Project: Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society

Project Series: GBV & Misogyny

An Exploration Into Gendered Norms on South African Social Media

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"The assault on gender is also an assault on democracy" - Judith Butler

1.   Introduction

What does it mean to be a man in South Africa? What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be transgender? These questions can be answered by understanding gender norms amongst the South African community. It is important to understand gender norms as they allow for the perpetuation of certain behaviours that affect all children but are proven to affect girls disproportionately.

In response to these questions, this report analyses data from South African Twitter (renamed to X.com), where it is estimated that 34.7% of Twitter's ad audience were female and 65.3% were male at the start of 2023[1]. The ad audience is an adequate indicator of the gender split on the platform because it classifies people on factors such as account likeness for people who haven't manually entered their gender into their account, matching this likeness to people who have entered gender identifiers on their profile[2]. There is room for error in this classification as there are with other techniques that try to determine the gender of a user, for example, a name-based classification. Categorising the names in this way becomes difficult in non-Germanic and Romance languages. In South Africa for example, this classification becomes more difficult where names in Zulu, like Ayanda, Sihle and Unathi are given to both boys and girls[3]

In line with Pillar 6 of South Africa's National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence, this report seeks to improve our understanding of the extent and nature of Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) specifically among social media users on Twitter through the lens of gender norms.

Understanding gender norms within the South African context allows for the improvement of interventions that can address harmful norms and practices. This means not specifically targeting men as the primary perpetrators of GBVF but understanding the societal and cultural stereotypes that give rise to the cycles of violence that are perpetuated against women and children in particular. It is important to understand social and gender norms because when they are in place, interventions aimed at educating people about the problem or changing individual attitudes may not be enough to shift behaviour, which is the ultimate goal of the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change[4].

This report does not seek to explain what gender is or the accuracy of any of the narratives presented. It simply highlights the conversations about gender norms that are taking place on

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[1] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-south-africa
[2] https://business.twitter.com/en/help/campaign-setup/campaign-targeting/geo-gender-and-language-targeting.html
[3] https://www.news24.com/life/archive/beautiful-zulu-baby-names-for-boys-and-girls-20170420
[4] https://gsdrc.org/professional-dev/social-norms/

Twitter amongst South Africans. For an overview of the methodology employed by the CABC, see the Appendix.

2.   Executive Summary

Masculine Norms:
- An overview of the 'male gender norms' category suggests a tendency towards leadership and provision. Masculine norms broadly follow along the same line - men should 'provide' and men should be 'strong'.
- Male friendships were also questioned, with accounts noting that they do not provide any source of emotional support. Responses were split with some noting that emotional support is a women's job or that male friendships express themselves differently.
- The prevalence of absentee fathers, despite the mentioned norms, was observed and indicates a contradictory or selective adherence to these norms.

Feminine Norms:
- An overview of the newly constructed 'female gender norms' category suggests a tendency toward conversation about relationships, money and family.
- Female gendered norms broadly fall within three frames - Women 'should' be humble, women 'should' show 'respect' to men, and women 'are not' safe to open up to, being cast as manipulative.
- Alongside these broad themes, how women dress emerged as a vector for spectators to pass value judgements on women.

LGBTQIA+ (Queer) Norms:
- Conversation found under the LGBTQIA+, or 'queer norms' as referred to in the rest of this document, suggested that while the community is formally protected, they still face stigma in society and that legislative protection has yet to have a normative impact on the community.
- There was also a suggestion that opening up traditional norms for questioning could lead to the degradation of society and established norms such as underage relationships.
- Furthermore, posts concerning the intersection between masculine, feminine and queer norms were found which reinforced the sexualisation of female bodies in order to question the existence of the queer community.

Authorship & Influence:
3. Engagement farming was noted in the focused gendered norms conversation - being present across 7 of the 12 most active accounts. This included playing on tropes and stereotypes to generate post-engagement, to facilitate revenue for an account owner.

3. Social and Gender Norms

Social norms are 'shared beliefs within a social unit about the appropriate ways to think, feel, and behave in a given context'[5]. Social units refer to a group of people that share similar characteristics and form part of a broader society. Norms govern decision-making in social situations and play an important role in facilitating cooperation and action between people[6]. If "all the world's a stage, and all men and women are merely players.." as Shakespeare famously stated, then norms function as the script by which the players are guided. Norms shape behaviour, influencing the content of communication, its timing and delivery. Several theories exist attempting to explain why individuals adhere to norms and these are: (i) internalisation and (ii) externalisation.

Internalisation suggests that norms cannot be decoupled from socialisation. From a young age, individuals are taught norms through punishment for violation or reward for adherence and thereby, learn the rules of conduct that are deemed acceptable.[7] Through this process, individuals may develop heuristics for norm abidance resulting in intrinsic preferences for certain behaviours. This process is referred to as internalisation where behaviours are deemed acceptable within a community and engaging in behaviour deemed unacceptable leads to social exile or a lower social status/image in the eyes of the community.

Research, however, suggests that there is a high degree of intraindividual variation. Individuals are flexible in norm adherence, adhering or violating certain norms depending on what others do or believe. Externalisation, or social learning posits that norms and the degree of norm adherence depends on the beliefs and observations of others. The existence of a norm does not automatically mean adherence and that a critical mass is required to sustain norm adherence.
In addition to the above, power and influence serves a similar function in norm adherence. Structural forms of power such as government and regulatory bodies dictate norms through rule-making which attracts sanction[8]. Furthermore, powerful actors and those with influence may also dictate norms in society either individually or collectively.

At this juncture, it is crucial to distinguish between what is referred to as descriptive norms and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms refer to the prevalence of a given behaviour within social groups while injunctive norms refer to behaviours that members of a group think others ought to do[9]. A further distinction must be drawn between actual and perceived norms. Whereas actual norms refer to accurate rates of descriptive or injunctive behaviour, perceived norms are the common perceptions of the prevalence of behaviour within social groups[10]. The latter is not

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[5] Why do people follow social norms? - Gross & Vostroknutov, 2022
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] For a full discussion on whether rule-making creates norms, or whether norms inform rule-making, see The Authority of Law - J Raz, 1979; The Concept of Law - HLA Hart, 1963; Taking Rights Seriously - R Dworkin, 1977.
[9] Applying behavioural science to issues of public health in South Africa: The case for social norms intervention - Gans, Neville et al. 2017
[10] Ibid.

backed by research nor data but instead, prior behaviour and mental heuristics determine what is normative. It is the latter category of *perceived* norms that drive behaviour.

Inextricably linked to norms is the concept of culture. Culture is a rather difficult concept to define. Spencer-Oatey's defines culture as a "set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour."[11] Norms are, therefore, context-specific regulators of behaviour[12] and as such, vary across cultures.

The CABC's research has mainly focused on social media narratives in an attempt to uncover underlying societal attitudes leading to high rates of GBV and inequality between genders. As noted above, these societal attitudes and consequent behaviours stem from norms nested within the broader South African culture. Padmanabhanunni & Gerhardt studied normative beliefs as predictors of physical, non-physical and relational aggression among South African adolescents. Their study included 229 students from a low-income community and found that general beliefs endorsing aggression were positively correlated with aggressive behaviour.[13] The study largely agrees with previous findings, specific to our focus areas, that men who witness intimate partner violence in childhood are more likely to commit such acts in adulthood compared with similar men[14], as well as having and endorsing attitudes related to spousal abuse[15].

However, as noted above, both internal and external norms play a role in behaviour. Situational and sociocultural factors are key considerations when examining harmful gender behaviours. South Africa has a patriarchal culture which feeds into and feeds off of cultural groupings, religious observance and institutional structures[16]. Often culture and religion overlap, such as in the case of the Boere/Afrikaaners whose cultural beliefs stem from the bible and, whose attitudes similarly reflect that of a patriarchal society.[17] To this end, former Justice of the Constitutional Court Albie Sachs stated that "it is a sad fact that one of the profoundly non-racial institutions in South Africa is patriarchy"[18].

It is natural to assume that social media has become a place for the expression of a patriarchal culture and this finds support in research undertaken by academics such as Liu (2023) who

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[11] Culturally Speaking: Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory - Oatey, 2008

[12] Supra note 8.

[13] Normative beliefs as predictors of physical, non-physical and relational aggression among South African adolescents - Padmanabhanunni & Gerhardt, 2019

[14] Witness of Intimate Partner Violence in Childhood and Perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence in Adulthood - Roberts, Gilman et al, 2010

[15] Effects of South African Men's Having Witnessed Abuse of Their Mothers During Childhood on Their Levels of Violence in Adulthood - Abrahams, 2011

[16] The stubborn persistence of patriarchy? Gender equality and cultural diversity in South Africa - Catherine Albertyn, 2009

[17] Afrikaner Identity: Culture, Tradition and Gender

[18] Judges and Gender: The Constitutional Rights of Women in Post-Apartheid South Africa - A Sachs, 2011.

finds that social media presents an opportunity for the expression of patriarchal norms, values and attitudes.[19] Simultaneously, however, social media also has the potential to shape norms and values as De Ridder's (2017) research suggests.[20]

What follows is an analysis of norms within the South African context based on social media data, which seeks to categorise and analyse the posts according to whether the norm is (i) internal; or (ii) external. Furthermore, whether such norms are held by virtue of South African culture or developed through social media engagement. Owing to the latter examination, we are required to set out some of the core and agreed-upon patriarchal beliefs within the South African context. These norms are set out under the respective norm in focus, i.e. (i) Men, (ii) Women and (iii) the LGBTQIA+ community.

4. Data Overview

The data for this report was collected from the social media platform X (previously Twitter). Publicly available social media data, within the South African context, was isolated from the period 1 January to 31 October 2024. The resulting dataset contained 17 million mentions (posts, reposts, replies), of which 71% were retweets. More than 300,000 unique authors took part in the conversation - representing an average individual contribution of 51 mentions per unique account (see Figure 1).

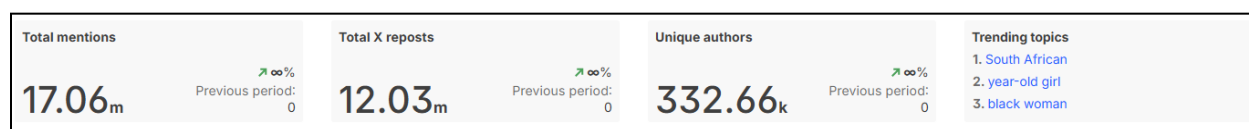| Total mentions		Total X reposts		Unique authors		Trending topics
17.06m	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	12.03m	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	332.66k	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	1. South African 2. year-old girl 3. black woman

Figure 1: Metrics associated with the overall, unfiltered conversation

The dataset was further sorted by a series of categories: Male norms, Female norms and LGBTQIA+/Queer norms. These categories made use of a further series of filtering keywords as shown in Appendix B. The associated dataset of relevant content, focused solely on conversation drawn in by the categories and contained 3.1 million mentions, by 206,510 authors - representing an average contribution by unique accounts of 15 mentions per account. Of this amount, 75% of the mentions recorded were reposts. This indicates a preference for the resharing of content from other accounts as opposed to the production of original content within the conversation (see Figure 2). In other conversations that we track like xenophobia, this type of high reshare percentage usually denotes an artificial amplification of content. However, more research and understanding of the conversation is required to understand if this is the case in the gender norms conversation.

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[19] Does Social Media reinforce Gender Norms? - Liu, 2023
[20] Social Media and Young People's Sexualities: Values, Norms, and Battlegrounds - De Ridder, 2017
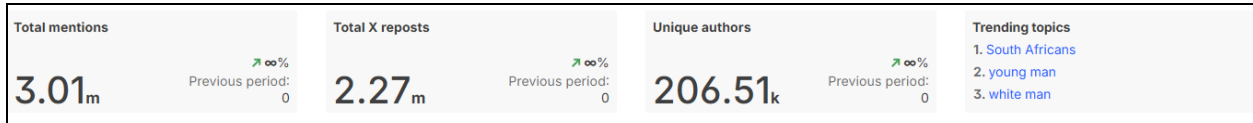
Figure 2: Metrics associated with the filtered, analysed conversation.

Regarding the overall conversation. Over half of all recorded mentions related to the conversation about male norms at 56%. Female norms accounted for 41% of the filtered data and LGBTQIA+ norms accounted for the remaining 3% (see Figure 3).
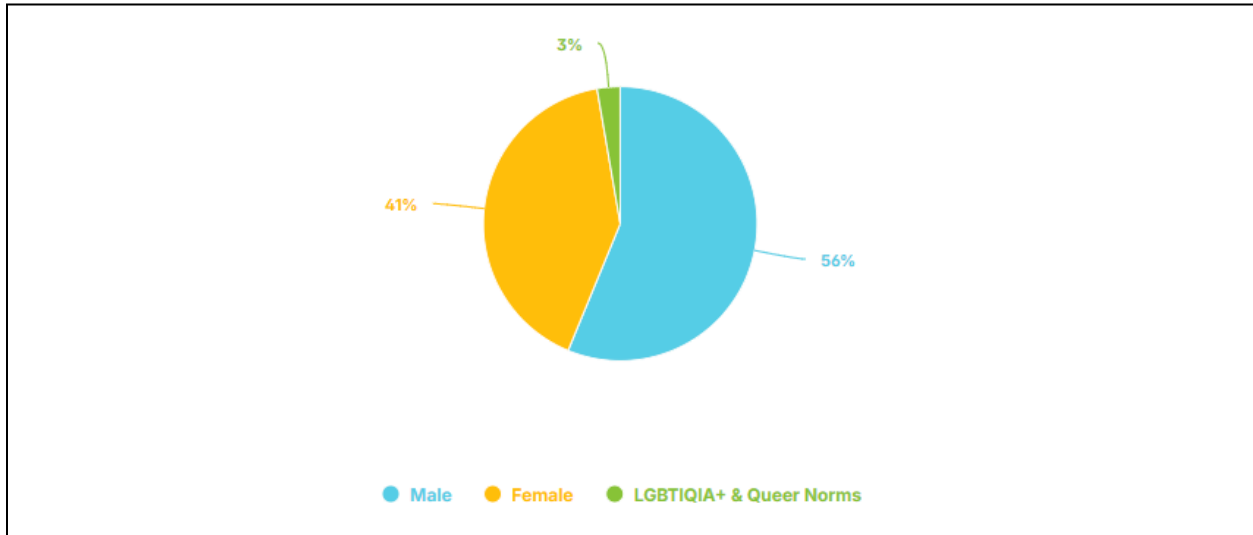

Figure 3: Categorical sorting of the filtered conversation

Breaking down mention volume over time, by weeks of the time period, provides insight into narratives and events which saw heightened conversation around gender norms (see Figure 4).
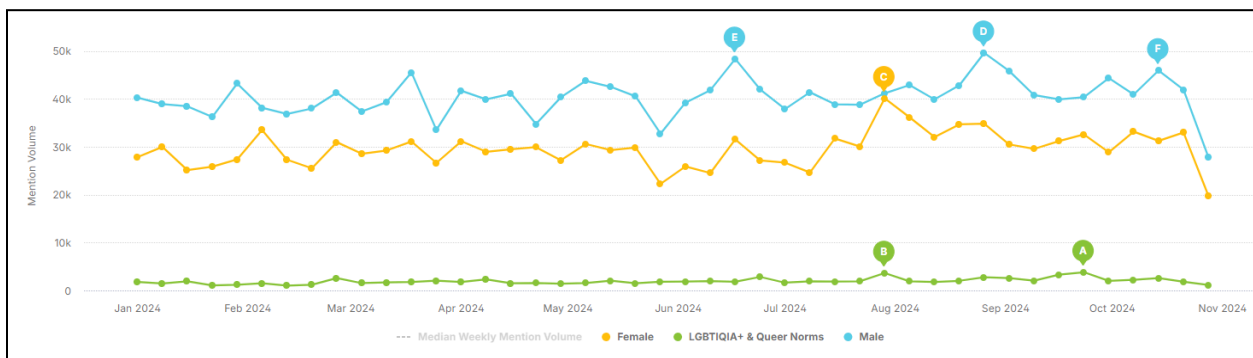

Figure 4: Mention volume over time for filtered conversation by week of the time period

These peaks are explored below by the magnitude of the marked peak. Peak B and Peak C occurred over the same period:

LGBTQIA+ & Queer Norms:

- Peak A (September 16th - September 29th / 107% increase from usual mention volume):
    - The most engaged post was in the form of a reply to an account which stated that "*SA biggest downfall was when Mbeki signed the homosexual Bill on the 30th of Nov 2006 due to pressure from the US & the West. Today men are competing with women, SA is now seeing a drop in both marriages between men & women, including a drop in birth rates. This is a crisis*" [sic]. The reply sought to bring attention to the homophobia in the post, stating that South Africa is facing high levels of rape and femicide and that it was interesting that the account decided to single out gay men. (1) ; (2) ; (3).
    - Other conversations during the period concerned individuals expressing that gay men should not be allowed to adopt kids, that transgender women cannot relate to the struggles of cisgender women or are forcing themselves into the experiences of 'womanhood', and that transgender people are 'confused'.
- Peak B (July 29th - August 4th / 97% increase from usual mention volume):
    - Conversation around Algerian Olympian Imane Khelif particularly concerning J.K. Rowling posting misinformation that Khelif is a transgender woman[21]. (1)
    - Conversation around the legality of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations in Algeria. (1) (2).

Feminine Norms:
- Peak C (July 29th - August 4th / 35% increase from usual mention volume);
    - The most engaged with post further spoke to the media and influencer storm around Imane Khelif's sex and gender - while referring to the fact that the situation had garnered more anger than the participation of Steven van de Velde, a convicted child rapist, in the olympics[22]. (1) ; (2)
    - Other conversations within this time period centred on former Miss SA contestant Chidimma Adetshina, among inquiries into the validity of Adetshina's South African citizenship[23]. (1)

Masculine Norms:
- Peak D (August 26th - September 1st / 22% increase from usual mention volume):
    - The most engaged post in this period concerned the news of the murder of two black women on a farm, sharing an image of the alleged perpetrator. (1)
    - The conversation also included posts from individuals asking for assistance in locating missing women and children, as well as content in relation to misogyny, and illegal immigration. (1) ; (2) ; (3)
- Peak E (June 17th - June 23rd / 19% increase from usual mention volume):
    - A popular post was shared which showcases men in suits having a braai and conversing with one another, with the caption, 'gents this is beautiful man, just gents nje [sic]" (1)
- Peak F (October 14 - October 20th / 13% increase from usual mention volume):

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[21] JK Rowling and Elon Musk named in Imane Khelif cyberbullying lawsuit | France | The Guardian
[22] Dutch child rapist greeted with boos – and applause – before Olympics loss
[23] Beauty contest sparks row over who counts as South African

- ○ The most engaged post during this period concerned the death of a young woman who was allegedly last seen leaving a club with an unknown man. The post in question was made in response to comments from individuals stating that 'women don't listen', with the author drawing attention to victim blaming rather than speaking out against the murder of women in the country. (1)
- ○ Another highly engaged post during this period concerned the airing of an episode of the television show, Skeem Saam, wherein a male character was sentenced to 15 years in prison after being convicted of rape. Responses to the episode varied, with some indicating that the case of rape should not count, as 'regretful sex' does not count as rape, while others praised the television show for bringing the conversation around consent to a wider audience. (1)

The remainder of the report dives into each category, before closing out with a section on authorship and influence in maintaining gender norms.

5. Masculine Norms

As noted above, norms are socially constructed and are informed by internal and external factors. From a young age, both males and females are taught what is expected of them as men and women. Traditionally, masculinity is associated with the performance of violence, aggression, avoidance of vulnerability and weakness, the need to compete, patriarchal ideology and the subordination of women. This is also referred to as hegemonic masculinity or put differently, the dominant form of masculinity found in society.[24]

The performance of masculinity is intertwined with culture, religion and society which are context-specific. However, some aspects such as those mentioned above are found across cultures and societies and these are (1) being the primary breadwinner or provider in a family; (2) initiating courting rituals; (3) displaying strength or toughness, including the use of violence. Several historical causal factors have been proffered for the universality of the aforementioned traits.[25] In South Africa, however, regard must be had to the country's history to analyse the dominant norms among both women and men, in particular.

The sequential systems of colonisation and Apartheid instilled a culture of violence and brutality both by those fighting to maintain systems of inequality as well as the freedom fighters who

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[24] The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) in South Africa: a pilot study - van Niekerk
[25] See L Nelson *'Parental Investment Theory and Human Sociobiology'* 2017.

sought to overthrow such systems.[26] In this regard, South Africa experienced a militarisation of society where the police and defence force were used against citizens, and coordinated resistance by quasi-military bodies such as the uMkhonto weSizwe military wing of the African National Congress (hereinafter "the ANC"). Militarised masculinities continue to plague South Africa post-apartheid with political parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) using militaristic symbolism and terminology in reference to their leadership structures, policies, and/or party logos, such as by referring to their leader as Commander-In-Chief[27]. In addition, organisations such as Afri-Forum act as quasi-police and defence units under the guise of community protection organisations, having access to firearms and lethal weapons. The normalisation of violence and hypermasculinity is captured by Graaf & Heinecken:

"The creation of a hierarchy of races entailed a purposeful process of dehumanisation of those not classified as white, with racist propaganda and legislation becoming the standard. Violence and brutality were normalised during this period, with the South African Police (SAP) and South African Defence Force (SADF) increasingly using violence against those who opposed the government. In addition to this, the notion arose of 'acceptable' kinds of violence, either by the state against opponents, or by those involved in the struggle against the state. The normalisation can create a situation in which the use of violence becomes seen as more acceptable, which reduces societal disapproval and potentially increases the rates of perpetration of violence. Thus, the normalisation of violence in South Africa can contribute to its ongoing perpetration in the country."

The resultant racial inequality by the aforementioned systems led to significant income disparities delineating exposure to violence by socio-economic conditions.[28] In the current South African context, Income inequality and low economic development remain strong predictors of exposure to violence.[29]

A culture of violence, in a society riddled with inequality, impacts across genders. Van Niekerk, in her analysis of masculine norms, suggests that a process of layering occurs where norms are affected by religion, class, ethnic and racial identities and as examined above, historical

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[26] Masculinities and gender-based violence in South Africa: Astudy of a masculinities-focused intervention programme - Graaff & Heinecken, 2017
[27] What the EFF's self-styled militarism says about South Africa's third largest party
[28] Ibid.
[29] Psychological research and South Africa's violence prevention responses - Seedat et al. 2014

factors.[30] There is, from a young age, an expectation that males will perform masculine norms and deviation from these expectations results in social exile. The corollary of this is the expectation placed on women to perform feminine roles. Deviation from this expectation, therefore, impacts both male and female gender adherents as well as individuals who identify as queer, or who may express a non-binary or a gendered identity. The author proffers the following statement in support:

"...adolescent boys conform to masculine norms such as having a competitive drive, behaving in favour of the patriarchal ideology and chauvinism, and male violence. In addition, the association of men with feminine qualities is linked to homosexuality, a marginalized form of masculinity, which is considered shameful and a weakness. Peer disciplining is then acted out through the language of domination (e.g., "faggot", "pussy", "you are the weakest link, goodbye"), which aids in defining boundaries whereby boys are included or excluded based on their ability to perform hegemonic masculinity."

Norms, however, are not set in stone and vary across time. Whereas society once valued strength and domination as important characteristics of masculinity, society now places significant importance on intellect which was, historically, stigmatised through the use of labels such as 'nerd' or 'geek'. At the same time, these varied norms build upon already established norms such as providing and being an attractive partner. The author encapsulates the evolution by stating that:

"However, with the nature of men's work today where intellect is favoured, certain schools aim to instill the value of hard work within their students. Therefore, school performance and academic credentials have become increasingly strong values that young men aim to gain. Education is perceived as the route to employment, which allows men to fulfill their breadwinner element of their male role."

As previously reported in the CABC's Labour Equality report, South Africa has made significant strides in legislating equality between genders and taking active steps to improve the number of women in leadership roles[31]. Despite these progressive steps taken by the National Government, South Africa still lags in empowering women and the queer community, as well as

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[30] The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) in South Africa : a pilot study - Van Niekerk, 2009
[31] Labour Force Equality Social Media Analytics Report: CABC

having high IPV and GBV rates. An analysis of norms may provide some explanation for this. It is largely accepted that women can, and should, participate in the economy by working or starting their own businesses. However, at home they are still considered to be secondary to their husband and this extends to sexual relationships, where they are expected to be submissive.[32]

"The women believed that some men did not accept changing gender roles or preferred that women not take advantage of emerging shifts in their newfound freedom, but rather maintain their traditional role within the household."

6.1 Data Overview - Masculine Norms

The male norms category returned a subset of the overall conversation containing approximately 1.75 million mentions and 1.3 million of the returned posts were reposts. Approximately 171,000 accounts contributed to the conversation, representing an average of 10 mentions per unique account (See Figure 5).

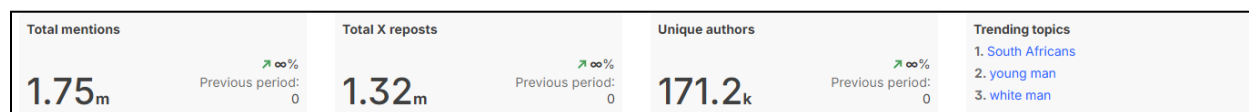| Total mentions		Total X reposts		Unique authors		Trending topics
1.75m	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	**1.32**m	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	**171.2**k	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	1. South Africans 2. young man 3. white man

Figure 5: Metrics for the Male Social Norms Conversation

A word cloud of the top 50 phrases, keywords and hashtags coloured by volume indicates the most common words used which include love, people, life, good and time (see Figure 6).

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[32] Gender norms in South Africa: Implications for HIV and pregnancy prevention among African and Indian women students at a South African tertiary institution. - Mantell, Needham et al., 2009

Figure 6: A word cloud, sorted by volume, of the top 50 Keywords, Phrases and Hashtags in the conversation.

Below is a topic wheel, which characterises the major topics within the centre circle and subtopics around the periphery, and suggests that the conversation about male norms largely focused on the perceived and expected norms for males whether young or old (See Figure 7).
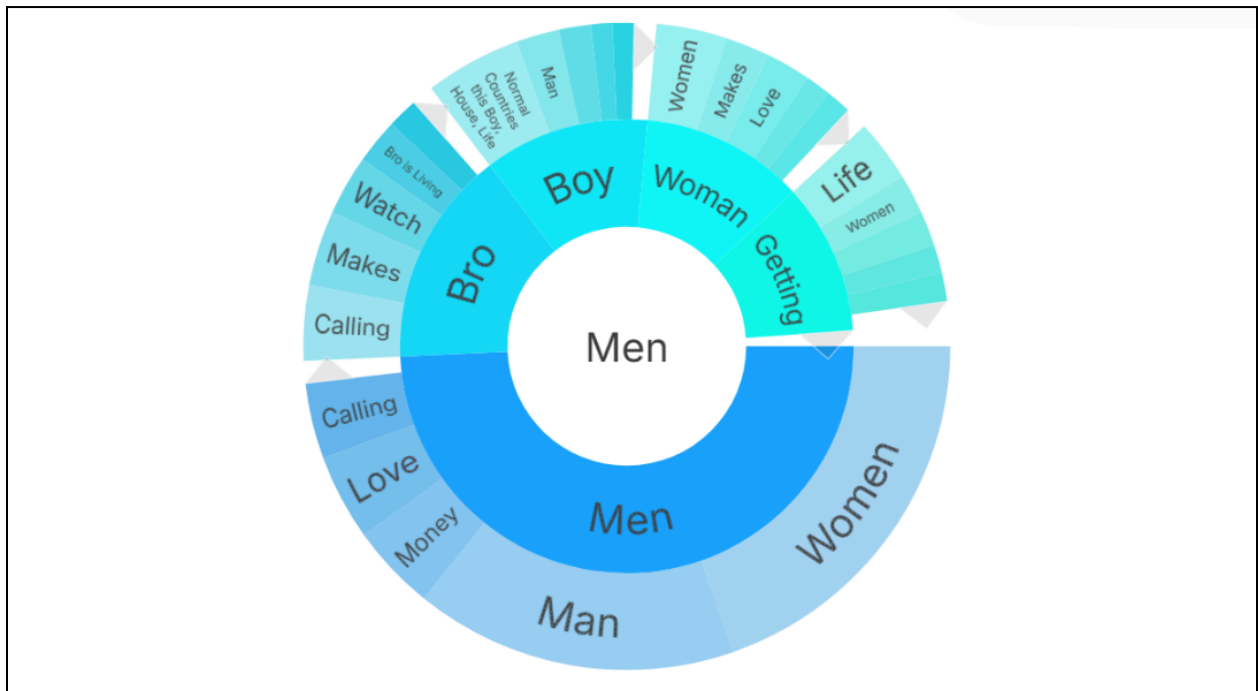

Figure 7: A topic wheel of the male gender norms conversation

The trending topics visualisation showcases phrases, hashtags and keywords which form themes of conversation throughout the time period (see Figure 8). The visualisation shows that the phrases, hashtags and keywords are all centred in the chart, and remain relatively stable throughout the reporting period. This is relatively unusual for a conversation of this size, over a long time-frame. Indicating that trending topics of interest remain stagnant in discussion concerning gendered norms.

Centred within the chart are keywords such as life, guy, good, people, love and money which are larger due to volume, as noted above. The trending nature of the topics is explored under the 'Authorship and Influence' section of this report.
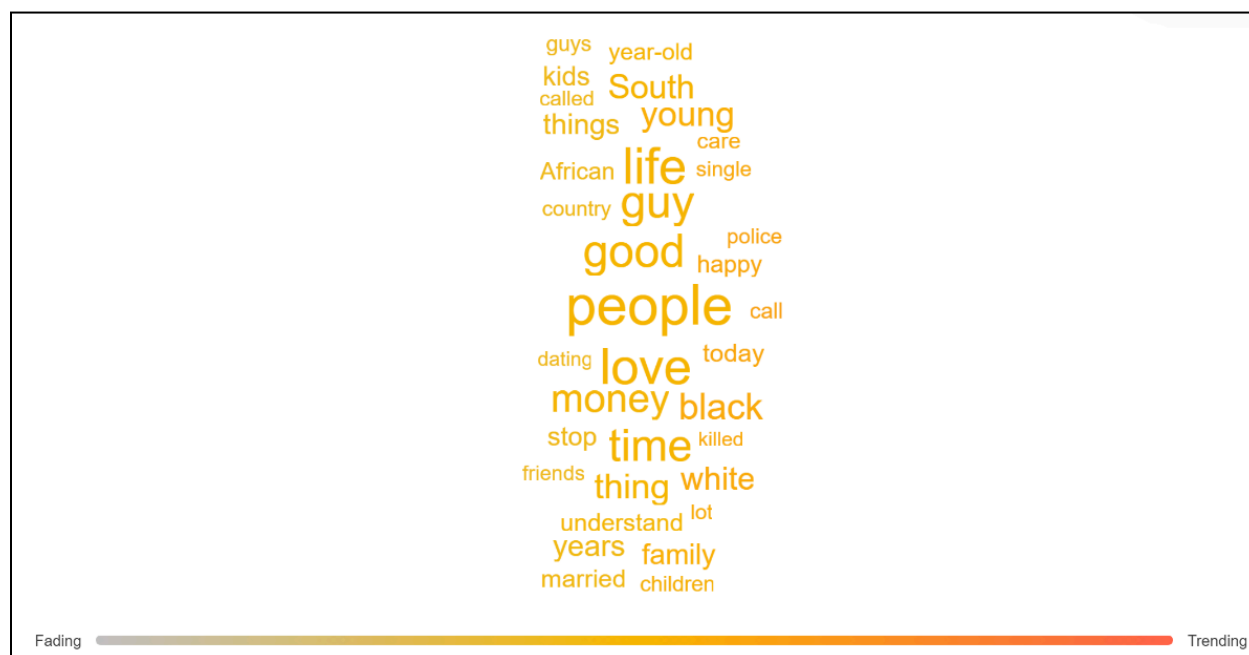

Figure 8: Trending hashtags, phrases and keywords within the female gender norms conversation.

6.2 Popular Posts and Topics - Masculine Norms

This section of the report examines the context and content of highly engaged posts in the male gender norms conversation. Provision and leadership emerged as key themes in the conversation, with posts largely reflecting on societal expectations placed on men. The expectation to lead and provide, as reflected in the images below, is both an internally and externally driven societal construct (see Figure 9). The image to the left reflects an innate

frustration and degradation due to financial constraints experienced by men, while the image to the right expresses, by a female presenting account, the enduring notion that men are and should still be regarded as the primary providers in the household.

being broke as a man is very degrading and frustrating, to every man who's putting in the work to change his financial status for the better, i hope you win soon bro, i hope things get better for you real soon

5:14 PM · Mar 13, 2024 · **1.9M** Views

A man is supposed to be a provider. I don't care what this generation thinks.

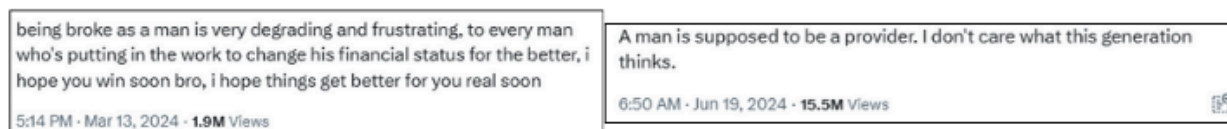6:50 AM · Jun 19, 2024 · **15.5M** Views

Figure 9: Posts engaging with Provision & Leadership

This perspective was challenged in relation to the expectation placed on women concerning provision, as shown in the post below (see Figure 10).

A broke woman is still a woman. An uneducated woman is still a woman

A woman with no Job is still a woman

And she gets all the respects she deserves

But a man without all these things is a burden even to his own family

Being strong as a man is the only choice. 🏠

8:00 AM · Mar 18, 2024 · **301.9K** Views

Figure 10: Post comparing the expectations placed on men vis-a-vis women.

In relation to the post dealing with financial constraints as a man, responses treated the post as motivation for their betterment and continuous improvement which further deepens the idea that men need to be financially successful (see Figure 11). Certain responses to the posts concerning male provision and strength agreed with the posts, linking the notion to Christianity as well as noting the corollary responsibility that women have.

3 years of really putting my foot down and I am no longer paycheck to paycheck.

It takes perseverance and commitment to dig yourself out of a hole.

I'm proud of all of you.. keep crushing it. We will win.

Everyone expects you to be a millionaire by 18 because standards on social media

True.

Men's roles are very clear and unquestionable. The only roles that are often unclear are for women especially due to feminism agenda - which confuses them.

Being a men means you are a provider, and you Must always make a plan.
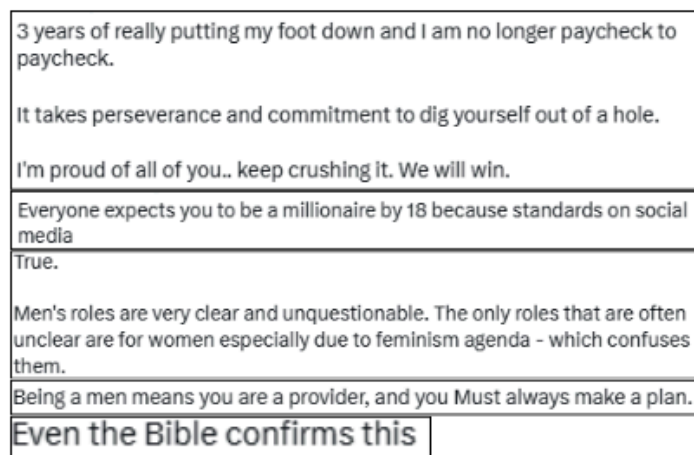
Even the Bible confirms this

Figure 11: Responses to Men Providing and Leading

Related to the theme of provision is that of fatherhood in South Africa. South Africa has a high rate of absent fathers. As the posts below indicate, the rate of absenteeism coupled with the perception that men could (and would) abandon their partners if the relationship no longer serves them seems to stand in contradiction with the claim that men are socialised into their role as providers (see Figure 12).
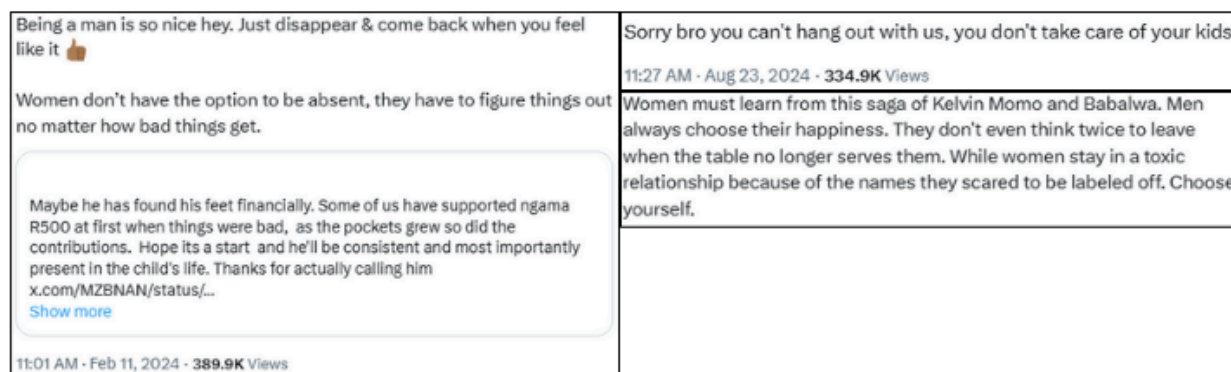

Figure 12: Posts Concerning Absenteeism

In response to the posts above, comments highlighted the perception that men can opt out of their responsibilities, especially concerning minor children, while women do not have that option (see Figure 13). The responses also indicated that money should not be the dominant factor in caring for a child, and that there are other ways to provide. The conversation also centred around holding men accountable for absenteeism. In response, one account posted that from their perspective, if men were to hold their friends accountable, most of their friendships would not last.
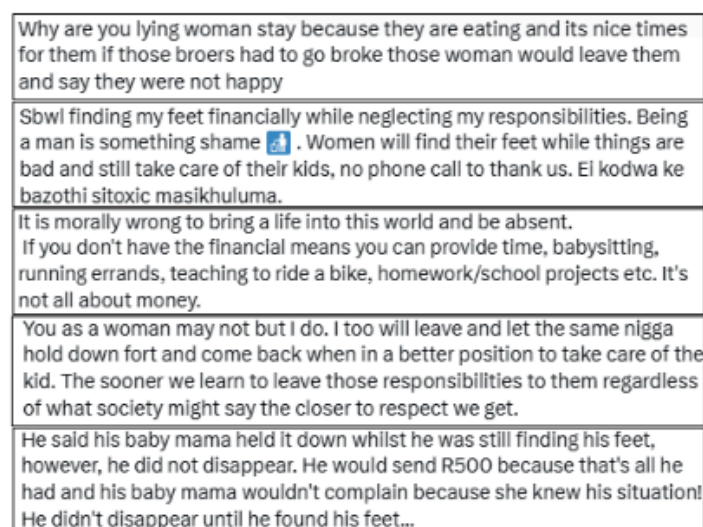

Figure 13: Responses to the posts concerning absenteeism

Below are two posts which focus on the same thematic notion that men's friendships are often shallow, lacking accountability and confrontation (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Posts Concerning Male Friendships

The two posts revealed deeply polarising views on male friendships. Masculine presenting accounts claimed that the author is either not a man and/or is ill placed to determine the content and nature of male friendships as, in their experience, they do show emotional support, accountability and confrontation (see Figure 15). There was some agreement to the notion by men, stating that male friendships exhibit different traits to those of women's, and that emotions are generally not something men are attuned to or have conversations about. There were also underlying suggestions that men were overly dependent on women for emotional comfort.
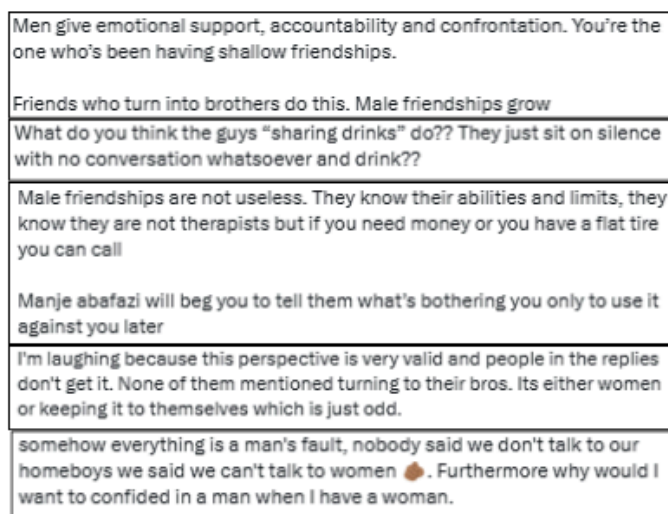

Figure 15: Responses to Posts Concerning Male Friendships

6. Feminine Norms

Feminine norms, or femininity, are often constructed through the lens of gendered roles. This includes stereotypes and perspectives of how women 'should' be and is often intertwined and demarcated in relation to hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. Mahalik and colleagues sought to develop a measurement instrument which captured various facets of 'femininity' and feminine norms within the Global North[33]. Through their research, the authors identified eight distinct factors of femininity, of which individuals vary, concerning their acceptance of and adherence to these factors. They include: being nice in relationships, thinness, modesty, domesticity, caring for children, being in a romantic relationship, sexual fidelity, and investing in appearance. What is interesting to note with regard to this research, is that the factors underlying femininity tend toward perception and behaviour in service of, or within the eyes, of other individuals. Whether that be in relation to being thin, sexually private/reserved or caring for children. This stands in contrast to the masculine norms identified further above, which centre on perspectives and ideas around control, provision and the avoidance of expressing vulnerability.

In the South African context, feminine norms are constructed slightly differently. Boonzaier and De La Rey[34], in exploring the construction of femininity in relation to violence posit that socio-economic context plays a large role in the construction and maintenance of femininity. Expressions include being submissive and passive, playing the role of nurturer and supporter under the 'leadership' of the husband or man of the house. Gqola, exploring femininity in relation to Gender Based Violence and South African historical context, concurs with Boonzaier and De La Rey[35]. Drawing on the aforementioned militarism of South African society - Gqola puts forth the idea that gender discourse in South Africa is defined by conservatism - such that discourse around empowerment and liberation for women fails to understand context and reality, existing as an espoused, and not enacted, value system which blankets and shields men and masculinity from exposure to uncomfortable conversations and condemnation necessary for real transformative change. An example of which the author gives, as they draw on the concept of 'passwords':

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[33] Development of the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory - Mahalik et al., 2005
[34] He's a Man, and I'm a Woman: Cultural Constructions of Masculinity and Femininity in South African Women's Narratives of Violence - Boonzaier and De Lay Rey, 2003
[35] How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender based violence in contemporary South Africa - Gqola, 2007

"There is clear and urgent need to change South Africa's public and private gender-talk. We need to tackle violent masculinities head on exposing the disdain with which violent men hold all women. As part of this we need to rid ourselves of the 'passwords' that Sibongile Ndashe (2006) speaks about, which refer to the disclaimers and qualifiers that silence real debate on gender based violence. Ndashe says these passwords are a prerequisite that goes something akin to 'not all men are rapists, and that in the past some people have been falsely accused'. Continuing to mouth these passwords, and demanding them before you listen to what women have to say, is part of the problem."

This conceptualisation further broadens the understanding that femininity and feminine norms are constructed in subservience to hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal norms. Such that, at the behest of avoiding 'vulnerability' and 'lost face' for men, femininity in South Africa is mainstreamed as a supporting role. This prevents radical, transformative dialogue and change which is necessary to tackle the very social structures which facilitate domination.

An important contextual element of the construction of gender norms in South Africa is the impact of Apartheid. Mantell and colleagues explore this context as relayed in Section 6[36]. In relation to feminine norms post-apartheid, the authors suggest that South Africa has made large strides in fostering gender equality - yet this again differs according to context such as cultural tradition and socio-economic status among other factors. These disparities engender an inequitable in-group (of women) ability, particularly for younger women, to embody more empowered norms or enact change within gendered structures in which they may find themselves, as the authors state:

"Although new gender norms may have evolved in the post-Apartheid context, the structure of persistent gender relations and ensuing power dynamics means that some women are less empowered and capable of negotiating protection with partners than others. These changes are likely to be mirrored in tertiary institution women students who grew up in the post-Apartheid period. Although they may be more likely to adopt empowering gender norms, they may still be expected by parents and partners to subscribe to traditional gender-role hierarchies that characterized their parents' generation."

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[36] Gender norms in South Africa: Implications for HIV and pregnancy prevention among African and Indian women students at a South African tertiary institution - Mantell et al. 2009

Neither masculinity nor femininity are exclusively embodied or propagated by men, women or non-binary individuals. These are incredibly complex social structures, value systems and context frameworks within which all individuals play a role - whether through enforcing norms, breaking norms or remaining ambiguous. Albeit that the underlying power dynamics which position masculinity *above* femininity, and thus in turn provide differing levels of power, agency and flexibility for adherents cannot be ignored.

Helman and Ratele provide an important perspective on the reproduction of gender norms within families in the South African context[37]. Of which, their perspective on the racialised discourse embedded within this conversation is an important qualifier. As the authors state:

"It is important to recognise the particular ways in which gender inequality and violence are represented in both public and academic discourse within the South African context. Gender inequality (particularly in relation to male violence and sexual risk) has tended to be represented both in the media and much academic literature as a 'poor black problem'."

This statement is further expanded upon at the closure of the paragraph:

"We do not deny that various social, cultural, and economic factors such as racialised poverty and neighbourhood structures shape practices of violence and sexual risk in very particular and unequal ways within the South African context. However, representations of these practices as only affecting certain groups not only pathologises these groups in harmful ways, but also serves to disguise the ways in which gender inequality is a profoundly powerful factor at all levels of our society"

Their findings suggest that the reinforcement of problematic gendered norms may rest on the essentialization of individuals' sex and gender identity, such that sex (female) is linked to gender expression (female) and a norm (for example, chores within the home). Another example being that sex (male) is linked to gender expression (male) and a norm (for example, 'man of the household' - reflected in the themes mentioned here: provision, authority and leadership). Yet at the same time, disruption of this norming process is evident across their participants,. such that sex (Male and Female) is linked to gender expression (Male and Female) and a disruption of a

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[37]Everyday (in)equality at home: complex constructions of gender in South African families - Helman & Ratele, 2016

norm ("Boys and Girls can do the same thing"). It is through this perspective that an analysis on online gendered discourse around femininity is offered.

7.1 Data Overview - Feminine Norms

The female social norms category returned a subset of the overall conversation containing 1.3 million mentions - the vast majority of which were reposts at 79%. More than 140,000 accounts took part in the conversation, representing an average of 9 mentions per unique account (see Figure 16).
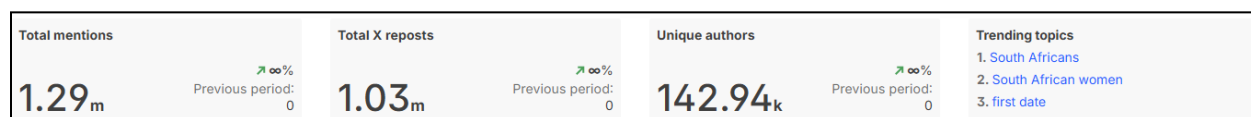

Figure 16: Metrics for the Female Social Norms Conversation

A word cloud of the top 50 phrases, keywords and hashtags coloured by volume indicates that common words used in the conversation include money, love, life, beautiful, people, young and baby (see Figure 17).
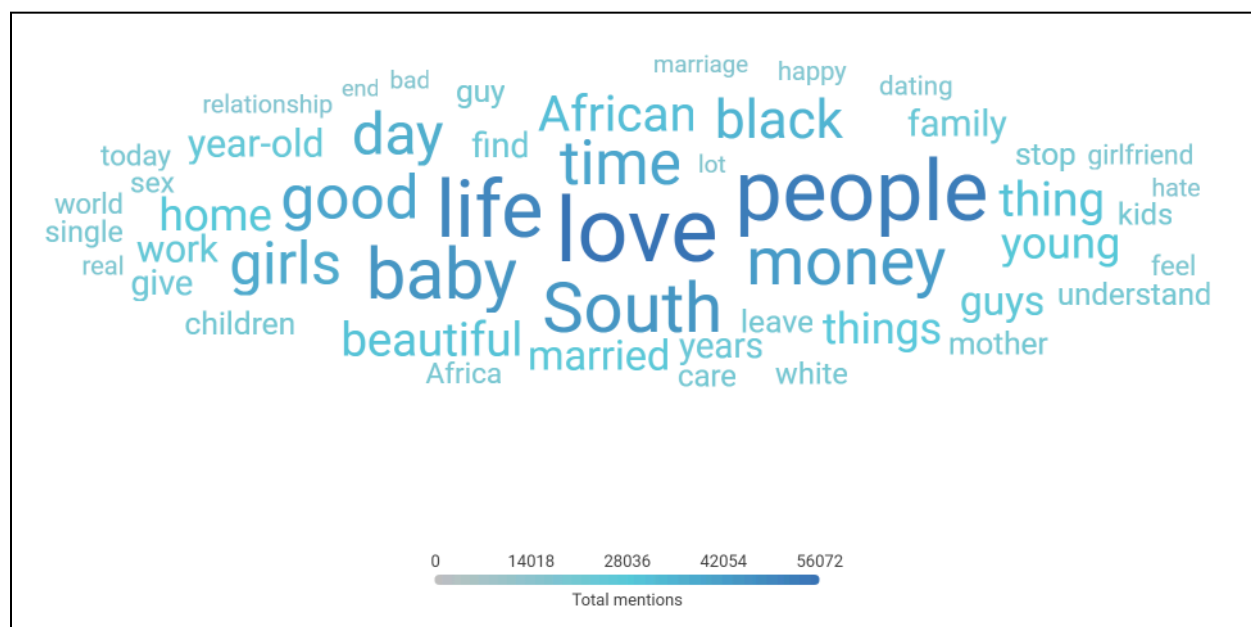

Figure 17: A word cloud, sorted by volume, of the top 50 Keywords, Phrases and Hashtags in the conversation.

Alongside this, a topic wheel, characterised by major topics within the centre circle and sub-topics around the periphery, suggests that conversation centres on gender identity (see Figure 18).
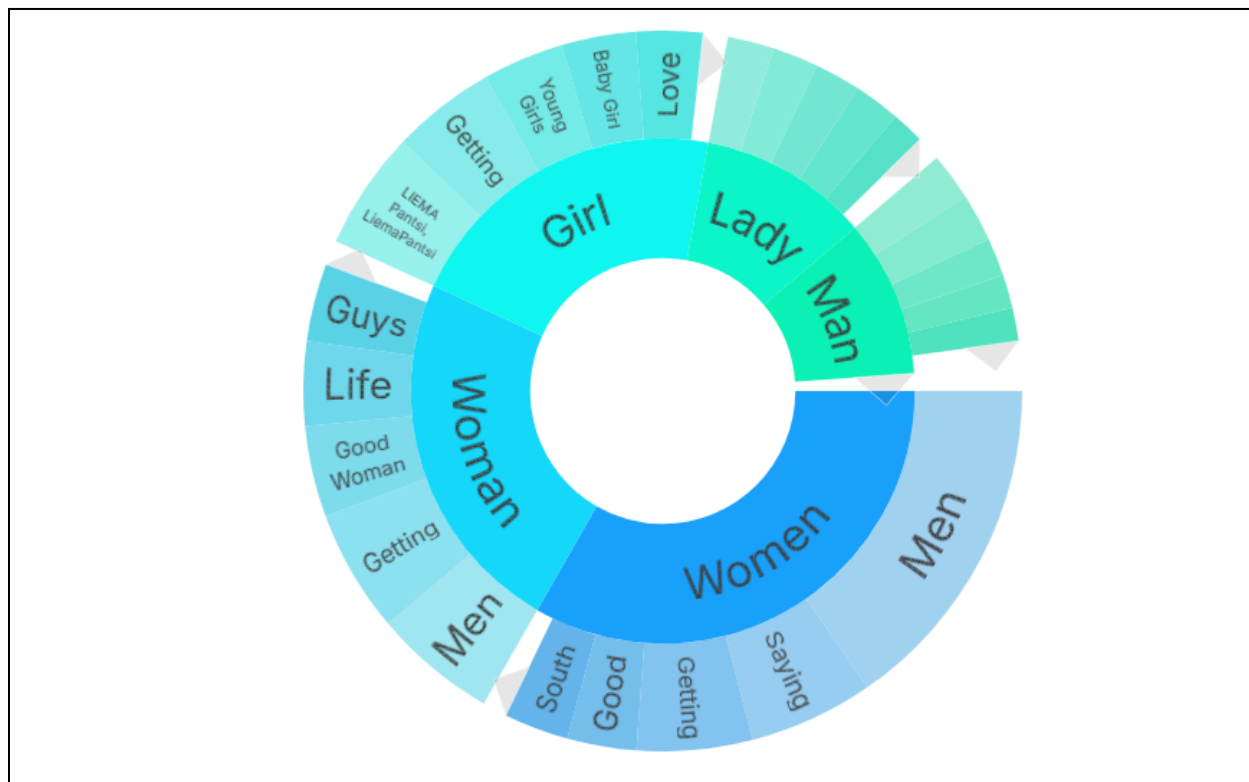

Figure 18: A topic wheel of the female gender norms conversation

Finally, the trending topics visualisation showcases phrases, hashtags and keywords which formed themes of conversation throughout the time period. Of these, points of interest which trended more include South Africa and South African. Centred within the chart are terms such as mother, girlfriend, home, baby (both in the context of birth and in relationships), care, married, beautiful, money, children and relationship (see Figure 19). The trending nature of these topics is explored further under the 'Authorship and Influence' section of this report.
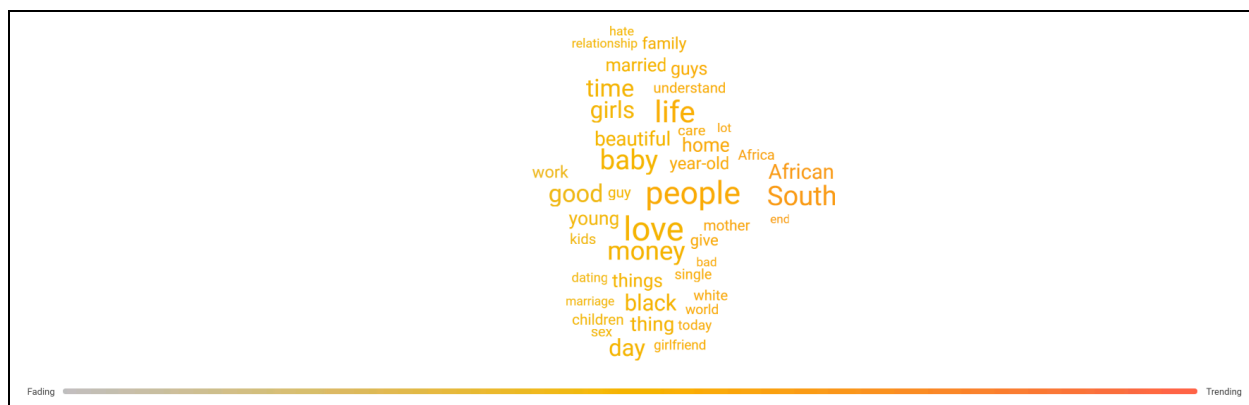
Figure 19: Trending hashtags, phrases and keywords within the female gender norms conversation

7.2 Popular Posts and Topics - Feminine Norms

This section of the report delves into the context and content of high-traction and highly engaged posts in the female gender norms conversation. How women dress emerged as a theme in the conversation - linked to perceptions of 'humility' as well as the male gaze (see Figure 20). The images compiled below differ in an interesting manner such that the left hand image of a red dress is put forth as a norm to be enforced, with the individual highlighted present in a public space. In the rightmost image, a woman wearing a gown in a private space is used as engagement material for an account ostensibly seeking to showcase 'norm breaking'.

The comparison of the public and the private may seek to locate clothing as a norm enforced through exposure to other individuals. The caption of the rightmost image ("You wake up and find your helper cleaning wearing this gown infront of your husband what's your next move? [sic]" draws on this, with the individual imagining a scenario where the woman in the picture is a domestic worker, working within the home while a man is present.
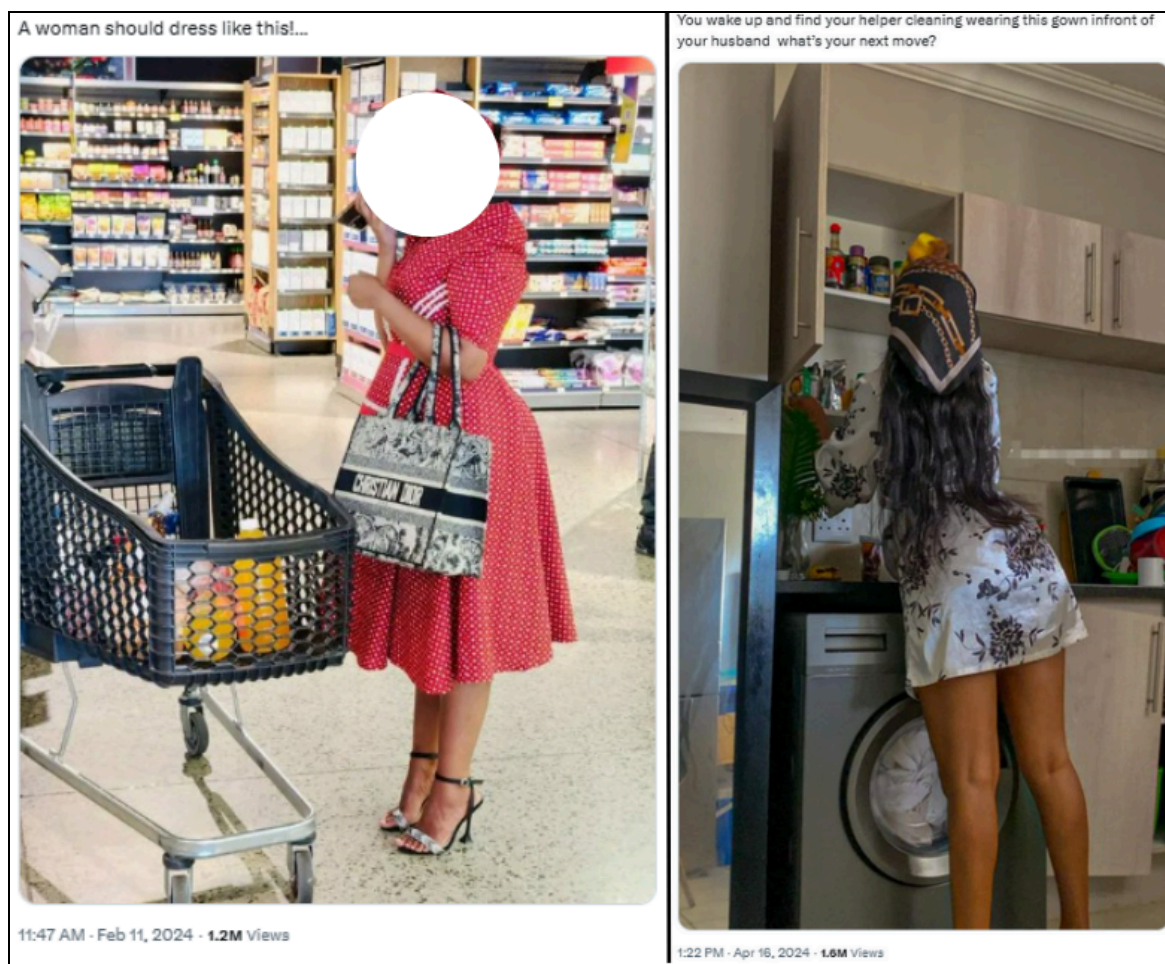
Figure 20: Posts engaging with gendered norms through clothing and the gaze of others

A post of a similar nature, about in clothing and the male gaze is shown in Figure 21 below.

Figure 21: How a woman should dress is further discussed in relation to other individuals

Responses to these posts drew attention to the fact that narratives of this nature facilitate victim blaming, suppress individual agency, and fail to hold individuals accountable for their own behaviour (see Figure 22).

The problem here is the men and women who rape kids. Kids are not doing anything wrong. Especially at home. They should be more comfortable hey.

○ 22   �ↄ 523   ♡ 21K   ᵢₗᵢ 385K   🔖 ⬆

But I believe it's important to teach both men and women to respect each other's boundaries and personal comfort at home.

○ 4   �ↄ 3   ♡ 219   ᵢₗᵢ 44K   🔖 ⬆

The problem is men, not kids

○ 73   �ↄ 1.4K   ♡ 62K   ᵢₗᵢ 603K

Why are your homes unsafe spaces for YOUR daughters? And if it's the men in your families that you don't trust, why do you bring them around your kids?
I need you guys to understand this is exactly the pipeline you go down when you start blaming victims for rape. The problem isn't your daughter, it's the men who aren't to be trusted around kids just because the kids are wearing shorts or crop top... Do better

○ 1   �ↄ 606   ♡ 14K   ᵢₗᵢ 229K   🔖 ⬆

Figure 22: Individuals highlight that norms around clothing facilitate victim blaming

Alongside this, individuals shared that they agreed with the original post. Noting that, from their perspective, restricting clothing is important so as to protect children (see Figure 23).

I agree with you trust no one

3:10 PM · Aug 29, 2024 · **23.7K** Views

○ 10   �ↄ 1   ♡ 49   🔖

I love this, but that will depend on people raising her

3:24 PM · Aug 29, 2024 · **33.9K** Views

○ 9   �ↄ   ♡ 87   🔖

In this world we live that's valid

3:19 PM · Aug 29, 2024 · **22.1K** Views

○ 6   �ↄ   ♡ 45   🔖

It has to do with safety but self respect.

3:46 PM · Aug 31, 2024 · **167.5K** Views

Figure 23: Accounts respond in support of restricting girls clothing within the home

The relationship between gendered social norms and the restriction of women's autonomy, for the purposes of another individual, may be further seen in conversations concerning relationships with women (see Figure 24).
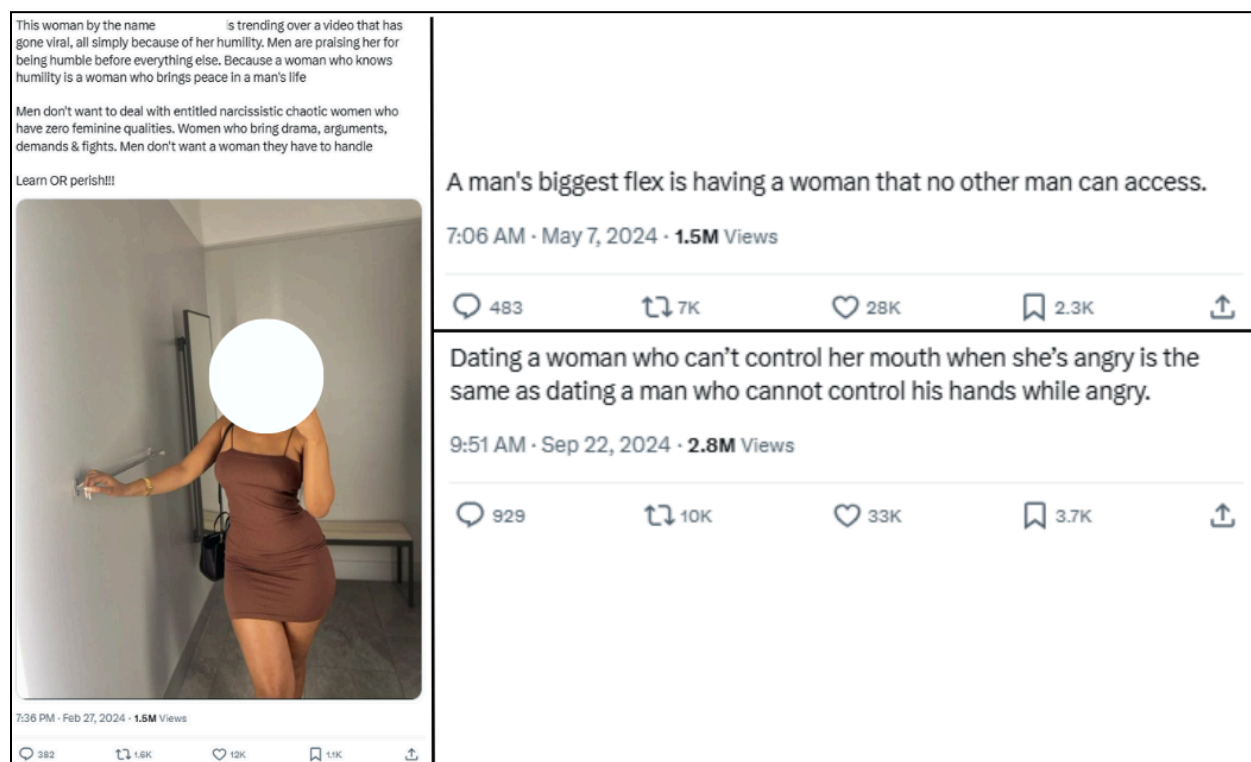

Figure 24: Norm enforcement in relation to partnerships with women

In this series of posts, women are described as 'ideal' or 'valuable' based on the courtesy they afford men. The leftmost post includes phrases such as, 'a woman who knows humility is a woman who brings peace in a man's life' as well as 'men don't want …. Narcissistic chaotic women who have zero feminine qualities …. Men don't want a woman they have to handle'. In the top-right image, the caption indicates that a man's 'biggest flex' (boastful quality) is having a woman that no other man can access. The bottom right post extends this line of thought further - comparing physical abuse from men to 'a woman who can't control her mouth'.

These posts, each in their own way, reinforce perceptions and norms around the dominance of men over women. Replies to these posts differed, with agreement (see Figure 25) and disagreement (see Figure 26).

Understanding Men:

Ladies your power lies in your ability to be submissive to a good man. When a woman is submissive to a man and she speaks to his masculinity with her feminine energy, he will GO THROUGH BRICK WALLS for you to make sure you are provided for in ways that you couldn't even imagine. Men have an innate desire to please women. This is how men are built. If you want the opposite effect, suppress your feminine energy and challenge him with your masculine energy and see how far you get.

Ladies this is fact. There's no need for you to push back against this.

💬 1   ↻ 4   ♡ 23   📊 6.3K   🔖 ⬆

Feminity is everything. That's why we aren't gays. We are not looking for masculinity under the guise of "strong, independent and highly opinionated woman"

💬 2   ↻ 3   ♡ 13   📊 3.5K   🔖 ⬆

That's the most simple flex we want. But hey. It's not easy in this generation

💬 6   ↻ 10   ♡ 410   📊 28K   🔖 ⬆

If she can't control her mouth, she'll share things from home with the neighborhood.

Not worth the investment.

💬 3   ↻   ♡ 5   📊 499   🔖 ⬆

same abuse different forms

💬 1   ↻   ♡ 8   📊 2.4K   🔖 ⬆

Figure 25: A compilation of replies expressing a positive viewpoint of the content in Figure 24

Its a men's world nothing for the woman. Honestly men find it very satisfying to see women lose themselves while pleasing them in the name of femininity!

💬 1   ↻   ♡   📊 432   🔖 ⬆

And women must tolerate a man who is chaotic, demanding, controlling lack humility and respect right women must accept any nonsense coming from men right?

💬   ↻   ♡   📊 349   🔖 ⬆

Respectfully my biggest flex is having my own money and taking care of my family and siblings.

💬 12   ↻ 46   ♡ 562   📊 25K   🔖 ⬆

Small ego men/boys. The world has moved on, don't base your ego on simple things like that. Stop simping....

💬 6   ↻ 2   ♡ 36   📊 5.9K   🔖 ⬆

Emotional n physical abuse differ

💬 26   ↻ 7   ♡ 361   📊 23K   🔖 ⬆

Verbal aggression and physical violence aren't equivalent.

Words can hurt, but hands can kill.

Comparing the two downplays the severity of physical violence.

💬   ↻   ♡ 41   📊 623   🔖 ⬆

Figure 26: A compilation of individuals disagreeing with the content in Figure 24

Norms function as behaviour boundaries assigned to a particular group. In turn, norms inform stereotypes or beliefs about these groups[38]. Exploring stereotyped perspectives can thus offer an exploration of underlying norms.

Within the dataset, negative stereotypes emerged categorising women as unfaithful and manipulative - in strong contrast to other dominant social norms ascribed to women as nurturing (see Figure 27).
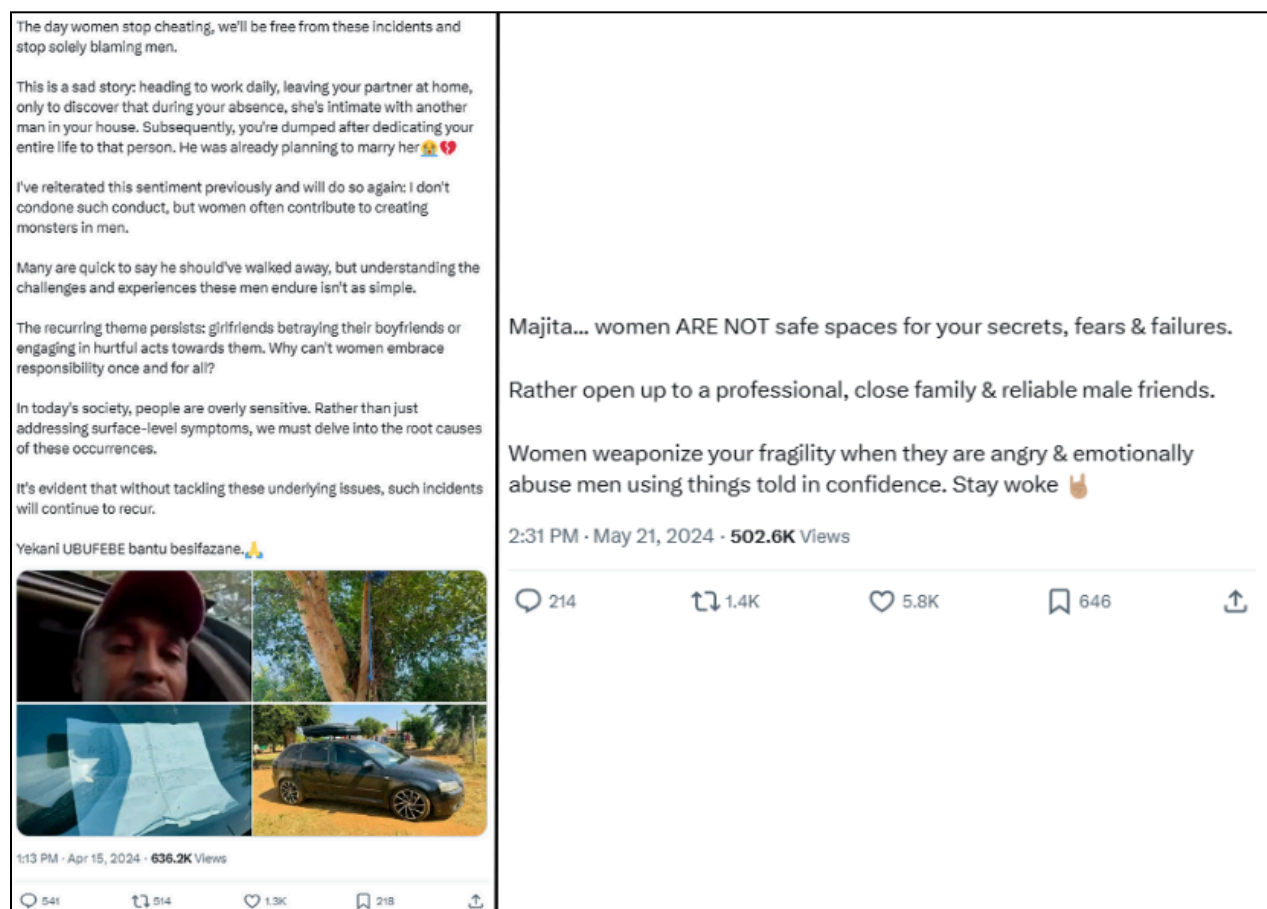

Figure 27: Women are characterised as emotionally abusive

In the image on the left - a story is attached to imagery of an alleged suicide by a man, replies under the post point toward a context of a murder-suicide. The post in question indicates that if women did not cheat, we would not blame men solely for violence - the author then indicates that women are unable to embrace responsibility for their behaviour which leads to violence on behalf of men, whether self-inflicted or inflicted toward another individual. In the image on the right, an influencer account urges men not to open up to women as women they claim, 'weaponize fragility'.

[38] Gendered stereotypes and norms: A systematic review of interventions designed to shift attitudes and behaviour - Stewart et al. 2021

Responses to posts of this nature varied. In agreement, narratives emerged that women could not be trusted to be responsible and stoke violence through their behaviour (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: Posts in support of the narrative that women are manipulative.

Conversely, individuals expressed their disagreement, urging men not to place the outcomes of their lives on women or believe stereotypes. Alongside this, individuals highlighted the hypocrisy of these statements (see Figure 29).

Figure 29: Replies in contrast to agreement

This high-level dive into the dataset suggests that further exploration of the following social norms and stereotypes is essential. These can be expressed in three streams. 'Women are manipulative/not to be trusted', 'Women should show deference to men', and 'Women should be humble'. Alongside this, conversation with regard to clothing and tattoos for example, may function as a vector into further understanding the maintenance or enforcement of norms online.

7. LGBTQIA+ (Queer) Norms

It may seem somewhat paradoxical to analyse "*queer norms*" as separate to masculine and feminine norms as many queer persons would identify themselves as either man or woman or even outside of the gender binary. Masculine and feminine norms do not differentiate based on orientation and all are subject thereto. However, whereas women may violate certain feminine norms by, for example, being the primary provider in the home, many (if not all) individuals in the queer community occupy a unique space that violates both masculine and feminine norms in hetero-patriarchal societies[39].

Any analysis of broad grouping such as the queer community's norms must be carefully considered and not seek to place the entire community under a broad umbrella with a one-size fits all approach. At the same time, and considering the above, certain sections of the

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[39] Gender Trouble - J Butler, 2002

community must not be analysed solely in opposition to masculinity and femininity as this risks perpetuating a hetero-patriarchal viewpoint. If the dominant norms of masculinity and femininity above are contrasted with one another, the reader would note that they act in opposition to one another. A woman is expected to display modesty and gentleness, while a man is expected to be dominant and aggressive. If our analysis considers queerness in opposition to masculinity and femininity only, we risk perpetuating a narrative that the community exists in contestation with society. This reduces their entire personhood to that of their sexuality and/or gender, and further dehumanises the community in relation to heteronormativity[40].

At the same time, their positionality in relation to masculinity and femininity in society engenders stigma, prejudice and inequality and cannot be ignored. This report and the research in relation to queer norms that follows, therefore, considers the community's positionality in relation to dominant norms in society as well as how they refine, extend and define these norms. In relation to the former, the community's positionality, Westman describes the space being occupied by queer individuals in South Africa as vertically protected but horizontally vulnerable[41]. The author states:

"*... within South Africa, homophobia, or discrimination against LGBT communities, is horizontal in that it is reflected in everyday interpersonal and psychological interactions, rather than vertical, which emanates from "socio-political structures and institutions, including but not limited to Constitutions, penal codes, laws, and government policies." As such, within South Africa while the open expression of homosexuality is protected legally or vertically, it is still condemned socially or horizontally. One might also say that in the absence of formal legal condemnation, individuals take it upon themselves to police and criminalise diverse expressions of gender and sexuality.*"

The prejudice that most queer individuals face due to their expression of gender and sexuality stems from the introduction of heteronormative Western, and often Christian beliefs brought into African society through colonialism[42]. These beliefs were further entrenched through legal and legislative sanction by colonial officials and, in the South African context, the subsequent Apartheid government.[43] While both colonialism and Apartheid have been dismantled, these beliefs remain common. Furthermore, significant evidence exists that suggests homosexuality was present in pre-colonial African societies[44].

"There are questions about how far post-colonial homophobia is linked to evangelism, or to perceptions of Western imposition of LGBTIQ+ rights as opposed to African traditions. Of the 72 countries worldwide that still criminalised homosexuality in 2018, at least 38 of them had been under British colonial rule. Of the 54 countries that were under French colonial rule, 18 have

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[40] Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality - K Schilt, 2009.
[41] Colonialism and Sexual Orientation and Gender - C Westman, 2023
[42] Colonialism and Sexuality - Meiu, 2015 ; The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa - Msibi, 2011
[43] See the Immorality Act of 1927, including subsequent amendments thereto.
[44] The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa - Msibi, 2011

homophobic laws. Ironically, African governments often use colonial legislation to discriminate against and prosecute individuals who challenge heteronormativity. When Botswana decriminalised homosexuality, the judge specifically declared that "the anti-sodomy laws are a British import. Meanwhile, Uganda President Yoweri Museveni maintained that homosexuality was a Western import."

To take the conversation forward, queer theory emerged in the 1990s and is broadly defined as the study of gender practices/identities and sexualities that exist outside of cisgender and heterosexual "norms"[45]. The theory seeks to disturb and extend traditional assumptions and norms about gender and sexual identities, and examines how societal norms and power structures shape understandings of gender and sexuality.[46] Butler (2009) suggests that gender is a set of behaviours that individuals perform repeatedly, which creates an illusion that heteronormativity is the default state of existence.[47] The author states:

"*The performativity of gender is thus bound up with the differential ways in which subjects become eligible for recognition. Although of course I accept that full recognition is never fully possible, I also accept that there are differential ways of allocating recognizability. The desire for recognition can never be fulfilled – yes, that is true. But to be a subject at all requires first complying with certain norms that govern recognition – that make a person recognizable. And so, non-compliance calls into question the viability of one's life, the ontological conditions of one's persistence. We think of subjects as the kind of beings who ask for recognition in the law or in political life; but perhaps the more important issue is how the terms of recognition – and here we can include a number of gender and sexual norms – condition in advance who will count as a subject, and who will not.*"

8.1 Data Overview - LGBTQIA+ (Queer) Norms

The Queer norms category returned a subset of the overall conversation containing approximately 83,710 thousand mentions and approximately 51,000 were reposts. Approximately 31 540 accounts contributed to the conversation, representing an average of 2 posts per author (see Figure 30).

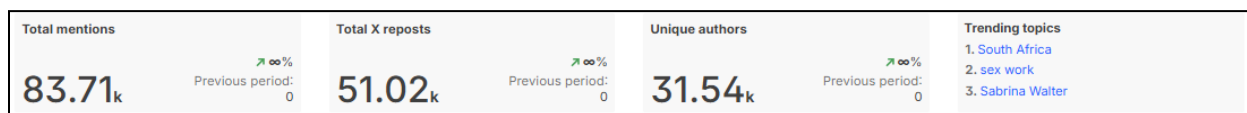| Total mentions		Total X reposts		Unique authors		Trending topics
83.71k	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	**51.02k**	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	**31.54k**	↗ ∞% Previous period: 0	1. South Africa 2. sex work 3. Sabrina Walter

Figure 30: Metrics for the Queer Social Norms Conversation

A word cloud of the top 50 phrases, keywords and hashtags coloured by volume indicates that common words used in the conversation include people, kids, sex, South and white (see Figure 31).

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[45] Introduction to Queer Theory
[46] Ibid.
[47] Sexual politics, torture, and secular time - Butler, 2008

Figure 31: Word cloud, sorted by volume, of the top 50 Keywords, Phrases and Hashtags in the conversation.

Alongside this, a topic wheel, characterised by major topics within the centre circle and sub-topics around the periphery, suggests that conversation centres similarly on gender identity (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: A topic wheel of norms in relation to the LGBTQIA+ community

The visualisation of the trending topics in the queer norms indicates terms such as private, rape, South Africa, white, country, school, and black trended more during the reporting period. Centred within the chart are terms such as trans women, trans people, homophobic, straight, and people (see Figure 33).
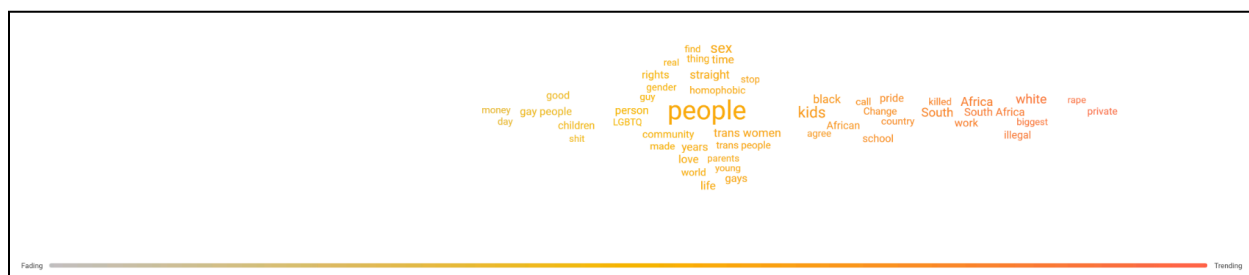
Figure 33: Trending hashtags, phrases and keywords in the queer gender norms conversation

8.2 Popular Posts and Topics - LGBTQIA+ (Queer) Norms

Masculine and feminine norms are sites of contestation and negotiated norm-setting, stretching and contracting depending on the context, society, culture and religious beliefs. Queer bodies and norms are contested through their existence. At the same time, allies and queer people remain steadfast in addressing the stigma and attack on their existence.

Posts concerning the imposition of Western values and culture emerged as an interesting reference point. While it was noted above that whether homophobia or homosexuality was a Western import remains contested, perceived queer norms often from the West are lambasted as inappropriate, 'too far' and an illness (see Figure 34). The post to the right calls out painting the entire queer community, in particular gay men, with one brush and calls for acceptance and respect for everyone.

Figure 34: Posts concerning Perceived Queer Norms

The image to the left disrupts several norms such as modesty in public and the hiding of queerness in public contrasted with the image to the right, where the account has a more modest portrayal of queerness. The image to the left is, presumably, a protest action and in recent years, the display of one's naked body by marginalised groups is intended to evoke the same visceral reaction from individuals as that which the community has when they are marginalised and/or harmed due to their sexual and/or gender identity.

The left images attracted mainly negative commentary and responses from individuals citing queerness as a mental illness, the perceived trauma that such actions (protest or otherwise) could inflict on children and disgust at the display of their naked bodies, stating that their activism need not be as explicit. Whereas, responses to the left image were largely supportive and flirty. Comparing the responses to one another would be unfair, as the account that posted the left image may be one that sought to evoke anger from the community and may have a fanbase predisposed to homophobia while the right image has a more supportive followership. However, the differing responses may indicate that abiding by certain social norms even when in conflict with others, may be more tolerable for certain individuals (see Figure 35).
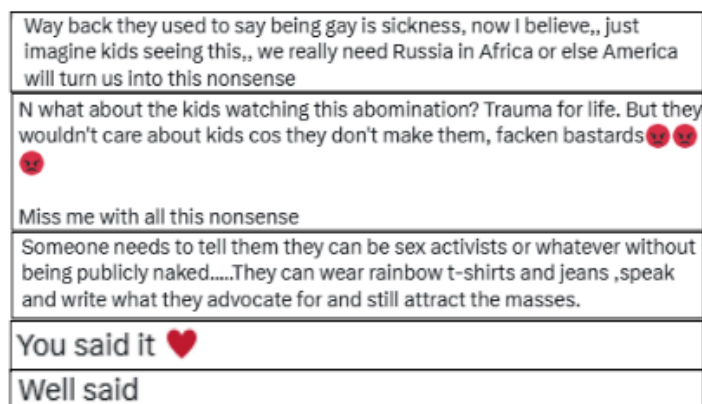
Figure 35: Responses to Figure 34

There is also a perception, impacting both masculine and feminine norms but affecting perceptions of the Queer community directly. This perception suggests that emphasizing gender norms as social constructs acts as a gateway to, and the challenging of norms such as, pedophilia. As the figure below illustrates, the account posts that feminism leads to feminisation of men and masculinisation of women, creating the queer community and disrupting traditional notions of the nuclear family. The post below suggests that the disruption of the nuclear family with a clear male authority leaves children at risk of being sexualized and taken advantage of (see Figure 36 below).

Figure 36: Post concerning degradation of society and morals

Responses to the above reiterated the notion that there is a targeted attack against masculinity, expressing support for laws outlawing homosexuality and spreading the narrative that paedophiles have always been part of the queer community. Others questioned the constant attacks on the queer community as 'mindboggling' instead of focusing on issues such as poverty and hunger (see Figure 37).

Figure 37: Responses to the perceived degradation of society

The CABC also found several tweets which illustrate the influence of religion on the perception of the queer community. In the image below, one account notes that societal pressure from the church leads homosexual people to engage in and commit to heterosexual relationships in order to gain acceptance in society. Along a similar vein, another account notes that having the freedom to be yourself should not be taken for granted especially considering the various forms of punishment, stigma and prejudice faced by the queer community in different countries.

The bottom two posts speak directly to each other (see Figure 38). One author notes that no one is born gay and that it is just a demonic disorder - note the reference to Protect Africa, reiterating the notion that homosexuality is a Western import. The author on the right questions why, despite harsh laws, religion and in the face of death and death threats, homosexuality continues to exist. And questions that, if it hasn't worked up to now, why continue?

Figure 38: Posts concerning Queer community and Religion

Responses to the first post largely questioned why the man would lead an innocent woman on especially considering the freedoms afforded to South African queer persons. The top right post quoted a post which reported on the first man to face the death penalty due to "aggravated homosexuality" in terms of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, and has been released on bail. Responses to the post largely questioned what "aggravated" homosexuality is.

In addition to this, the CABC further recorded engagement farming through the exploitation of cultural practices/traditional attire as well as the sexualization of feminine African bodies. This, in turn, informed posts regarding homosexuality with accounts noting that the physical attributes of the posted women are the reason why African men cannot be homosexual (see Figure 39).

Figure 39: Intersectional Posts concerning Masculinity, Femininity and Queerness.

Responses to the post included reductionist and simplified, if not misogynistic. Accounts focused on the physical attributes of the women as justification for their claim that African men cannot be homosexual. By reducing these individuals to these physical attributes, accounts are presumably stating that attraction is solely based on what the other party looks like. In addition, it is a narrow view which only finds support in certain heterosexual males.

8. Authorship and Influence

Gender conversation online is often tied to 'engagement farming'. Accounts, which subscribe to X verified, are able to generate immense interest and interaction on their posts - in turn, this engagement can be monetized. The CABC has explored the monetization of misogyny previously[48]. For the purposes of building an understanding of norm reinforcement, the top authors in the conversation, each with more than 2,000 mentions within the time period, were isolated. In combination, these authors numbered 12 and accounted for 34,000 mentions within the focused dataset.

Not all authors focused on gender norms or stereotypes in the South African context. Three accounts stood out as unusual. The first solely reposts content related to cats, the second tended to repost anti-islamic and anti-transgender content, while the third reposted content

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https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/misogyny-incentivised-how-x-accounts-spreading-harmful-gender-stereotypes-are-cashing-in-20231104

related to the British royal family. Furthermore, of the nine remaining accounts which focused on the conversation about gender, relationships, and family among other topics - two focused on feminism and the impact of gendered norms. The remaining seven accounts posted in a manner akin to engagement farming.

Of these authors, their posts predominantly featured conversation about male and female norms - with mentions for each category closely following each other in terms of mention volume (see Figure 40)

Figure 40: Top 12 Authors by Norm Conversation

The word cloud in Figure 41 below showcases the top 50 keywords, phrases and hashtags used by the cohort. The most used keywords included love, money, life and good.

Figure 41: Top 12 Authors Word Cloud

When visualising a trend map (see Figure 42), topics of conversation which emerged closer to the end of the time period included marriage, 'wife material' and phrases related to norms, stereotypes and gender essentialization. These phrases include, "lot of men", "men are only loved" and "broke guys". Key conversational points often found in material designed for engagement farming, for example, "men are only loved when they have money".
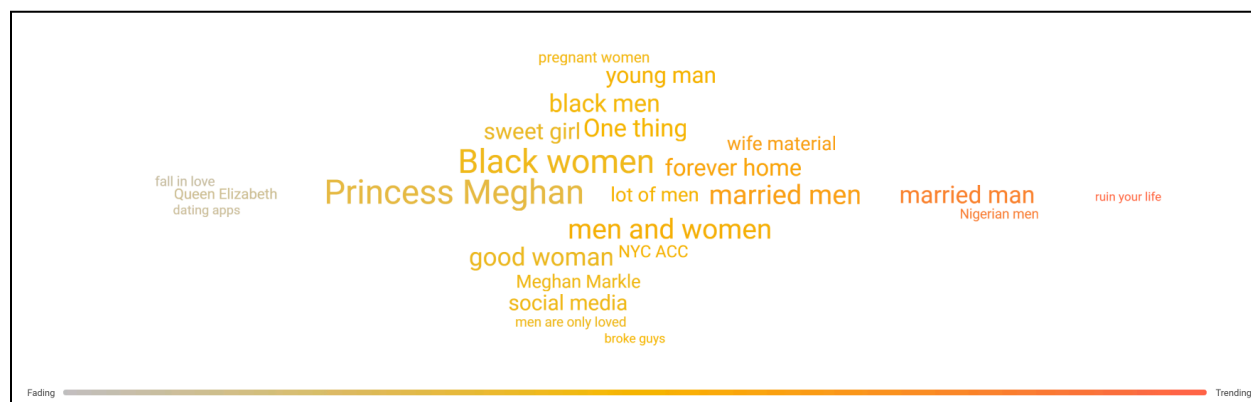

Figure 42: Top 12 Authors Trending Topics

Of the top seven relevant authors, posts that could be considered as an effort at engagement farming were common (see Figure 43).

Figure 43: Posts drawing on gender and relationships as a means of generating engagement

Certain accounts further advertise services within their threads, providing further evidence of a monetary incentive for the production of gendered content (see Figure 44).

Figure 44: A post drawing on gender and tradition for engagement is attached to advertising for a CV Revamp service

While this style of posting may not be against the terms of service of the platform, or against any regulations concerning social media - the presence of these types of accounts and the monetary incentive ostensibly driving their behaviour raises a point of concern with regard to the development and maintenance of healthy, constructive conversations on social media. Jokes, allegories or the posting of controversy for engagement can serve to normalise negative stereotypes and perceptions. Which indeed in turn are informed by and maintain gendered norms.

9. Conclusion

This report has sought to explore and develop a foundational understanding of the gendered social norms conversation on South African social media.

In exploring Male Norms - Provision and Leadership, Autonomy and Absenteeism, and conversation about non-romantic relationships and support have emerged as potential vectors for a further deep dive into perceptions of masculinity. Concerning Female Norms - Humility and Obedience, Manipulation and Sexuality, How to dress and Aesthetics, and showing 'respect' in relation to men have emerged as further avenues for exploration. Considering Gender Identity and Queer Norms - the data suggests that Globalisation and Stigma, Queerphobia, Religion and Norm Rebellion may provide further insight into the perceptions, and stereotypes of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Finally, an analysis of authorship and influence suggests that monetary opportunities may govern the manipulation of gendered conversation, inclusive of seeking controversy and the enforcement of norms for engagement and revenue.

Opportunities for further analysis are identified below:

Masculine Norms:
- The data presented in this report regarding masculine norms tended towards leadership, provision and responsibility. Certain posts questioned the high rates of father absenteeism which stood in contrast to the masculine norm of responsibility and provision.
    - A future-focused report on masculine norms should seek to uncover the tendency to adhere to such norms in practice.
- Our research indicates that individuals perceive male friendships as shallow and lacking accountability, future reports may seek to explore male friendship as a topic of interest.
    - A guiding question may be: how are male friendships understood and constructed online in relation to gender norms?
- Regarding outreach, online interventions should seek to explore masculine norms that are harmful and beneficial (whether deemed, perceived or actual) and evaluate male perceptions to the norms under investigation.

Feminine Norms:
- The data presented in this report regarding female-gendered norms tended toward negative stereotyping. A future-focused report on female gendered norms should seek to understand and showcase the full spectrum of norms - what they are, how they are interpreted and which receive the strongest support, pushback or frustration.
    - This report illustrates how negative, frustrating and triggering content tends to draw high engagement and go viral online

■ Future exploration of this theme may be well served through an analysis of less popular posts and messaging divorced from influencers.
○ Furthermore, there may be value in exploring a shorter time frame. Allowing for deeper, focused analysis of a snapshot of time in conversation.
● Concerning the data presented here, the intriguing relationship between female gendered norms and the idea of an outside 'gaze' may provide an interesting avenue for research.
○ A guiding research question may be: On South African social media are norms predominantly facilitated or justified through the expectations of others?
● Regarding outreach - an online intervention may seek to deconstruct and explore the role of clothing in stereotyping and norming.
○ Further engagement and exploration is necessary regarding the equating of physical and verbal abuse along gendered lines.
○ A guiding question here may be: How does the comparison between verbal and physical abuse interact with gendered norms. perceptions of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence? Could this comparison function as a vector for understanding the minimisation of violence against women?

LGBTQIA+ (Queer) Norms:
● The data uncovered in relation to LGBTQIA+norms were critical towards the existence of the community. However, positive messaging about the community was found in both pro-queer posts and those highlighting "more urgent issues" that require society's attention.
● Further research should seek to critically examine the use of fear-mongering concerning the LGBTQIA+ community, and their activism in regard to norms as socially constructed. This is in relation to the theme of the degradation of society's norms.
● Outreach should focus on sensitising individuals that norms, whether good or bad, are socially constructed and are refined over time, generally, for the good of society. Further, the questioning of traditional masculine and feminine norms does not lead to the degradation of society. In addition, it serves to erase the queer community from history and suggests their existence is a *modern* choice.

Future reports within this project series will be well-placed to explore each of the categorised gendered norms in further depth. Particularly, for the purposes of building a more in-depth and diverse understanding of the relationship between norm emergence, reinforcement and sanctioning in the online space in the South African context.

Appendix

Appendix A

Primary Keywords (Query)

(Wom?n OR M?n OR boy OR girl OR Child OR meisie OR seun OR kinder OR mfana OR intombi OR intomba OR mfaz OR indoda OR lad OR vrou OR ngane OR grootman OR hun OR chick OR isifebe OR sfebe OR whore OR slut* OR king OR queen OR princess OR makoti OR mtwana OR ntwana OR umuntu OR mtanam OR stekkie OR cherr* OR ouen* OR "mense" OR vyfie OR "simp" OR bride OR groom OR husband OR wife OR wives OR gay OR lesbian OR homosexual OR trans OR trannie OR tranny OR transgender OR moffie OR queer OR transvestite OR male OR female OR lady OR ladies OR gent OR gal OR nigga OR honey OR hunnies OR babe OR bitch OR bebz OR bru OR bro OR dude OR "ou" OR "oke" OR Masc* OR Fem* OR "After 9" OR "After Nine" OR MSM)

NOT
("Man United" OR "Man City" OR "Burna Boy" OR bbtitans OR khositwala OR cricket OR Rugby OR soccer OR "Man of the match" OR khosi OR God OR jesus OR SAFA OR Springbok OR RSA OR #MUFC OR #MUNNEW OR #CarabaoCupFinal OR Eskom OR Cyril OR Ramaphosa OR "ANC" OR "African National Congress" OR "Julius Malema" OR "Fikile Mbalula" OR "big brother" OR #crimestop OR #SAPS OR kaffir OR sjava OR Chelsea OR Malema OR #EURO2024 OR MK OR porn* OR cum* OR #OnlyFan* OR "Only fans" OR cock OR #GayPorn OR #Transporn OR #LesbianPorn OR Ghana OR Philly OR UK OR #gaydaddy OR Booty OR fuck* OR moan* OR Breed OR Content OR Virgin OR ass OR #cum* OR Senat* OR Bottom* OR Top* OR Tereros OR dick* OR Squirt* OR Anal OR #bbmzansi OR Vote* OR Voting OR Election* OR Fame OR Famous OR Football OR Rugby OR Soccer OR DA OR EFF OR IFP OR MP OR Patriot* OR Foreign* OR "Zai Zai" OR Amakwere* OR Kwere* OR Olympic* OR #Paris2024 OR Medal OR "World Record" OR "Gayton McKenzie" OR Flag OR Steenhuisen OR Abelungu OR Colon* OR "Clever Black" OR "Kleva Black" OR Assassin* OR "Herman Mashaba" OR Parliament OR "White Genocide" OR Orania OR Ukraine OR Zionist* OR Israel* OR Palestin* OR "Tyson Gay" OR @MissJJabari OR @rawAfricanBoyz OR #bbclovers)

Appendix B

Categories:

Male norms

((M?n OR boy* OR male* OR Indoda OR gent OR guy OR oke OR ou OR bru OR bro OR dude OR nigga OR husband) NEAR/1 (must OR mustn't OR mustn OR musn OR moet OR "moet nie" OR fanele OR will OR won't OR wont OR "wou nie" OR do OR does OR doesn't OR doesn OR dont OR don't OR doen OR could OR couldn't OR couldn OR cud OR cudnt OR should OR shouldn't OR shud OR shld OR shudn OR can OR can't OR cant OR kan OR is OR was OR isn't OR isnt OR Are))

Female Norms

((wom?n OR girl* OR gal OR lady OR Ladies OR gyal OR mfaz* OR ntomb* OR chick OR chicks OR hun OR hunnie* OR honey OR queen OR princess OR vrou OR wife OR wives OR female OR baby OR babe OR bebz OR makoti) NEAR/1 (must OR mustn't OR mustn OR musn OR moet OR "moet nie" OR fanele OR will OR won't OR wont OR "wou nie" OR do OR does OR doesn't OR doesn OR dont OR don't OR doen OR could OR couldn't OR couldn OR cud OR cudnt OR should OR shouldn't OR shud OR shld OR shudn OR can OR can't OR cant OR kan OR is OR was OR isn't OR isnt OR Are))

Transgender & Queer Norms

((Gay* OR Lesbian* OR Homo* OR Trans OR Transgender OR Queer OR LGBT* OR Moffie OR "Non Binary" OR Non-Binary OR Agender) NEAR/1 (must OR mustn't OR mustn OR musn OR moet OR "moet nie" OR fanele OR will OR won't OR wont OR "wou nie" OR do OR does OR doesn't OR doesn OR dont OR don't OR doen OR could OR couldn't OR couldn OR cud OR cudnt OR should OR shouldn't OR shud OR shld OR shudn OR can OR can't OR cant OR kan OR is OR was OR isn't OR isnt OR #pridemonth OR Are OR Pride OR #Pride2024 OR #PrideMonth2024 OR "After 9" OR "After Nine"))

NOT (Gayton OR Transfer* OR "Women for Change" OR "Sabrina Walters")

Appendix C

Methodology

Stieglitz and colleagues (2018) identified four distinct phases in social media data analysis: (1) discovery, (2) collection, (3) preparation, and (4) analysis. Below, we describe how these phases guide our research.

Step 1: Data Discovery

- The first step in data discovery is to draw up a list of keywords designed to isolate the broad conversation of interest on social media. The research and dialogue facilitation teams contribute collaboratively to this list through a shared spreadsheet.
- To create this list, the research team drew on existing knowledge combined with desktop research, a literature review and a quantitative, analytic review of social media.

Step 2: Data Collection

- We "collect" the resulting data using our social media analytics platform.

Step 3: Data Preparation[49]

- We 'prepare' the data for analysis by refining the query. Query refinement entails sifting through the data set while looking for posts that are not relevant.
- If and when our team finds that some words could be added or removed, they are resolved by introducing additional keywords and/or exclusionary terms to the query.
- With the goal of delivering the most useful insights possible. The development of a query, categories and tags is based on two factors:

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[49] New keywords and exclusions are identified both at the query and category level on an ongoing basis.

1. *Prominence* - this is assessed quantitatively, using a dashboard that allows us to visualise data points, and qualitatively, using researchers' expertise, desktop research and dashboard work.

2. *Relevance* - a qualitative assessment of whether a focus area is important enough to the strategic goals of the heCareZA project to be included. Our team makes this determination based on subject matter expertise in South African social media dynamics and whether or not further research into the focus area is likely to provide valuable information for the ongoing heCareZA Programme.

Step 4: Data Analysis

- We build a dashboard in our social media analytics platform to support our data analysis. This tool produces metrics according to volume, trending topics, news stories, and unique authors in relation to the keyword list.

- We conduct thematic analysis (TA). TA involves studying the emerging patterns in data and exploring how units of meaning connect to form themes. Thematic analysis can highlight individuals' perspectives, ideas and experiences, and can be used to generate fresh insight into the social dynamics behind human behaviour.

- The goal of this analysis is to better understand what was said during the reporting period. Thematic analysis is conducted both at the query level and the category (focus area) level.