is some gray area. Because I know a lot of women who are really into being won over, and then

there's others that say, 'I don't want to be looked at weird by another man'. To find the line in between is very, very hard.

Furthermore, as Stephen emphasized, multiple participants found that sexually transgressive behavior needs to have a "sexual intent (...) to go over someone's boundaries". Because of this, they explained how a man and a woman need to "communicate about each other's boundaries" and "ask for consent". All ten participants talked about the importance of consent, such as David:

I believe that consent is always a measure for sexually transgressive behavior. Even if you are in a relationship, you can still be sexually transgressive if you are not sure whether the other person is OK [with what you're doing]. (...) So, when in doubt, just ask for consent. And I think a lot of men are not used to that because it's not the norm to ask for consent.

Because of the nature of sexually transgressive behavior participants first went on to describe how "it can happen to anyone" and David explained that "it happens so fast, even if you don't have ill intentions, it can happen to anyone". However, this contrasted with what they later described as a typical type of offender. The majority of the participants said it is "usually someone in a power position, such as your boss or coach", "male students in fraternities" and a "typical manly man, someone who boasts about his sexual conquests" and one who "was brought up in a toxic environment". Additionally, Thomas shared that "a tiny minority of men (...) are predators and the curious thing is that these people will commit most crimes". Only Andrew explained that even though "[he] thinks there might be a pattern, (...) it is a pretty serious thing to generalize [a type of predator]".

Contrastingly, the majority of participants did not describe a typical type of victim. Only David discussed that "perhaps it's related to trauma or their upbringing (...) [so] that they put themselves in danger". But he followed that by saying that a woman "is in danger because the other person is the danger". The remaining participants reciprocated the feeling, such as Michael

who said, “you can’t put the responsibility on women” and that he thinks “there needs to be more reflection done by men”. Andrew added that “you can build a fence around your house but if some wants to break in, they will do just that”.

### **Hegemonic masculinity norms**

When asked to describe their own sense of masculinity and their adherence to masculinity norms, participants created a strong distinction between themselves and “those men”, i.e., men who, according to the participants, are “toxic” and “do sexual violence”. It was also observed that participants had difficulty defining what it means for them to be a man but found it easier to name traditional masculinity norms that they themselves do not adhere to, but those other men do.

Some participants described their own masculinity as “flexible” and “not really set in stone”, whilst others named more specific characteristics such as “respectful”, “protecting” and a “caretaker”. Multiple participants reported “just being [themselves], such as Paul, who said his masculinity is more “based on a feeling (...), it’s just how [he] feel as a person”. Interestingly, all participants talked about how they try “not [to] hold on to certain ideas of what a man should be”. These traditional masculinity norms were described as “acting tougher than you really are”, “being the bread winner”, “chasing women”, “being superior to women”, “feeling self-confident”, “not being in touch with [their] emotions”, and “being a macho man”, which are in line with hegemonic masculinity norms (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2005; Hearn et al., 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015). David went on to describe how this image is “outdated”, which was reciprocated by other participants, such as Tomas who said he “suspects most men don’t want to be dominant”. Some participants, such as James, talked about how they actively try not to adhere to these masculinity norms:

I try to consciously fight against it. It is more like an ingrained personality trait that we get taught in our childhood, rather than a decision that I make. So, it takes conscious

effort not to be like that. I [fight against these norms] because I don't want to belittle my girlfriend and make her less than what she is. I just want to be equal.

Some participants explained they “simply do not care what other people think” and “do not feel like those [characteristics] fit [them]”, which shows that they feel little to no pressure to adhere to traditional, hegemonic masculinity norms (Currier, 2013; Kahn et al., 2012; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). David explained how he would actually like masculinity norms to change, so that men are more “caring and communicative about their feelings and needs”, characteristics that are not aligned with hegemonic masculinity norms (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2005; Hearn et al., 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015). Conversely, other participants weren't as quick to claim they do not adhere to traditional masculinity norms, such as John, who recognizes that “subconsciously [he] might act in that way”. Similarly, Andrew talked about how he sometimes is “not aware of [his] own privilege and that [he] takes up more space”, which causes him to sometimes be “confronted with the facts, and [he] feels bad about that.” Nevertheless, in a general sense, participants experienced their own masculinity as “positive” and “not really toxic for women”.

Similarly, participants did not believe masculine and gender roles should be “distinct” and “divided”. John said he believes there is a lot of “overlap” and that “women and men shouldn't have specific gender roles”. Additionally, Michael explained how “everything should be done in collaboration with your partner” when in a relationship, and that this relationship should be “one hundred percent equal”. Participants expressed that traditional gender roles are “not of this time” and that “each relationship is different”, so “what a man and a woman decide to do in their relationship is different for every situation”. Again, the participants perspectives of gender roles do not fit those of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2005; Hearn et al., 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015).

Furthermore, participants talked about pressure to engage in sexist conversations about women. Stephen shared his experience:

Sometimes you land in a circle of jokes, like, locker room talk. And this is something I don't like about myself because at the time it sounds funny, but when you look back to it, you realize that it wasn't that women-friendly. (...) There's this [idea] that it's OK because it's only a joke, so it feels normal. And as a man you feel like you are different if you don't engage in that type of conversations.

This experience was reciprocated by other participants who said they felt "dragged" into these types of conversations and that there is some "social pressure to engage" in locker room talk due to "some kind of pressure to fit into the group". Despite this, all participants felt capable of stepping out of these types of situations and reported actively confronting their friends about sexist comments. However, there was a difference between confronting a friend one-on-one and confronting an entire group of friends, the first one being "easy" and "not a problem" and the latter being described as "tricky" and "sometimes quite scary".

For example, James explained that "if you talk to a lot of people who have the same opinion [except you], it's basically a lost cause", therefore, he "[doesn't] even try because it's going to create a fight". Additionally, Michael added that "[he doesn't] feel scared of sharing [his] ideas and opinions but the question is whether the other person is even listening". Overall, participants reported "ignoring" these types of conversations or "trying to change the topic" when in a group setting. Interestingly, despite the conversations still happening around them, participants reported feeling "certain [they] do not think this way about women" and know "[they are] not bad men just because [they] are friends with [men who engage in locker room talk]". So, the participants did not feel much pressured to engage in locker room talk and were not afraid of being excluded from the group or otherwise be seen as not man enough by their friends (Currier, 2013; Hooper, 2001; Kahn et al., 2012; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016).

### **Competitive victimhood**

Furthermore, none of the participants reported feeling threatened by the movement. In fact, Andrew explained that he doesn't feel threatened because "this movement can lead to more



equality (...) which [he] supports”. Other reasons for this low perception of threat were that “men shouldn’t be the rulers of society anymore” and that it “brings balance (...) to the male predominant power”. Although some participants found that the #MeToo movement can be seen as a “threat to men who feel comfortable having a dominant position”, others felt that this did “not undermined [their] own position as a man in society”. John explained why he feels this way:

A privileged group has more advantages and rights than another group. If you want equality, the [privileged] group might have to lose those advantages or rights, making it seem as if you are in the ‘losing team’. Whilst, in fact, you are just balancing out the scales. (...) And I don’t think I’m losing anything that I really need.

Furthermore, participants felt that it was a “minority of feminists who talk negatively about all men” and “who make baseless accusations”. Paul added that “victims may also talk more negatively, but they are traumatized, so they react differently”. They related this back to the influence of social media, as James explained that “extreme stances are (...) what’s getting the most media attention”. Stephen said that “you get confronted online with the link: feminism is anti-man” but participants all agreed that “most people engage in normal, non-extreme conversations”. Furthermore, participants explained they did not necessarily feel spoken to in regard to sexually transgressive behavior because they “do everything [they] can not to do it”, but that they sometimes “still feel part of the problem” because of the generalization discussed earlier. Regardless, most participants agreed that “when people say all men, they don’t mean all the men who are doing their best and don’t engage in that behavior”.

Overall, participants did not perceive the #MeToo movement to be negatively targeted at men in general, but more targeted at “the current unfair, superior position of men in society”. They went on to share their opinion on men who do not support the movement, stating they believed those men feel threatened because they “do not understand what it is about” or have received “misinformation about #MeToo”. Other participants gave other reasons, such as that

those men “feel spoken to because they have done something bad” or that they see that movement as targeted at “a specific type of man”. So, participants did not perceive the movement as a threat to their identity as a man, therefore not feeling the need to defend the moral image of men as a whole (Kahalon et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2012).

### **Discussion**

The current study aimed at investigating the perspectives of heterosexual male university students of the #MeToo movement using semi-structured interviews. It aimed at answering the research question: how is hegemonic masculinity reflected in men’s perspective of the #MeToo movement? The theoretical framework proposed hegemonic masculinity (including rape myths) and competitive victimhood to be related to men’s perspectives of and support for the #MeToo movement.

Participants reported their first interaction with the #MeToo movement to have happened through social media, which helped them become aware of the magnitude of sexually transgressive behavior. In general, participants reported more positive aspects of the #MeToo movement than negative ones and described it as a movement that creates awareness for sexually transgressive behavior and emphasizes how prominent it is. They also found the movement to provide an opportunity for victims to share their experiences as well as opening up a conversation about boundaries and consent. In fact, the participants themselves reported having more conversations about sexually transgressive behavior with their female friends because of #MeToo, which they associated with their increase in knowledge about the topic. Furthermore, they stated that the movement educates people and encourages them to reflect on their stance on the issue. Finally, they reported sexually transgressive behavior (and victims) gets taken more seriously and that perpetrators are now more often held accountable for their actions.

In contrast to the high amount of positive aspects of the movement, only a few participants mentioned negative aspects. First, participants discussed false accusations and how

detrimental they can be as they can ruin someone's lives. Only two participants expressed feeling negative about this, however, one of them said he believes this is not a direct consequence of the #MeToo movement but something that was already happening before. Another participant went on to say that false accusations are a minority case. Second, participants found that the movement contributed in a way to the polarization of societal views on the topic of sexually transgressive behavior but found this to be a direct result of the media's focus on extreme views on the topic, and not necessarily a negative aspect of the #MeToo movement itself. In fact, they believed only a minority of women talk negatively about men and that most people are able to engage in normal, non-extreme conversations. Finally, two participants felt negative towards the generalization to 'all men'. On the other hand, the rest of the participants reported knowing which men the movement is referring to and therefore did not perceive the generalization as big of a problem as those two participants.

When considering these positive and negative aspects of the movement, participants reported supporting both the #MeToo movement and feminism in general, as they found it to bring a positive change to society and lead to more gender equality. In this way, the men's perspectives of the #MeToo movement in this study go against earlier findings regarding male university students showing less support for the movement (Nodeland & Craig, 2019). It also does not reflect the divided opinions found by Brown (2022), as all ten participants felt supportive of #MeToo. This may be due to a sampling bias seeing as most of the participants were recruited from the researchers environment and may, therefore, share an interest about the topic with the researcher. Furthermore, it is possible that participants who do not feel supportive of the movement felt reluctant to participate, leaving a sample of only participants with a positive perspective of #MeToo. However, it is also possible that participants find nuance in the movement, as they not only described positive but also negative aspects. For example, most participants did not find false accusations to be as serious as the problem of sexually

transgressive itself, so it can be that male university students genuinely support the movement because the negative aspects do not weigh as much as the positive aspects.

Similar to their knowledge of the purpose of the #MeToo movement, participants showed a clear understanding of sexually transgressive behavior, as they defined it as going over someone's boundaries in a sexual way. These findings also do not support earlier studies that found the male university students have less knowledge about sexually transgressive behavior (Nodeland & Craig, 2019). Furthermore, participants went into detail regarding the 'gray area', some agreeing that it can sometimes be unclear whether a man is being sexually transgressive. Because of this, they discussed that anyone can engage in sexually transgressive behavior without ill intent. However, they found that one can counter this by having conversations with their partner about their boundaries and consent.

One would expect that, due to a high level of knowledge on sexually transgressive behavior, the male participants would also show less adherence to rape myths (Cantalupo, 2011). This was not entirely the case, as participants described a typical type of offender, one who is either in a position of power, is part of a fraternity, or is what they described a 'typical' man, i.e., someone who boasts about his sexual conquests. In fact, one of the participants claimed that most crimes are committed by a small minority of men. On the other hand, participants did not describe a particular type of female victim and did not find that there were certain things women did to put themselves in danger.

Similarly, participants created a strong distinction between themselves and 'those men', i.e., men who are toxic and do sexual violence, as claimed by the participants. Those other men were often described as a traditional, hegemonic man: one who acts tougher than he is, is confident and a macho man, is not in touch with his emotions, and feels superior to women (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2005). Participants felt that this image of a man is outdated and went on to describe that most men do not want to have these characteristics. In fact, when participants were asked to describe their own sense of masculinity, they had difficulty

doing this, and reported their masculinity to be a flexible one and the few specific characteristics mentioned were respectful, protecting, and a caretaker.

However, these characteristics do not necessarily stray away from hegemonic masculinity, as a hegemonic man often seems himself as the caretaker of the family, with the duty to provide and protect. On the other hand, participants reported having a flexible view of gender roles, saying that it should be a collaboration between a man and a woman, which does not align with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Hearn et al., 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015). It seems, then, that participants are more concerned about straying away from the characteristics of homogenic masculinity that they perceive as more negative or toxic, which they related to the perpetration of sexually transgressive behavior. Conversely, it may be that the participants in this study do not have a high degree of rape myths despite describing a specific type of perpetrator, but that they did this because they want to distantiate themselves from what they see as a toxic man who engages in sexual violence.

Participants also described their experiences with women-unfriendly conversations with their male friends, or locker room talk. Some reported there being some social pressure to engage in such conversations, however, all participants said they felt capable of confronting their male friends about these conversations but chose not to do this in a group setting as they felt it wasn't worth it because it would either cause a fight or their friends wouldn't listen. Because of this, they reported ignoring these conversations or trying to change the topic but expressed they do not think 'that' way about women, once again distantiating themselves from 'those other men'. So, participants did not engage in locker room talk as a way to feel accepted by other men, but rather because they believe it will turn against them or it won't make a difference. This shows that the men in this study do not feel pressure to adhere to masculinity norms in the form of engaging in locker room talk because they are not concerned about being part of the group or being seen as much of a man by their friends (Currier, 2013; Hooper, 2001; Kahn et al., 2012; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016).

Finally, participants did not feel threatened by the movement as they found that it can lead to more equality and the balancing out of men and women's position in society. These findings show that the men in this study did not perceive the movement as a threat to their male identity and, consequently, did not feel the need to defend the group morality (Kahalon et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2012). Furthermore, they did not feel spoken to by these types of comments because they actively try not to engage in sexually transgressive behavior and said they understood which men the movement is referring to, namely, a 'specific type of man'. This goes back to the point discussed earlier, that the participants are more concerned about distancing themselves from the image of a man who engages in sexually transgressive behavior.

It is important to note that the findings of the current study may be more leaning towards positive views of the #MeToo movement because of the fact that I am a woman questioning men on their stance on a feminist movement. Moreover, participants might have felt pressured to feel more negatively about the type of men that engage in sexually transgressive behavior, which could explain why they try to separate themselves from that image. However, all participants reported having felt comfortable during the interviews and that they felt like they could be honest and share their genuine views on the matter. Further research could explore the same topic with a male interviewer to investigate whether the gender of the interviewer affects the responses of men. Furthermore, it would be valuable to go more in-depth into men's rejection of hegemonic masculinity norms. Specifically, their motivations behind it and what they perceive to be a more updated type of masculinity, seeing as they described hegemonic masculinity to be outdated.

All in all, the current study shows that male university students are positive about the #MeToo movement, and that hegemonic masculinity is reflected in their perspectives in the sense that they do not adhere to the negative and toxic norms associated with it. Because of that, their sense of competitive victimhood is low, as they do not feel that the movement is a threat to

their identity as a man. These findings bring a nuanced view to a polarized discussion, showing that male students actively reject hegemonic masculinity norms and, in doing that, do not feel threatened by the movement.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Informed Consent Form**

Study: The other side of the feminist coin: Men's perspective of the #MeToo movement

Contact: Erica Nunes Coelho, 473465en@student.eur.nl

Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University

Dear participant,

For my master thesis I will be gathering data on men's experiences and response to the #MeToo movement. Before taking part in this study, it is of utmost importance that you are aware of the procedure and design of this study. You will be asked to participate in an interview on your experience with the #MeToo movement and sexually transgressive behavior. We will touch on topics that could be sensitive and triggering, therefore, you are able to withdraw your participation in the study at any time, including during the interview itself.

You are eligible for the current study if you:

1. Identify as a heterosexual man
2. Are between the ages of 18- and 29- years old
3. Currently attend a Dutch university

### **Confidentiality**

It is important to note that all of your responses during the interview will be confidential and anonymous. You will receive a participant number with which you will be identified for the rest of the data analysis. Only I as the researcher will have access to your full name. Your data will be processed anonymously and cannot be traced back to you. After processing the data and the finalization of this thesis project, the entirety of the study's raw data will be deleted.

### **Participant's rights**

Note that, as a participant, you have the right to access your data at any time during the project, rectify, erase, or restrict the processing of your personal data, and withdraw your consent at any time. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority if you feel the need to.

## Consent

By signing this consent form, you agree to the following:

1. I have been thoroughly and sufficiently informed on the study. I have had the opportunity to clarify any questions regarding the procedure of the study.
2. I am voluntarily participating in this study.
3. I have a clear understanding of my rights as a participant, such as that I am able to withdraw my participation in this study and any point and time.
4. I give consent to my audio being recorded solely for the purposes of data collection and processing, knowing that the audio recordings will be deleted after data processing.
5. I give permission for the collection of data on these specific topics:
  - a. My experiences with, and opinion of the #MeToomovement
  - b. My experiences with, and opinion of the feminist movement
  - c. My opinion of the discussion on sexually transgressive behavior

I give consent.

I **do not** give consent.

Name participant:

Date:



Name, email of student: Erica Nunes Coelho, 473465en@student.eur.nl Name,

email of supervisor: Dr. Samira van Bohemen, vanbohemem@essb.eur.nl Start date

and duration: 06-01-2023, six months

Is the research study conducted within DPAS

**YES - ~~NO~~**

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?

(e.g., internship organization)

## PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. **YES - ~~NO~~**

*If 'NO': skip to part V.*

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? **YES - NO**

*Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) must first be submitted to an accredited medical research ethics committee or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO).*

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. **YES - NO**

*If 'YES': skip to part IV.*

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). **YES - NO**

*If 'YES': skip to part IV.*

## PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? **YES - NO**
  
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? **YES - NO**
  
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? **YES - NO**
  
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? **YES - NO**  
*Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g., purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).*
  
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? **YES - NO**
  
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g., racial, or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric

- data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? **YES - ~~NO~~**
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? **YES - NO**
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? **YES - NO**
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? **YES - NO**
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? **YES - NO**

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

The current study deals with a sensitive sexual topic, which can elicit negative emotions from participants. Participants may have dealt with sexually transgressive situations themselves or feel strongly about the topic due to someone close to them having had an experience related to the topic. This is unavoidable, however, as it is the central theme of the research and related to all of the research questions.



What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Participants will receive information regarding the study's topic beforehand and they will be told about the interview. They will also be informed about their anonymity in their results and on all the data. They will also be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time. After the study, participants will receive a list of resources, such as websites and phone numbers, pertaining to sexually transgressive behavior. They can access these resources for more information on how to identify sexually transgressive behavior in their own experiences as victims, but also on how to help others close to them. They will also receive information on how to report incidents and receive legal and psychological help.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Participants may experience negative feelings during the interview, because of the sensitive topic. Participants could feel ashamed to talk about the topic or reluctant to share their experiences.

*Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.*

*Continue to part IV.*

#### PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Data will be collected on the campus of the Erasmus University.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

The sample size is expected to be between 10 and 15 participants.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

The population is male university students, around 130.000.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

*Continue to part V.*

## Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

The data will exclusively be stored in a password protected OneDrive file.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.*

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I, Erica Nunes Coelho, am responsible for all of these tasks.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Once every month.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Each participant will receive a participant number and will be referred exclusively to that number.

*Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.*

## PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Erica Nunes Coelho

Name (EUR) supervisor:

Dr. Samira van Bohemen

Date: 21-03-2023

Date: 23-03-2023



*Samira v Bohemen*