

(Re-)Placing the #MeToo Movement: Power, Shame, and Autobiographical
Narratives

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1. Introduction: #MeToo, Narratives, and De-Placing

Somewhere on this planet, a man is touching a woman to death. Somewhere on this planet, a man is about to touch a woman to death—Myriam Gurba, *Mean* (33)

#MeToo narratives are, collectively, about the ubiquity of sexualized violence. Unlike previous (feminist) social movements centering (sexualized) violence against women,¹ the #MeToo movement is all-encompassing, at least regarding the possible ways and places for (mostly) women to be sexually harassed, violated, or assaulted. While each autobiographical #MeToo narrative appears to have a certain specificity, the collectivization of these narratives—with and through the narrative practice that the phrase “me too” establishes becomes meaningful—ultimately proclaims that sexualized violence is pervasive and, for some, universal. This type of violence then appears inescapable, along with the trauma, devastation, and shame that follows. As I argue throughout, these dynamics are processes of de-placing. I have chosen the term ‘de-placing’ for this analysis to underline that it is not a process of being involuntarily moved from one place to another (a displacement) but rather the process of being denied to be in place to begin with; it is a move not to a ‘somewhere’ but a ‘nowhere.’ The processes of shaming construct this particular ‘nowhere,’ in which victims of sexualized violence are de-placed, configuring a position of profound powerlessness. Demonstrating the ubiquity of sexualized violence in a particular manner—through the autobiographical mode and the possibilities of the digital realm—the #MeToo movement ultimately constructs a catalog of the restriction on women’s movements.²

As such, the #MeToo movement’s rhetoric unveils much of feminism’s efforts to “subvert restrictions placed on women’s movements in public [and] . . . to critique mainstream narratives that keep women in a constant state of fear” (Loney-Howes 27) as ineffective. Quite on the contrary: in light of the ubiquity of sexualized violence that the #MeToo movement unmistakably demonstrates, this state of fear appears simply reasonable. Considered in its collective outlining of the everyplace-ness of sexualized violence, the #MeToo movement returns to a conceptualization of some (bodies) as “already raped [or] inherently rapeable” (Marcus 387). In the cultural discourse that now recenters the ubiquity of sexualized violence, the impacts of its constant threat and the effect of this on

¹ For instance, the Battered Women’s movement focusing on domestic violence in the early 1970s (Schechter; Hirschmann; Tierney), the Anti-Rape movement focusing on rape in public places in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Bevacqua; Matthews; C. N. Baker and Bevacqua), or various anti-harassment and anti-rape efforts on college campuses mostly from the 1970s to the 1990s (Germain; Heldman et al.).

² I write particularly about ‘women,’ here, because the #MeToo canon, with some exceptions, largely focuses on women as (potential) victims of sexualized violence, concentrating its grievances on crucial dynamics of what is positioned as patriarchal hegemony.

conceptualizations and allocation of victimhood have taken center stage. For Sabine Sielke, the act of victimizing those who have experienced sexualized violence is “the collateral damage done in #MeToo’s attempts at ‘breaking the silence’” (243); collateral damage because it supposedly reaffirms what “feminist critique managed to undo decades ago” (243): that women are (merely) victims. However, these narrativizations rather reveal that the process of victimizing people (more likely to be) exposed to sexualized violence was simply never undone.

This demonstration of the de-placing effect of (the threat of) sexualized violence responds to a cultural framework in which neoliberal notions of self-empowerment in a conceptual refusal of victimhood dominate (Ozkazanc-Pan; Rottenberg). Indeed, this framework is woven into the structures of the #MeToo movement, as many of its prominent narratives do not resist moments of this self-empowered speech, professing the narrating, violated subject as triumphantly resisting placelessness and emotional debilitation all the while authoring profound powerlessness. Yet, telling the ‘truth’ about sexualized violence, as the autobiographical narratives of the #MeToo movement claim to do, unavoidably narrates a process of agency lost (or unveiled to have been a myth in the first place). Evidently, there is tension between agency lost and reclaimed in the #MeToo movement, the pain of which becomes a central theme in the autobiographical narratives. As this mode of narration/writing itself constructs and performs a subject with agency, it further generates (this) tension, which is, I argue, embedded in the resistance to placelessness that #MeToo narratives perform.

It appears equally tension-filled to negotiate between the realities of certain bodies’ vulnerability to sexualized violence and to consider “the identities of rapist and raped [to] preexist the rape itself” (Marcus 388), conceptually placing women in an inescapable position of powerlessness and in need of (the state’s) protection. This assertion is entirely unthreatening to prevailing patriarchal power dynamics (Cahill, *Rethinking Rape* 154). However, the #MeToo movement reveals little ambiguity about this dilemma. Instead, the movement rather comfortably positions those under constant threat of sexualized violence as always already aware of this position, a consciousness foundational to the construction of a (shamed) subjectivity and the restriction to one’s own movement that is only masked as self-imposed. This, however, leaves the question of resistance open.

Despite the #MeToo movement’s specific perspective on place(lessness) in its narrative practices, which illustrate both the ubiquity of sexualized violence and its de-placing effects through shaming processes, there is no inquiry into the role of places in

(the resistance of) the #MeToo movement or feminist movements against sexualized violence that may be situated as predecessors of it. The ‘speaking out’ narrative practice, an analysis of which makes up a sizeable amount of current #MeToo research (Badia; Boyle; Gilmore, “#MeToo and the Memoir Boom: The Year in the US”; Gilmore, *The #MeToo Effect*; Loney-Howes; Serisier, *Speaking Out*; Serisier, “Reading Survivor Narratives”), signals a refusal of the de-placing and or through shame. Beyond the narrativization of placelessness, it is the resistant practices of ‘speaking out’ in the light of the lamented realities of the threat of sexualized violence, the threat of shame, and powerlessness that brings the #MeToo movement’s construction of places into question. I examine this construction, centering autobiographical narratives as the principal activist practices that render the #MeToo movement meaningful. So, I approach #MeToo through close readings of principal autobiographical texts of the movement. In this examination, I consider both ambiguous narrativizations of placelessness and the demand to be in place and the places constructed in/through these writing practices as well as, crucially, the collective witnessing of it. In the literary reconsideration of the places victims of sexualized violence are de-placed from, a reconsideration embedded in the subjectivity and agency constructed through the autobiographical mode, the #MeToo movement places and replaces. Most crucially, it (re-)places shame into the public realm, a performance of loss and regaining of agency in the courtroom and the sites of abuse.

To consider the narrative practices of the #MeToo movement along the lines of resistance, their (claim to) publicness is crucial. Publicness is not only foundational to the ‘here’ that #MeToo narratives claim and construct but also central to the performance of shame resistance. Specifically, the ‘moving’ of shame into the public destabilizes the debilitating properties shame and shaming function through. As this movement is always resistant, I consider it as a practice of counterpublics, drawing on Nancy Fraser’s conceptualization of “subaltern counterpublics” (“Rethinking the Public Sphere” 67). This notion illustrates the fragmentation of publics to encompass more than a hegemonic public, holding open possibilities of resistance. However, I argue that the notion of a counterpublic confirms the potency of a dominant public as a counterpublic’s construction hinges on its properties as ‘counter,’ thus always in a ‘vis-à-vis’ position of resistance. As a result, it is constrained in its possibilities to permeate through dominant discourses.

Feminist theory has been plagued by the struggle to conceptualize power and agency, which also reflects much of the tension in the productive construction of a counterpublic and the reconfirmation of the status of a dominant public that is resisted. It is also within these

discussions that I situate my analysis of place(lessness) and the #MeToo movement. In seemingly circular waves, feminist theory has struggled to theorize prevailing patriarchal power dynamics without rendering those suffering under them—oftentimes written about as merely pertaining to women, a surely simplified assessment—powerless and victimized *a priori* (de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*; Dworkin; MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*; Pateman); it has conceptualized the power exercised by those historically disempowered without rendering the prevailing dominance of patriarchal power relations as irrelevant in the light of progress or even ruling them overturned entirely (Banet-Weiser; Caputi). As concepts of agency are embedded in these dynamics, the same conundrum applies (Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory* 55). While it remains unavoidable that some (bodies) are granted agency and sovereignty as others are continuously promised but deprived of these notions, the simplified conceptualization of ‘women’ as ‘non-subjects’—as a subject without agency is not a subject after all—constructs an analytical deadlock that does justice neither to feminist theory nor to the (possibilities of) feminist resistance. To move these dynamics into productive analysis, I propose to consider the tension between performances of agency and narratives of its profound loss—something surely foundational in the #MeToo movement—a generative tension. It is from these autobiographical narratives, which are, as I argue, constructed by the tension between their extradiegetic performance and symbolism and the intra-diegesis, that the tension between a presumable inability to generate resistance (necessarily emphasizing the profound devastation of the trauma of (the ubiquity of) sexualized violence) and the performance of this resistance emerges. This results in performances of affective empowerment that do not deny and, instead, crucially (at times ragefully) lament the profound disempowerment of sexualized violence. As I argue that this generative tension can only be negotiated through publicness, a focus on the construction and negotiation of (contested) places through narrative practices, as I outline throughout, allows for this consideration.

Rather than understanding the #MeToo movement as constructing a place countering hegemonic dynamics regarding victims of sexualized violence, I consider the movement’s autobiographical narrative practices and the placing of these narratives—collectivized in and through digital spheres—as constructing a productive tension between disempowerment, anticipated, expressed shame and performances of empowerment/rejections of shame.

To first thoroughly assess this tension, Chapter 2 explores the most central theme in (#MeToo’s) narratives about sexualized violence: shame. I question the self-evidence with which shame continues to be theorized (even) in feminist theory. Countering this self-

evidence, I read shame as symbolic violence (Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*), a regulatory tool functioning to construct and uphold dominant power relations. Resistance to it is contingent on a conceptual unmasking of it as not self-evident but rather, principally, violent. Additionally, I dismantle the notion of shame as something intimate or private in any way, outlining that it has little to do with a self-evaluation and is rather both a mechanism of (stabilizing) power relations and the result of these, as it is a hegemonial script that discursively constructs what is deemed shameful. In this chapter, I also consider how the centrality and narrativization of shame in #MeToo narratives affirm or resist these dynamics.

Recognizing the centrality of power in theorizing shame, Chapter 3 then considers the relationality of power, a notion, of course, indebted to both Foucault (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*; Foucault, “The Subject and Power”) and the feminist appropriations of this theory of power (Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*; Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”; Deveaux; Fraser, *Unruly Practices*). I pertain that power is neither entirely fluid—as the grounds on which it is practiced are never within a cultural vacuum but already produced by the same dynamics that the persistent repetition of power relations constructs and upholds—nor stabilized. Rather, it hinges on the repetition of its relation and, crucially, its discursive naturalization to sustain itself. It is within these dynamics that I understand the de-placing properties of sexualized violence, which are discursively masked as self-silencing or self-governing (through shame). So, declarations of shame at the very least perform a disruption to dominant—hegemonial—power relations. However, I argue that this performance hinges on a certain discursive power, the possible practices of which are dependent on the same power dynamics that these performances aim to dismantle. So, the collectivization of these declarations becomes a crucial element in their (activist) political potential—put simply, it enacts the “too” in “me too.” Throughout a theorization of power that aims to outline the productivity in the tension between dis/empowerment—possible through the construction of places in narratives of placelessness—I further examine the power relations in the #MeToo movement, which are emblematic of the broader issue of (unequal) discursive power.

Against this backdrop, Chapter 4 explores the practices of placing in central autobiographical narratives of the #MeToo movement, in the places that, as I argue, are particularly potent in the (re)negotiation of the processes of replacing (in the light of de-placing) for victims of sexualized violence: 1) digital spheres—as an important arena for the #MeToo movement in outlining the ubiquity of sexualized violence and in participating

in the narrative struggle that configures cultural scripts about victimhood, blame, shame, and believability regarding sexualized violence; 2) the courtroom—as a contested and ambiguous realm for victims of sexualized violence in the seeking of (a notion of) justice and public recognition of their believability and a realm seemingly inaccessible to many victims of sexualized violence and nevertheless or precisely because of this inaccessibility present in the narration of this violence; and 3) the site of abuse—as the places in which a loss of agency is narrated and, yet, the places that, in their literary reconstructions, may become sites of resistance.

Chapter 5 then concludes this thesis with an exploration of the performances of (feminist) rage in the #MeToo movement as politically potent rhetoric in the ambiguous resistances of a movement that is continuously met with the impossibility of agentic expression in the light of dominant processes of desubjectification and, with that, placelessness. Performances of feminist rage, I argue in this concluding chapter, re-center the demand to be in place—and in public—as the crucial movement practice to construct and utilize a political relevance that resists the cultural scripts that deem stories and experiences of sexualized violence as either shameful, personal (and therefore somehow shameful) or long resolved.

The #MeToo Movement ‘Story’

The collection of sexual harassment and violence narratives under the #MeToo slogan, along with activist collaboration, organization, and demonstration, has revealed an uncertainty in (academic) conversations about how to classify such ‘movements.’ While some critics and activists seem reluctant to talk about #MeToo as a (social) movement, it is clear that the formation or perception of a new collective that even allows for an understanding of #MeToo as any sort of meaningful collective ensues only after enough people were moved to step onto a public platform and reframe their experiences. At a certain point, these moves were met with public recognition and debate. While the street demonstrations that are either associated with or attributed to the #MeToo movement have added to its growing iconography and cultural potency, the core of it are its autobiographical narratives. This includes the tweets as well as the performances, essays, or memoirs it engendered. In the process of consumption in which #MeToo is both a social movement and a market, the stories that construct it are further narrativized. As with any movement, this process underlines the collectivization of its stories that ultimately continuously constructs its message (Benford; J. E. Davis, “Narrative and Social Movements”; McCurdy). Emerging

out of research on movement frames in social movement theory, sociologists have turned to narratives in social movements, understanding them to encompass “[t]he myths of the movement, rituals that may be central to movement solidarity, [and] intensive situations of consciousness raising” (Johnston and Klandermans, “The Cultural Analysis of Social Movements” 18). Indeed, sociologist Gary Fine defines social movements as “a bundle of narratives” (128).

The #MeToo movement is most frequently understood to find its origin in a rather localized, widely unknown solidarity practice thought up by activist Tarana Burke in 2006. Born out of an inability to hear and respond to someone sharing ‘her story’ of sexualized violence, Burke conceptualized “me too” as a more accessible way to share, listen to, and respond to experiences of sexualized violence, which are, as signaled in the foundation of this practice, “‘hard stor[ies] to hear’ and harder to respond to” (Serisier, “Reading Survivor Narratives” 51). “Me too,” thought up as a movement to foster solidarity and support among (particularly Black) victims of sexualized violence, remained a local activist effort until actress Alyssa Milano invoked, “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet” (@Alyssa_Milano) on the social media platform Twitter³ on October 16, 2017. Milano’s tweet further explains that this call-to-action was an effort to “give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem;” to claim an undeniable presence in the (digital) public sphere that visualizes and demonstrates the ubiquity of sexualized violence. ‘The problem’ also referred specifically to the abuse perpetrated by Harvey Weinstein, an influential film producer. Numerous accusations against Weinstein, which had surfaced in October 2017 through the publication of investigative reporting by *The New York Times* (Kantor and Twohey) and *The New Yorker* (Farrow) sparked the virality of Milano’s tweet and, with that, the first ‘wave’ of the #MeToo movement. As many highly publicized stories of sexualized violence coincided, followed, and continue to follow, so do several ‘waves’ of the movement.⁴

³ Twitter was renamed X when the social media company Twitter, Inc. merged with X Holdings Corp. in 2023. However, the platform remains commonly referred to as Twitter (as does posting on it remain commonly referred to as ‘tweeting,’ a word that has been included in the Oxford English Dictionary since 2013) and the website continues to be reached through the domain twitter.com

⁴ Weinstein was specifically accused of abusing his position of power to perpetrate sexualized violence. This is a crucial pattern in the #MeToo movement. Many narratives are collectivized not only under the banner of ‘sexualized violence’ but specifically because they are stories of abuse perpetrated by a man already holding a certain power over who he then renders a victim. It is in the light of this that, for instance, the (televised) sexual harassment perpetrated by Luis Rubiales evoked a resurgence of the #MeToo conversation Hedgecoe, as did many other stories that illustrate a similar pattern. Rubiales, who served as the President of the Royal Spanish Football Federation and the Union of European Football Associations’ vice president at the time, had forcefully kissed soccer player Jennifer Hermoso during the medal presentation of the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup without her consent.

Although the #MeToo movement is an unorganized collective, Tarana Burke is frequently credited as its founder in both the media narrativizations of the movement as well as academic ones (Badia 32; Boyle 33; *me too*). The title of Burke's memoir claims that she (or rather) her memoir tells the story of *the Birth of the Me Too movement*. According to Burke, it is

The story of how empathy for others—without which the work of ‘me too’ doesn’t exist—starts with empathy for that dark place of shame where we keep our stories, and where I kept mine. The courage that trickled out of a young Black girl in the Bronx, and now from millions of others, formed the massive ocean that this movement has become. The essence of ‘me too’ is found deep in the marrow of this lifelong story. There is no here without where I was: stuck and scared and ashamed, a place I remained until the need to care for someone else’s shame saved me too. (12–13)

In the movement's origin story that Burke constructs here, this solidarity is the basis with which to move out of “that dark place of shame where we keep our stories.” The sharing of her experience is not the only decisive aspect of the practice that enabled the movement out of that place. Rather, the specific setting—one that, in Burke's story, builds collectivity—enables an emphatic witnessing that allows the possibility of movement through which her story “was completely out of [her] body” (224). Elsewhere, Burke gives another background to her origin story of the ‘me too’ movement: her experience of reading *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (1970) and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou (1969) as a child (Badia 33). About this, Janet Badia notes, “As a scholar whose work has largely focused on women readers and the stories that are central to their reading experiences, I could not have scripted a better origin story myself” (33). These narrativizations of a social movement's origin story are, first and foremost, stories. Yet, these retrospective stories signal the practices (of sharing, witnessing, and writing) that are central to the ongoing practice of meaning-making in and around the #MeToo movement. Part of #MeToo's ever-emerging movement history is also the fact that this narrative practice—responding “me too” to someone sharing their story of sexualized violence to signal having experienced something similar, an expression of affective solidarity—remained largely unknown until actress Alyssa Milano's tweet. With that, the origin of the #MeToo movement points to another story frequently told: the activist efforts of a Black woman became coopted by a rich, white Hollywood actress, now credited with inventing this narrative practice and movement (A. Y. Davis, “Struggle, Solidarity, and Social Change” 29).

As a decentralized, widespread movement, #MeToo appears hard to grasp, as the many discussions about its particular meaning, message, founders or representatives, demands, and successes indicate. In the midst of this, discussions about the cultural dynamics of sexualized violence continuously construct the meaning of a ‘#MeToo narrative’ as well as the

significance of the narrative practice that is “me too.” It is these threads—the narrative practice and structures that the movement stands for and facilitates—that are foundational to the #MeToo movement.

I understand the #MeToo movement as a “rhizomatically networked collective” (Brunner and Partlow-Lefevre 2), in which “[t]here is ongoing dynamic movement between rhetor/audience positions as audiences join the collective in the process of making meaning by declaring #MeToo, telling stories, and sharing links, among other actions” (12). The #MeToo movement has undoubtedly used different media and movement strategies than some of the (feminist) movements that are placed as predecessors in its genealogy. Building its structures and claiming its place on and through social media, the movement has found itself being demoted to ‘clicktivism’ or celebrated as a powerful demonstration of solidarity and resistance, productively utilizing the collectivizing properties of social media (Suk et al.). However, in its core movement practice, it continues a foundational feminist practice in the fight against sexualized violence: the sharing of (seemingly) personal narratives to underscore their sociocultural relevance, bringing them into the public to be collectivized.

. . . [F]eminist anti-rape politics is founded on the belief that producing and disseminating a genre of personal experiential narratives can end sexual violence. It is a belief, in the words of the well-known slogan, that ‘breaking the silence’ through telling personal stories can and will ‘end the violence.’ (Serisier, *Speaking Out* 4)

The #MeToo movement follows this tradition. Bianca Fileborn and Rachel Loney-Howes trace the genealogy of the #MeToo movement to the second-wave feminism of the 1970s as it was “invested in the idea that speaking out about rape and sexual assault could reveal the ‘truth’ regarding the causes of violence” (6). Surely a noteworthy milestone here is the publication and success of Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will*. For her, rape is “a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear” (Brownmiller 15) and, consequently, a social and feminist issue. With that, it is perhaps unsurprising that the movement has evoked some academics to dig out the second-wave feminist theme “the personal is political,” yet another reminiscence regarding its narrative practices. In research on the #MeToo movement, claims of its seriality are as common as those of its remarkable novelty (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir, “Introduction: Rebellion, Revolution, Reformation” 13; Sielke 243).

Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, for instance, reads the #MeToo movement as the return of “the old ‘subject of feminism’” (59), referring to the development of poststructural feminism that questions the category of ‘women’ both entirely and as the subject of feminism (Benhabib et al.). With the #MeToo movement, following Berger, these considerations—questions, for instance, about the possibility and usefulness of solidarity (Butler, “Contingent

Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism’)—were sidelined, if not entirely irrelevant.

. . . [W]hat #MeToo seems to say and show, is that whether you are, or I am, Black (Anita Hill) or white (Alyssa Milano), high on the social or celebrity scale (Gwyneth Paltrow) or low (Nafissatou Diallo), and possibly lesbian or queer (like a number of female actors in both Hollywood and the French cinema world), it happens or can happen to ‘me too’, at the hands of men who are white (Harvey Weinstein) or Black (Bill Cosby). (Berger 59)

This reading is, however, too short-sighted. Having experienced sexualized violence is not quite the ‘unifier’ that Berger presents here. Rather, the #MeToo movement has sparked discourse around the specificities of race, class, and gender in experiences of sexualized violence and, further, in speaking about those experiences. As Pamela Runestad assesses, “[t]o witness #MeToo is to witness how abuse of power and privilege is shaped by gender, class, race, and status such that sexual assault is normalised in the United States” (148). The cultural discourse around #MeToo has rendered any discussion about sexualized violence incomplete without a recognition of its gendered, classed, and raced systemic foundations. To speak and write about #MeToo also means confronting the power dynamics that determine who gets to speak about sexualized violence (and who gets to be heard) (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, “Introduction” 8) as well as who is particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse or harassment (Kagal et al. 135).

This particular vulnerability leads Berger to reminisce about second-wave feminism, contending that, in this light, the #MeToo movement is almost “a vindication of Catharine A. MacKinnon’s brand of feminism” (59). Here, Berger refers to MacKinnon’s extensive theorization of women’s powerlessness. At first sight, the movement might read as a striking mimesis of MacKinnon’s conceptualization that “sexual objectification and sexual violence . . . represent the socially situated subjection of women to men. . . . [T]he rape of women by men is integral to the way inequality between the sexes occurs in life. Intimate violation with impunity is an ultimate index of social power” (*Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 243–45). Foregoing further complexities in the social dynamics of sexualized violence, MacKinnon positions rape as the pinnacle of or perhaps a fitting symbolism for men’s power over women. Surely, MacKinnon’s conceptualization appears timely in light of #MeToo’s refocusing on the ubiquity of sexualized violence and the constant threat it poses, mostly for women. Yet, Berger concludes, “. . . the Hollywood drama hasn’t exactly stuck to the sexual script theorised by MacKinnon” (59), referring to the #MeToo stories in which men were victims (and/or those in which women were the perpetrators). Perhaps most notably, Asia Argento, one of the first women to publicly accuse Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment, was later herself accused of sexual assault (Berger 59). Put simply, the plethora of #MeToo

stories does not allow for an oversimplified conceptualization regarding the cultural dynamics of sexualized violence.

A movement practice that leans heavily on the sharing of (seemingly) personal experience of sexualized violence, of course, finds itself confronted with lingering accusations about a potential individualization of a systemic issue. For the #MeToo movement, which principally counters notions of perpetuating sexualized violence as anything other than a sociocultural matter of public concern, these accusations primarily focus on the persistence and relevance of (linear) narratives of personal empowerment. Lisa Lazard, for instance, critiques that

[w]ithin neoliberal frames, victimhood is self-made, and suffering becomes a psychological choice rather than something inflicted by a wrong. It is perhaps not surprising then that empirical work on sexual violence more generally has seen an increased rejection of victim identity by women, and a greater emphasis on women's empowered choices which are embedded in the need to rise above sexual harassment and violence. (53)

The desire to move away from a language of victimhood either responds to the neoliberal premise that renders suffering a personal failing or reinforces it in the iteration that not only are there empowered choices to be made even in victimhood but that, given this scope for action, it remains the victim's responsibility to overcome trauma. Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad similarly worry about the #MeToo movement as emphasizing 'the personal' "contained by a postfeminist sensibility that is 'not disruptive' and is 'capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy friendly'" (1320). They argue that the #MeToo movement might do little to challenge the patriarchal and capitalist structures that enable the ubiquity of sexualized violence by individualizing it. Surely, the autobiographical focus of the #MeToo movement prompts a concern like Gill and Orgad's. In this vein, Leigh Gilmore writes about, "the neoliberal life narrative [that] features an 'I' who overcomes hardship and recasts historical and systemic harm as something an individual alone can, and should, manage through pluck, perseverance, and enterprise" (*Tainted Witness* 89). These concerns, however, disregard whether #MeToo narratives, by refocusing sexualized violence from a personal to a sociocultural issue, even allow for the conceptual preservation of a private/public discussion—a discussion that has been presumed dead and resuscitated several times within feminist theory. Rather, I argue that the #MeToo movement's narrative practices draw on a tension between seemingly individual and collective experiences, unveiling the untenability of a personal/political or private/public distinction.

The discussion about neoliberalism and feminism has, of course, not emerged with the #MeToo movement. Rather, it has returned. Kristin Bumiller argues that neoliberalism has dominated feminist movements against sexual violence, so that "[d]espite feminist-inspired

reforms, many of which were explicitly designed to empower ‘victims’ to exercise more ‘choice’ or protect against retraumatization, the voices and desires of women are often muted by the more dominant discourse of the state” (96). Nancy Fraser has extensively critiqued second-wave feminism in this light, arguing that “. . . the dream of women’s emancipation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation” (Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History* 110–11). Drawing on Catherine Rottenberg’s discussion of ‘neoliberal feminism’, Sarah Banet-Weiser also discusses this through a concept she terms ‘popular feminism,’ within which, “empowerment is the central logic; with little to no specification as to what we want to empower women to do, popular feminism often restructures the politics of feminism to focus on the individual empowered woman” (17). Missing a conceptual approach to feminist power, popular feminism merely focuses on (isolated) portrayals of a certain type of empowerment, oftentimes quite narrowly within the logic and aesthetics of a capitalist market.

Tracing the #MeToo movement back to anti-rape activism since the 1970s also brings up issues that both movements have in common: the centering of white women’s experiences. When the #MeToo movement is now positioned as a predecessor of second-wave (white) feminism, it is a reproduction of and reflection on the lack of intersectionality that has shaped previous anti-rape advocacy work. Angela Davis provides the crucial reminder that “[g]enealogies should always be questioned because there is always an unacknowledged reason for beginning at a certain moment in history as opposed to another” (“Struggle, Solidarity, and Social Change” 29). So, she asks, “why the work against rape and sexual violence within the US Southern Black freedom movement came to be so marginalised” (29). Challenging the association with ‘breaking the silence’ advocacy in anti-rape movements—that is, autobiographical practices to resist the ubiquity of sexualized violence—with white feminism only, Angela Davis contends that the narrative practices of second-wave feminism are preceded by Black women’s public declarations of domestic violence through Blues music (*Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* 25). Historian Danielle McGuire has also outlined the importance of anti-rape activism in the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movement. For instance, McGuire outlines the broad organizing during the landmark trial *State of North Carolina v. Joan Little* (1975), arguing that the Free Joan Little campaign is often falsely portrayed as a result of second-wave feminism. Instead, McGuire argues that “while this may be true for white, middle-class feminists who became active in the antirape movement in the early 1970s, African-American women had been speaking out and organizing politically against sexual violence and rape for more than a

century” (204). Arguing for this century-long practice of speaking-out about sexualized violence, McGuire points to a few criminal cases in which a white perpetrator was sentenced for the rape of a Black woman in the late 1950s and 1960s—“[v]ictories [that] rested on decades of black women’s organizing and personal testimony” (204).

What is clear beyond the history of narrative politics in Black feminism and white feminism (a juxtaposition that, I should note, does not do justice to the complexity of racial politics in feminism): It would be false to suggest that women first started to speak out about sexualized violence in the 1970s and, with that, simply moved the issue into public discussion. Instead,

. . . perhaps the most important element in constructing a new understanding of rape was through practices of collective listening or ‘witnessing.’ . . . Women did not begin to speak of rape in 1970, but at that time their speech found new collective and political practices of listening that made their speech meaningful in new ways. (Serisier, *Speaking Out* 6)

The practice of speaking about sexualized violence and the conviction that this practice, in public, can end this violence through a profound cultural understanding of it has shaped feminism since well before the emergence of the #MeToo movement (Boyle 24). Linda Alcoff writes about “[t]he strategic metaphor of giving voice to the trauma” (179) and points to the titles of several prominent books that were published in the 1980s: *No More Secrets* (C. Adams and Fay), *Voices in the Night* (McNaron and Morgan), or *Speaking Out, Fighting Back* (Vera and Dodds). Tanya Serisier also points to ‘rape memoirs’ published in the 1990s, for instance, *Telling: A Memoir of Rape and Recovery* (Francisco), *After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back* (Raine), or the autobiographical collection *Surviving the Silence: Black Women’s Stories of Rape* (Pierce-Baker). Although seemingly ubiquitous in feminist movements, these previous collective ‘consciousness-raising’ efforts were not necessarily met with widespread support (Bevacqua 201). Yet, viewing the #MeToo movement within the feminist tradition of speaking out about (seemingly) personal experiences of sexualized violence, underscoring its ubiquity in public, reveals that a conviction in this (feminist) practice has persisted. It is a response to both the threat of sexualized violence as well as a response to the persistent displacing of these discussions. In the history of feminist anti-rape efforts, the claim to the political relevance of sexualized violence is consistently re-emphasized, indicating that the understanding of it as something ‘intimate’ and personal remains tempting. Against this backdrop, #MeToo returns to the strategy of “publicly demonstrat[ing] that the experience of sexual violence [is] at once deeply personal and intrinsically political; a product of underlying patterns of gender inequality rather than an individual, isolated experience” (Loney-Howes 24). While the narrativization of #MeToo

stories as intimate revelations persists, their interconnectedness and collectivization signal their importance as precisely not unconnected stories but as exposing structural undercurrents.

Powerful examples illustrating the displacing of women through sexualized violence are the *Take Back the Night* events resisting this de-placing and placelessness. Primarily emerging in the US in the late 1970s, *Take Back the Night* were collective performances of women insisting on being able to exist safely without (the constant threat of) sexualized violence (Kennedy Bergen). Occurring in public—in the places argued to displace women through their looming danger—these performances reconfigured these places through women's collective movement in them. In the moments of specific collective bodily movement within them, these places are primarily sites of protest and utilized to perform a claim to them, a claim that extends the temporality of the collective movements performed. As many activists participating in these events would demonstrate that they have been victims of sexualized violence, the notion that there is something to take *back* is also crucial. Not only are the places of protest temporarily altered regarding their staging of the threat of sexualized violence—while previously ubiquitous and unspoken now serving as symbols for it, loudly spoken—they also transform places of rape into places of resistance. At least, this is what the images of these rallies or marches signify.

Linda Alcoff describes her participation in a *Take Back the Night* march:

The plan was for the survivors in the march to wear black armbands to signify in a public way the scope of the problem. Whether any particular survivor participated was up to us, but I felt the call to help, to make the collective act as strong as it could be. It was a small act to simply wear a band over my sleeve, but it felt like an important opportunity for solidarity and defiance. As I accepted the armband, my mouth went dry, I began to shake, and I could sense panic on the horizon. In an instant, my capable, mature self was transformed into the child who was threatened with violence if she ever told. But I managed to do it nonetheless, to stay in the march, and hold myself together. I regret to report that it does not get easier with time. (12)

In this description, the participation in the march is not primarily a demand but an act of defiance. Alcoff describes resisting not the threat of sexual violence itself but the threat of violence should she disclose her experience as she does. In this context, Alcoff discloses being a survivor of sexualized violence by wearing a black armband, a performance through which the experience is collectivized in this specific presence.

Alcoff also brings up another important example of the feminist practice of disclosing experiences of sexualized violence: Part of the long history of anti-rape efforts on college campuses is the story of students at Brown University who anonymously wrote down the names of their rapists on the wall of the women's bathroom (L. M. Alcoff 201). While this practice protested Brown University's inadequate handling of rape allegations, it also served

to construct a solidarity collective, enabling a different sense of safety. The necessity of it is also part of the grievances of the movement. But the constructing of this collective does more than voice that grievance. It also, in the light of little institutional protection, alters the women's bathroom to a vital place of anonymous communication—a “discursive space” (L. M. Alcoff 202)—that aims to establish safety in the absence of other protection. For this, the anonymity of the accusation lends protection to the accusers (201). The story illustrates that “[s]urvivors must continue to develop and explore ways in which to resist the conventions of speech that have silenced or co-opted our voices and to create new discursive forms and spaces in which to witness” (202). Here, like Serisier, Alcoff too highlights not only the practice of disclosing but also of witnessing. However, Alcoff also outlines detrimental forms of witnessing, underlining that speaking and witnessing alone do not further a feminist purpose when it comes to anti-violence advocacy. Rather, the place in which this is practiced fundamentally constructs both practices. While Alcoff writes of ‘new discursive spaces’ which enabled a different kind of speaking and witnessing, I propose to extend the argument to the “placial” (Casey xiv) dimension of these practices beyond (merely) discursive spaces but including the protest in, claim to, and construction of places.

Alcoff highlights the specific speech practice associated with survivors of sexualized violence in public spheres: confessions. She draws on Foucault who establishes that confessions became “one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 59) and, more pointedly, “Western man has become a confessing animal” (59). And, crucially, the frame of confession constructs a hierarchy between the one who confesses—the victim of sexualized violence—and the one witnessing the confession. In this light, the public expression—confession—of such an experience has little potential to be empowering. Rather, it is dependent on being permitted to speak and always constrained to the sphere in which the confession is given. This reading is also at the root of many tensions in and around the #MeToo movement and deserves further scrutiny. Throughout, I explore the agentic place construction of the confessing victim. Serisier argues that “. . . by providing a space in which women’s stories of sexual violence could be told, feminists demonstrated how social storytelling can contest power relations and create a stream of further action and storytelling” (*Speaking Out* 7). Here, her acknowledgment of the provision of space is crucial. Specifically, however, it is the process of the construction of places that may enable the witnessing that constructs the speech as not a confession but a practice capable of contesting power.

#MeToo Narratives: Texts That Shape a Movement – Toward a #MeToo Canon

The #MeToo movement is constituted by the numerous autobiographical narratives that have been shared since its emergence and through its collectivizing tool (the phrase ‘me too’ or the hashtag #metoo). With that, it has created a market for memoirs, merchandise, film, and television. This market has also sparked controversy. Now commercialized, ‘MeToo’ remains a market because it is profitable, hinting at notions of voyeurism, sensationalism,⁵ or, to choose a more provocative term, trauma porn. Texts marketed as #MeToo narratives have also expanded beyond the US-American realm. For instance, Japanese journalist Shiori Itō’s memoir ブラックボックス (Itō, ブラックボックス; engl. Black Box) was published for an Anglophone market with the title *Black Box: The Memoir That Sparked Japan’s #Metoo Movement*. Toufah Jallow, who became publicly known after accusing Gambian President Yahya Jammeh of rape in 2019, co-published a book marketed with the title *Toufah, The Woman Who Inspired an African #MeToo Movement* (Jallow and Pittaway). While these examples may prompt questions about the transferability of the #MeToo movement beyond the US context, they primarily reveal the purchasing power that publishers attribute to the “#MeToo” label, indicating that references to the US-centric #MeToo movement are (presumed to be) profitable. Given the centrality of the mostly US-centric, Anglophone scope of the #MeToo movement, I will focus on this realm, recognizing that an examination of other movements that have grown out of #MeToo, refer to it, or focus on a similar subject matter through similar strategies would nevertheless also demand an examination of the respective specific cultural and historical contexts they emerge in.

This is, of course, neither limited to a #MeToo market nor unprecedented. Rather, the marketability of (the texts of) the #MeToo movement brings back debates about personal trauma narratives. For some, (personal) trauma narratives first and foremost “construct a melodrama of suffering and redemption around ethically simplified conflicts of good versus

⁵ Lamenting the sensationalism of the #MeToo movement, Rose McGowan, at one point, explained why she initially did not want to be named as one of journalist Ronan Farrow’s sources, stating, “I did not want my rape spoken about over breakfast cereal on *The Today Show*” (Gardner). All prominent #MeToo stories have been heavily reported on and, in the process, narrativized and/or sensationalized and, for some, fictionalized. The court case *John C. Depp, II v. Amber Laura Heard* in Fairfax County, Virginia, livestreamed online and on television and spread through edited clips on social media platforms, is perhaps the most paramount example of this. Journalist Jessica Bennett writes, “There’s something almost pornographic about the voyeurism involved, with a kink for every predilection: fame, beauty, drugs, extreme wealth, a private island, five penthouse apartments, fecal matter left on a marital bed, bloody messages written on walls . . . As ‘Saturday Night Live’ satirized it in a sketch last week, boy, is it ‘fun’ to watch.” This phenomenon is certainly not unique to the #MeToo movement. For instance, Linda Alcoff has critiqued the sensationalism of so-called ‘television confessionals’ prominent in the late 1980s. Here, “[t]he emotions of survivors were eagerly displayed for public consumption. . . . The survivors are mere instantiations of the truths the experts reveal, recounting their experiences without any of their own interpretation and analysis” (192).

evil embodied in the characters of villain and victim, and they rely on kitsch's clichés and tropes to arouse teary-eyed sentiment in readers”⁶ (Rothe 88). For others, personal trauma narratives are “an un-silencing of survivor testimony, important for empowering individuals and aiding in healing. They often perform as advocacy for other silenced people” (Avieson et al., “Introduction” 2). Mirroring the very premise of the #MeToo movement, Bunty Avieson et al. contend that “[w]riting trauma narrative—indeed, reading trauma narrative—creates an intimate, collaborative space. Here, secrets are told; behaviors exposed; abuse named; shame shaken off” (3). The movement has also embraced and utilized its place in the public sphere to further build its rhizomatic network, the consumption and research of which leads to the construction of a ‘Me Too’ literary canon. Beyond the tweets shared under the hashtag, the #MeToo movement also incited the publication of several memoirs (as one genre of autobiographical narratives). Indeed, Gilmore rightly points out that the #MeToo movement is part of a ‘memoir boom’ (“#MeToo and the Memoir Boom: The Year in the US”).

Perhaps the most prominent publication as part of the #MeToo movement is Chanel Miller’s memoir *Know My Name*. Before the publication of this memoir, Miller was anonymized as “Emily Doe” and only known to the general public for having been sexually abused by Brock Allen Turner. At the time of the assault, neither Miller nor Turner were public figures. Turner received what many perceived as a lenient sentence, through which the case gained widespread mediatization and criticism. In this process, the publication of Emily Doe’s victim impact statement (K. J. M. Baker) sparked further extensive anger about the sentencing and solidarity for Miller. The publication of her memoir that lifted her anonymity, countering the effects of anonymity that rendered Miller “a blank screen onto which the court, the media, and strangers could project their biases about rape culture” (Gilmore, “More Than Angry” 182), sparked a new wave of the #MeToo movement. Rose McGowan, who was among the first women to publicly accuse Harvey Weinstein, published

⁶ Anne Rothe makes this claim specifically about “misery memoirs,” a genre she situates at the intersection of popular trauma culture and a turn-of-the-century memory boom. For Rothe, the principal characteristic of misery memoirs is that they are “politically anaesthetizing and do not seek to end the suffering they represent as spectacle” (83). While misery literature—often used synonymously with ‘trauma porn’—is frequently criticized along the same lines (see, for instance, Yagoda 187), a textual exploration into the supposed political anesthesia outside of an observed (but unexplored) practice of collective consumption along the lines of voyeuristic sensationalism remains absent in Rothe’s text. G. Thomas Couser, however, defends the ‘misery memoir’ genre. He places misery memoirs along the lines of “survivor testimony,” viewing its function mainly in cathartic effects for the writer (148). Missing also in his account is the political dimension of these texts, which is thoroughly explored in analyses of feminist autobiographical narratives (see, for instance, Cosslett et al.; Gilmore, *Autobiographics*; S. Smith and J. Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*); a history that I situate the #MeToo movement in.

a memoir entitled *Brave*, adding to the growing corpus of #MeToo literature. In 2021, Tarana Burke published her memoir, the subtitle of which hints at her involvement in the founding of the movement (and the narrative practice “me too”): *Unbound: My Story of Liberation and the Birth of the Me Too Movement*.

Alongside Miller’s victim impact statement, the publication of Jessica Mann’s victim impact statement is also crucial to the emergence and potency of this particular autobiographical genre in a #MeToo context. Mann was a central witness in the case *The People of the State of New York v. Harvey Weinstein* (2020). The extensively mediatized victim impact statements about the abuse perpetrated by Larry Nassar while he was a doctor for USA Gymnastics are also to be situated in this discussion, as is the publication of Rachael Denhollander’s memoir titled *What Is a Girl Worth?: My Story of Breaking the Silence and Exposing the Truth about Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics*. Further memoirs contributing to the #MeToo canon I draw on here are *Mean* by writer Myriam Gurba, which is an autobiographical coming-of-age story that focuses on the ubiquity of sexualized violence in this process, and Tanya Selvaratnam’s memoir *Nothing: A Story of Intimate Violence*, in which Selvaratnam details her experience of intimate partner violence perpetrated by Eric Schneiderman, Attorney General of New York at the time the first accusations against him were publicized.

Also of notable importance for the movement is the anthology *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture* (Gay), published in the midst of #MeToo’s first wave and contributing crucially to the construction of its central themes. Consequently, I shall consider several essays from this anthology throughout. Writer Katie Rose Guest Pryal published an autobiographical text in essay form titled *Even If You’re Broken: Essays on Sexual Assault and #MeToo*. Exploring alternative ways of autobiographical writing, Laurie Halse Anderson published a poetic memoir titled *SHOUT: The True Story of a Survivor Who Refused to be Silenced*, placed in a #MeToo context. The collections *Resistance: Righteous Rage in the Age of #MeToo* (Goyette) and *#MeToo: Rallying Against Sexual Assault and Harassment: A Women’s Poetry Anthology* (Alma) similarly explore the potency of the poetic form in this autobiographical practice. I outline the narrative construction and negotiation of shame, power, and place(lessness) in close readings of this (surely not exhausted) corpus of #MeToo literature. I also employ exemplary vignettes from further

#MeToo texts as well as include narratives from the digital realm specifically, addressing the function of several digital collectivization projects.⁷

“Me Too”: Autobiographical Narrative Practice and Collectivity

In this unorganized collective, it is particularly curious to examine what connects #MeToo narratives into a movement. First and foremost, “me too” is an autobiographical narrative in practice. Specifically, it is an autobiographical narrative in which the subject immediately places themselves admits a collective. In that, it is also an expression of solidarity. As Debra Jackson writes,

[t]he ‘too’ in the response is the central feature of the moment of mutual recognition. When I respond ‘me too’, I not only recognise her as reliable testifier, I also expose myself as a victim and make myself vulnerable to her judgment about my testimony. Our mutual vulnerability empowers each other as both epistemic and moral agents. (qtd. in Brynjarsdóttir 112)

This leads Eyja Brynjarsdóttir to argue that, “[i]n addition to the resistance to testimonial injustice, I believe #MeToo also provides resistance to hermeneutical injustice” (112). The very narrative practice of saying “me too” is already about both speaking and witnessing. This constructs the possibility for collectivity. Examining this notion, Anne-Emmanuelle Berger notes,

[t]he phrase [“me too”], in its doubly striking economy (two monosyllables spurted out like a blow), testifies to the illocutionary force of an utterance, its ‘message’ lying not so much in its content (reduced to almost nothing), as in its highly perlocutionary effect: (since) you (any ‘you’) said it, I (any ‘I’) can say it. The first-person performative has successfully replaced the third-person narratives of abuse . . . (57)

It is this practice that perhaps is most reminiscent of the second-wave feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ that the movement finds itself digging out. The collectivity in these seemingly personal narratives that the collectivizing tool “#MeToo” emphasizes in any narrative that is placed within this frame exposes these narratives as not personal after all. But, not only those who publicly tell their story of sexualized violence using the ‘me too’ hashtag produce a collective in which these ‘intimate’ accounts are public grievances of systemic, cultural issues. Rather, the quantity of stories enables and incites a recognition of collectivity among these stories. The resulting narrativization of the #MeToo movement

⁷ A number of fictional works are also closely associated with the #MeToo movement. Among these are, for instance, *The Water Cure* (Mackintosh), *Queenie* (Carty-Williams), *The Testaments: The Sequel to The Handmaid’s Tale* (Atwood) or, on the level of film, *The Assistant* (Green), *She Said* (Schrader), and *Bombshell* (Roach). However, in this thesis, I focus specifically on autobiographical narratives as their claim to truthfulness—situated vis-à-vis a politics of believability—and particular construction and performance of a ‘self’ make up, as I argue, the core dynamics of #MeToo’s specific negotiation of feminist politics regarding its strained foci: power(lessness) and (resistance to) shame.

constructs a script that allows a (meaningful) understanding of a ‘me too narrative’ to emerge as both a genre of sorts and a narrative practice. This collectivization can only take place in public, a placing that rids the stories of the notion of being ‘private.’

The public declaration of having been a victim of sexualized violence cannot be separated from the history and remaining cultural power dynamics that deem this practice a counter-practice, resisting the cultural script that displaces ostensibly meaningful conversations about sexualized violence from a victim-shaped public arena. ‘Breaking the silence’ suggests not that a topic merely was not spoken about before, but that there was a specific silence—something perpetually sustained—to be broken. The silence constructed in the notion of the public figures associated with the #MeToo movement as ‘silence breakers’ is a loud silence. It is within this context that I read descriptions of the movement like Brynjarsdóttir’s who contends that “[t]he #MeToo movement directly resists and rallies against this silencing culture; it is . . . an epistemic resistance movement” (119).

While a #MeToo narrative perhaps reads as an intimate disclosure, it is, in fact, about publicness. In its simplest description, “#MeToo reaffirmed publicly just how widespread sexual assault and harassment actually are. . . and, significantly, that these experiences are *routine* and *normalized* . . .” (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, “Introduction” 2). A version akin to that assessment can be found in almost any writing about the #MeToo movement. Also symbolized in descriptions of the movement along the lines of ‘awareness-raising’ (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir, “Introduction: Rebellion, Revolution, Reformation” 1) or ‘consciousness-raising’ (Boyle 24), it becomes clear that the #MeToo movement is about the narratives it makes public. More than any underlying activist effort, the ‘making public’ of it is already its principal movement practice. Because the #MeToo movement publicly tells and collectivizes stories about sexualized violence, it is a response to public, social, political, and legal neglect around it. As I argue throughout, the public sharing of these stigmatized narratives is the crucial movement practice through which to approach #MeToo. Utilizing autobiographical narratives to move into public conversation as its key movement practice, an inquiry into the #MeToo movement necessitates an understanding of the movement’s claim to places. Moving beyond a simplified understanding of its claim to a conversation in broad public discourse, I explore the places the narrative practices of the movement construct in and through its principal movement practice: autobiographical narratives.

Whether through the construction of the site of abuse, a performance in the courtroom, or the utilization of digital spheres to foster networks, these autobiographical narratives appear to ‘reveal’ something particularly intimate; a notion resulting out of a very particular

cultural dealing with sexuality or, more specifically, sexualized violence. This is what Rita Felski writes about as ‘confession,’ “a type of autobiographical writing which signals its intention to foreground the most personal and intimate details of the author’s life. Like consciousness-raising, the confessional text makes public that which has been private . . .” (83). Surely, such notions are ubiquitous in the #MeToo movement. As Shana MacDonald writes,

. . . many women’s performances on and off the stage included public declarations of personal truths, truths that abusers intended to remain private, for the sake of speaking out against the institutional discourse not only of Hollywood as one structure, but of larger institutional sexism and rape culture. (24)

Chanel Miller lifting her anonymity with the publication of her memoir *Know My Name*—a title that itself speaks volumes in this context—is a simple example of this. Or, to name another example, Christine Blasey Ford performs a resistance to the notion of sexualized violence as something belonging in private when, at the very beginning of her statement before the Senate Judiciary Committee, she reads out, “I am here today not because I want to be. I am terrified. I am here because I believe it is my civic duty to tell you what happened to me while Brett Kavanaugh and I were in high school”. Even more forcefully, Rose McGowan writes in the author’s note preceding her memoir, “There was never any other choice. Justice would be served. And it was. . . . A few years ago, I realized society needed to be primed to hear The Story, so I set about taking my voice of dissent public” (7). In the telling of these stories, victims of sexualized violence gain and express control over the narrative that renders them a victim. Simply put, “[s]urvivors who tell their stories author their experience rather than simply recounting it” (Serisier, “Reading Survivor Narratives” 45). The writing constructs the story as flexible and moves a seemingly static incident. This practice of movement itself performs a shift to the power dynamics of the story, as the victim is presented as the author of it.

Nevertheless, there is an unavoidable vulnerability to this public expression that stands vis-à-vis the narrative construction of agency in and through autobiographical writing. Questions of agency have been central to the study of women’s autobiography (as one example of autobiographical narratives) since its advent as a genre (S. Smith and J. Watson, “Introduction” 22). As with previous feminist movements that centered around narrative politics of autobiographical practices, these questions are part of a tension of “collective processes while questioning the sovereignty and universality of the solitary self” (5). Many of these notions have been explored thoroughly (Gilmore, *Autobiographics*; Kehily; K. M. Powell). Crucial for this purpose, Leigh Gilmore has argued that autobiographical narratives, “can be understood as a canny raid on the discourses of truth and identity. Further,

they are effective as political rhetoric precisely to the extent that they claim to ‘speak the truth’ at a particular time and in a particular place,” rejecting the notion that “coming-out narratives, confessional narratives, and consciousness-raising narratives are regressive attempts to claim a representative and mimetic function for first-person writing” (*Autobiographics* 226). The process of reading and writing (these narratives) does not represent but constructs its particular claim to truthfulness. In the context of sexualized violence, autobiographical narratives do not merely claim truthfulness but precisely reclaim the narrative in a process of authoring that performs an ownership over it.

This conceptualization of the types of narratives that constitute the #MeToo movement allows for a consideration of the activist potential in #MeToo. Further, Joan W. Scott outlines that, “[w]hat counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political” (69). This assessment indicates another unavoidable dimension of #MeToo narratives as expressions of experiences that, through their collective demand to be witnessed, participate in the construction of ‘what counts as experience.’ Leigh Gilmore also sees the vast collectivity in autobiographical narratives as the most prominent quality of the #MeToo movement, terming “the gelling of millions of diverse accounts into a collective voice that exposed systemic bias” the ‘#MeToo effect’ (*The #MeToo Effect* 4). This effect is, at its core, a particular, collective narrative practice.

Hitherto unexplored are the narrative similarities that allow for the collectivization of various autobiographical stories under the #MeToo banner. Surely, the practice of sharing connects them. But beyond that, there are noteworthy themes in the narrativization of many prominent ‘MeToo stories’ that enable the construction of this collective in the first place. These stories are not merely about sexualized violence, bounded by the timing of their exposure, but, rather, these are stories about an individual, mostly male, powerful perpetrator, abusing his power; someone who was enabled by a larger web of structures and a culture that perpetuates gendered silencing processes that render the victim seemingly powerless, having lost their voice, agency, and, metaphorically speaking, ability to move. Specifically, many #MeToo victims write about being abused by someone who previously held power over them and about being shamed then to the point of silence. In some stories, the perpetrator’s downfall marks a collective cathartic relief. The structures that have enabled the abuse of power move to the sidelines and, in some cases, judicial justice completes the cultural catharsis.

Surely, the story of Harvey Weinstein is a prime example of the latter case. Perhaps ironically, the abuse perpetrated by Weinstein and his conviction is now frequently told like

a Hollywood story: The omnipresent, all-powerful, rich, white, large producer who could be cast as a villain in one of his own movies, regularly makes or breaks Hollywood careers for young, (mostly) white, vulnerable girls and women is known to be choleric at worst, moody at best, perverse, adulterous, charismatic, and a genius. In classic ‘casting couch’ scenarios, he takes advantage of the women sent his way, sexually abusing or harassing them, with the threat of career and reputation suicide over their heads. Ultimately, he is exposed on a broad scale. The cathartic conclusion then comes when Weinstein is convicted on four counts of rape, one count of sexual assault and sentenced to 39 years in prison. In cultural discourse, it is irrelevant for which crimes exactly he was convicted. His previously silenced and shamed victims now do not have to justify the merit of their accusations. Outside of the legal realm, he is guilty of all (sexual) crimes he is accused of, making the judicial victory a collective one. On January 15, 2018, Harvey Weinstein was first photographed using a walker to walk into Manhattan Criminal Court. The iconography of it speaks volumes: the person so frequently sketched to be untouchable, invincible, and all-controlling now shows himself as weak (either because a back surgery forced him to or because he was employing this weakness as a legal strategy [Harris]). The image is particularly powerful because it works in contrast to the previous narrativizations of Weinstein; and because it works perfectly with the narrativization of his downfall.

At the time of the initial reports about Weinstein that incited the #MeToo movement, another story about a persistent predator received a surge in public attention, arguably because of the emergence of the movement: the case of USA Gymnastics and Larry Nassar. Although the first complaints about Nassar date back to the 1990s and legal investigations had preceded the #MeToo movement’s viral moment in October 2017, by the time Nassar was sentenced in December 2017 and January 2018, the trial was a dominant news story, featuring live television broadcasting of victim impact statements written in court. Later, the story would also be grounds for two documentaries, *Athlete A* (B. Cohen and Shenk) and *At the Heart of Gold* (Carr). Further, Rachael Denhollander, the first woman to accuse Nassar publicly without remaining anonymous, published a memoir about the abuse and the legal process that followed. Under the guise of medical treatment, former USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar had sexually abused several—presumably hundreds—of (underaged) athletes for decades. Since the 1990s, several athletes have raised isolated complaints against him that never resulted in an investigation. After Denhollander’s public accusation, several similar complaints were gathered and the case eventually came to trial, in which Nassar ultimately pled guilty (to seven counts of rape of minors, possession of child sexual abuse

images, and tampering with evidence). Since Denhollander, more than 500 women have publicly accused Nassar of abuse. Nassar received a de facto life sentence. Further, several other people connected to the abuse by failing to handle the accusations correctly have resigned or also been sentenced.

The narrative parallels to ‘the Weinstein story’ are striking. Nassar’s abuse also tells a story about an individual villainous perpetrator, preying on powerless victims but enabled by a structure that perpetuates both the abuse and the silencing processes that stand in the way of any interruption to it. As with Weinstein, Nassar’s downfall marks a cultural catharsis. ‘Justice’ is celebrated in a way that seemingly almost forgets about the people who enabled his abuse, as they remain side characters in the narrativization of Nassar’s victims’ victory. More so, the deeply embedded cultural norms that were the foundation of Nassar’s grooming tactics remain, grievances numbed in the seemingly cathartic victory over Nassar and Weinstein.

What I aim to point out here is not merely that the #MeToo movement has brought along a sizeable amount of (non-fictional) media productions about the story it tells and constructing stories in the process, although that certainly is a development to remark about the #MeToo movement. More so, however, I aim to lay out the narrativization of the #MeToo movement. It is, as I argue, the narrative dimension of sexualized violence that enables its collectivization. Its emergence and construction are not merely a matter of timing. Rather, the sheer number of autobiographical narratives shared since its inception draws attention, first, to the ubiquity of sexual abuse and harassment, and, secondly, to the narrative themes that come up again and again, unveiling or perhaps reemphasizing that these stories are undoubtedly of public concern. What enables the construction of #MeToo as a category is the collective revelation that the notion that the structures, practices, and affects these narratives address are in any way ‘private’ is not only a myth but a harmful function of cultural silencing mechanisms.

The marketability and consumption of some #MeToo narratives under the ‘Hollywood’ banner has made this obvious in an almost oversubscribed manner. Surely, it is somewhat ironic that an industry that has produced images and narratives that construct and perpetuate misogyny and (gendered, raced, classed) ‘rape myths,’ is narrativized at the forefront of a new form of anti-rape movement. Yet, it is perhaps this industry’s mediatization of (certain) stories about sexualized violence, rendering the #MeToo movement into a marketable entity, that has, again and repeatedly, revealed the myth of privacy and the silencing properties of the upholding of a private/public notion and, with

that, perpetuated a notably broad production and consumption of autobiographical narratives.

I write specifically about autobiographical narratives to highlight some crucial dynamics in the autobiographicalness of #MeToo stories. Leigh Gilmore contends that “[t]he ‘I’ in life writing aims for truthfulness within the constraints of memory” (*The #MeToo Effect* 13), a sentiment that unveils principal issues in the reading of autobiographical texts: That life writing—which encompasses various types of texts processing the lived experience of the author—is simply a process of making events public that occurred from a specific perspective, merely deviate in details from the ‘actual’ events due to the largely still uncertain constraints of memory. Gilmore draws on a tradition in which “[f]rom Rousseau’s *Confessions* on down, readers have been conditioned by the ideology of individualism to think of autobiography as a theater in which the self’s uniqueness, privacy, and interiority are on display” (Eakin 110). In the understanding that “self’s, uniqueness, privacy, and interiority are on display,” the process in which these are constructed in the first place is overlooked. So, left unnoticed in the notion Gilmore perpetuates here is the process through which a particular truth is constructed in the process of writing and the process of reading. It is in the autobiographical text that the author performs not only autonomy but also narrative power. “Because autobiography promotes an illusion of self-determination: *I* write my story; *I* say who I am; *I* create myself. The myth of autonomy dies hard . . .” (Eakin 43). And the myth Paul John Eakin addresses here comes to full fruition in the understanding that autobiographical texts are mere representations of a person’s (the author’s) truth as far as their memory allows.

Eakin, who explores the ‘making’ of selves through autobiographies, indicates this understanding of autobiographical texts when he reflects on his assessment of the ‘self’ in this type of writing:

I [previously] concluded, agnostically: ‘Whether the self ... is literally discovered, made ‘visible’ in autobiography, or is only invented by it as a signature, a kind of writing, is beyond our knowing, for knowledge of the self is inseparable from the practice of language’. Now, after another ten years, I find myself reluctant to speak of ‘the self,’ for the definite article suggests something too fixed and unified to represent the complexity of self-experience. (x)

A discussion about the process (and fiction) of a construction of selves shall return in an exploration about shame—an affect that is, it may seem, principally concerned with (a notion of) ‘self’ and, in #MeToo stories, often narrated. As a slippery concept for autobiographical writing, I maintain that autobiographical stories do not represent a truth (or self) but construct a story and, with that, practice a truth (and self). This understanding of autobiographicalness is in no way an assertion about the author’s intent of truthfulness or even about the narrated

event's truthfulness. Instead, it is a (re-)focusing on the practices of narrativization that is not exclusive to fictionality. Further, the events, experiences, and emotions narrated in an autobiographical text have already been narrated prior to the process of writing. As Eakin writes, ". . . narrative is not merely an appropriate form for the expression of identity; it is an identity content" (100).

In this light, Elizabeth Falconi and Kathryn Graber make a convincing case to break down the (arbitrary) distinction between storytelling and narrative practice. Quoting Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou in their understanding of stories "not just as texts, amenable to a purely formal analysis, but as socioculturally shared practices, interactionally drafted in specific local contexts" (2), Falconi and Graber highlight that storytelling happens not only within regimented frames but also in the everyday—a slippery category oftentimes signaling a move from storytelling to narrative practice. But as neither the boundaries of what constitutes 'the everyday' are clear (9) nor the assessment of when the construction of a story is regimented and as both categories hold no possibility of becoming productive for analysis, the distinction between storytelling and narrative practice crumbles. So, Falconi and Graber rhetorically ask, "Why have interactionally demarcated narratives of personal experience, displaying many of the same formal features as storytelling and some of the same pragmatic features as regimented oral performance, been treated as analytically separate?" (12).

The writings of the #MeToo movement are situated in a feminist tradition of sharing personal stories about sexualized violence. Because of this, Leigh Gilmore considers the movement "a powerful episode of narrative activism within a longstanding intersectional feminist lineage" (*The #MeToo Effect* 2). So, the autobiographical narratives that are shared through different media—including, for instance, memoirs, essays, or tweets—are products of autobiographical movement practices. I consider these autobiographical practices not merely as individual expressions of identity, but part of a process of constructing a collective activist message. So, I write about autobiographical narratives to highlight the processes of meaning-making that are an inevitable part of both the writing and (collective) reading of these texts as they construct a story. This is, I argue, a more precise way to think about what Rockwell Gray calls "the autographical mode" which requires one "to reflect, to speak, or to act with an intention which is broadly self-narrative or self-revealing" (33). With this broadness, the notion of the autobiographical becomes almost too universal to remain meaningful. Yet, a reminder of the autobiographical mode highlights the practices of narration always at play in any autobiographical revelation. To maintain a meaningful

distinction between the ubiquitous practices of self-narration and the widespread publicization of a self-revelation with perhaps at least some rhetorical aspiration, I propose the category of autobiographical narratives.

Arnaud Schmitt writes about this process of publicization as “[e]xternalizing one’s narrative” (16). This externalizing not only introduces “an unknown audience” (16) but reveals a demand to take place in public not merely as oneself or with a personal story but also to claim participation in public discourses about cultural events and structures. Janie Haaken has laid out that women’s personal narratives about domestic violence publicized in an anti-violence activism effort “[address] this political dimension of the problem, where contests emerge over the legitimacy of particular accounts and their social interpretations” (*Domestic Violence and the Psychology of Storytelling* 18). Through these autobiographical narratives, “[t]he battered women’s movement intervened in [the] cultural script [about domestic violence], recasting the characters on the stage” (19). Following the feminist tradition of publicizing personal accounts of sexualized violence, autobiographical narratives of the #MeToo movement that do not make a ‘larger’ point about sexualized violence as a sociocultural problem are scarce, if not entirely impossible, through the “#MeToo” framing.

With the context of sexualized violence, autobiographical narratives in the #MeToo movement are always already engaged in a struggle for control over this story. Or, in other words, victims of sexualized violence are engaged in a struggle for narrative power. “In the context of #MeToo as a storytelling practice; narrative activism drives narrative justice” (Gilmore, *The #MeToo Effect* 103). It is perhaps also for this reason that the autobiographical form has repeatably proven itself so alluring for feminist anti-violence efforts. Further, particularly autobiographical stories narrating trauma demand an emphasis on their narrativization as they “are habitually regarded as though they were completely unmediated, as though language, gesture, and imagery could become transparent if the experience being expressed is sufficiently horrific” (Bernstein 47). Of course, the horror of the story does not determine its mediatedness, which does not start but crucially also takes place in the process of narration.

So, to emphasize the processes of narrativization at play and encompass the crucial texts that construct the collectiveness that is ‘the #MeToo movement,’ I specifically write about autobiographical narratives. Further, a discussion about the texts of the #MeToo movement needs to always consider the intradiegetic elements that construct the story as it is being told as well as the meaning (or the process of meaning-making) of the telling of this

story—that is, its placement and its engagement with an already existing, perhaps hegemonic, narrative about sexualized violence, victims of sexualized violence, or the specific incident in question, now narrated from the victim’s perspective. This notion of autobiographical places the #MeToo movement in a particular context of feminist movement practices.

As a #MeToo collective emerges, or rather, a #MeToo practice comes to be understood as a meaningful category, a broader narrative about sexualized violence, the process of speaking about sexualized violence, and the notion of being a victim of sexualized violence is constructed. In this process, the autobiographical form is crucial for the movement. An in-depth engagement with principal texts of and since the #MeToo movement exhibits their intertextuality. Given the movement’s reliance on a particular autobiographical practice, this underscores David McCooey’s assessment that “autobiography acts as a large, extended conversation in a community too large to commune with itself” (25). This is not only true for autobiographies—if ‘autobiography’ merely refers to books that were given a notion of legitimacy through their (print) publication due to the publisher’s presumption of their economic marketability and, ultimately, profitability—but to autobiographical narratives more broadly.

2. The Dynamics of Being (A)Shamed and Narrative Resistance

In her memoir *Notes on a Silencing*, Lacy Crawford includes, as a paratext preceding the author's note, a quote from Maggie Nelson's book *The Argonauts*, "I told you I wanted to live in a world in which the antidote to shame is not honor, but honesty." With the repeated expression of this hope, Crawford places the practice of her memoir amid this desire to model honesty as the antidote to shame and, ultimately, rid herself of her shame. Throughout her memoir, Crawford details her experience of being sexually assaulted as a 15-year-old student at St. Paul's, a boarding school in New Hampshire, in 1990. As the inclusion and placement of Nelson's quote would indicate, shame is a prominent theme throughout Crawford's story. She writes about how sexual assault is "to the victim, at least, [not] about sex at all, but about cruelty exacted in domination and shame" (Crawford 8) and how shame leads victims to think that "*I can survive this as long as nobody else ever knows*" (162).

Tarana Burke ends the prologue to her memoir *Unbound: My Story of Liberation and the Birth of the Me Too Movement* by stating that her book is

The story of how empathy for others . . . starts with empathy for that dark place of shame where we keep our stories, and where I kept mine. . . . There is no *here* without where I was: stuck and scared and ashamed, a place I remained until the need to care for someone else's shame saved me too. (17)

Using the image of a place, Burke rhetorically connects shame to darkness, immobility, and fear. Albeit with the focus on caring for someone else, Burke reveals a similar sentiment to Crawford when she pairs the ability to move to a new 'place' with a particular collectiveness and, thus, openness. Stating "[t]here is no *here* without where I was," Burke also indicates that there is a linearity to her story that describes both her shame and her resistance to it. According to Burke, this is "the essence of 'me too'" (17). The practice of constructing an autobiographical narrative allows for the production of this linearity, in which a narrative of shame as something to be overcome or, at least, resisted can emerge. To describe a debilitating vicious cycle of silence, Burke uses the metaphor of a "dark place of shame," in which stories like hers are kept. Ultimately, a collectivized breaking of that silence enabled the movement that Burke alludes to when she writes, "[t]here is no *here* without where I was." Throughout her memoir, Burke tells a story about healing through activism that stands in contrast to a childhood and youth of shame, fear, silence, and solitude.

In this chapter, I argue that the (resistance to) shame as it is performed in the #MeToo movement is tied to a (re-)negotiation of places. Prior to any resistances, shame incites a de-placing, constructing an affective 'placelessness' that renders those shamed powerless, restricted in motion. Yet, the #MeToo movement performs moments of resistance and, with

that, a (re-)claim to the construction of places that enable movement. Beyond Burke's metaphor of a 'dark place' in which shame happens—a place that, in Burke's memoir, shame can be left in—the sites connected to shaming and shaming are crucial to theorizing both shame and feminist resistance(s) in the context of sexual violence. This occurs through several levels.

First, shame—feeling and being (a)shamed—incites a retraction or, in other words, placelessness; it is an affective being 'out of place.' As Sara Ahmed contends, "[t]he very physicality of shame—how it works on and through bodies—means that shame also involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces, as bodies 'turn away' from the others who witness the shame" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 103). In its broadest sense, Luna Dolezal claims, "[s]hame is about visibility" (15) because it arises through being the subject to an unwanted visibility. Yet, it results in a desire for a particular invisibility. So, as Jill Locke argues that "repetitive shame wears on the subject's ability to inhabit, much less participate in and transform, the political world" (153). Feeling shame and being shamed is precisely *not* being in place. Perhaps most pointedly worded by Sandra Bartky:

The heightened self-consciousness that comes with emotions of self-assessment may become, in the shame of the oppressed, a stagnant self-obsession. Or shame may generate a rage whose expression is unconstructive, even self-destructive. In all these ways, shame is profoundly disempowering. (*Femininity and Domination* 97)

Secondly, shame cannot be conceptualized without an engagement with the spheres in and through which shame can emerge and shaming can occur. In a reference to Audre Lorde's infamous claim "... the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house", Bonnie Morris argues that "... public shaming is the chief master's tool ..." (202). Her analysis of the 'politics of shaming' thus centers gender (specifically, gendered exclusion) and race. Shame, she argues, controls female behavior through its ordering function. It separates and thus rewards certain behaviors while punishing others. Morris states, "The prevailing notion of female modesty and the association of women with the private sphere—the home—meant that a harsh whipping, ducking, and scolding held in the public arena would be especially humiliating to the accused women" (203). So, for Morris, shaming occurs specifically 'in the public arena.' More comprehensively, though, I argue that shaming works through the public because it needs to be a collective social tool. The power of shame lies precisely in its affective quality to incite immobility in terms of resistance or justice and threaten ostracization. So, shaming depends on a cultural script that constructs what is deemed shameful and this cultural script depends on its negotiation in the public sphere. The shame that occurs in the context of (gendered) sexual violence is the result of a stable cultural script that perpetuates a constant and consistent practice of shaming victims

of sexual violence (Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*; Fayard). Because this shame is experienced as a feeling related to the self—rather than broad cultural frames of power, something I shall explore in the proceeding chapter—it incites a retraction and reorientation.

The daring implication that shame only exists in the public demands further consideration. While there is an important connection between the places of the public sphere and shame, the experience of shame is not tied to any specific place. One can experience the bodily sensation of shame anywhere. There is, however, always a notional ‘Other.’: “Shame as an emotion requires a witness: even if a subject feels shame when it is alone, it is the imagined view of the other that is taken on by a subject in relation to itself” (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 105–06).

Thirdly, although shame is always preceded by acts of shaming, as I have laid out just now, it masks itself as an internal, perhaps even ‘private’ affect. This specific quality, I argue, is the dimension through which shame/shaming functions. Representations of these dynamics are plentiful in (affective) theorizations of shame (Benhabib 110–11; Broucek 46–49; Sedgwick 136). Sara Ahmed describes shame as, “an intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself. . . . [S]hame impresses upon the skin, as an intense feeling of the subject ‘being against itself.’” (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 103). Yet, when we regard the cultural script necessarily engraved in any shame—as the awareness of having done something shameful is never before or beyond this cultural script—the theorization that shame is ultimately an affect resulting out of a self-evaluation (“how the self feels about itself”) is misleading. A focus on the affective dimension of feeling ashamed runs the risk of individualizing shame, which masks the cultural practices that precede the process of self-evaluation. Such a theorization would reproduce the dynamics of shame that renders those shamed incapable of evaluating the shamefulness of their action or being outside of the omnipresent hegemonic cultural script that shames them.

Shame is ultimately about an outside gaze upon oneself that adopts the principal narratives with which a perceived ‘Other’ might shame oneself. Crucial here is not merely the dynamics by which one practices an ‘outside’ gaze upon oneself but the narratives with which that gaze is practiced. Amidst dominant cultural dynamics that shame, for example, women for (their) sexuality, a victim of sexual harassment or assault might adopt a view in which she seemingly shames herself for her part in a shameful sexual encounter. Yet, the narratives with which they practice this shame (“bound up with how the self feels about itself”) are not theirs after all. Here, shame is an example of Michel Foucault’s contention that

[t]here is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be at minimal cost. (*Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77* 155)

Upholding power not only does not require physical violence but also requires little other resources as long as there is a continuously upheld hegemonic script with which one views—and potentially shames—oneself, regulating behavior. With this script, a gaze that unleashes this particular kind of self-surveillance suffices to maintain dominant power dynamics.

When Jean-Paul Sartre writes, “I am ashamed of what I *am*. Shame, therefore, realizes an intimate relation of myself to myself” (301) but also notes, “I am ashamed of myself *as I appear* to the Other” (302), both dynamics at the same time are what constitutes shame. Decisively, shame is not about oneself. It is about the disciplining narratives that cultural power dynamics instill, masking shame as an affect in which a self is concerned with itself when it is never an individual affect or practice.

To illustrate the dynamics of these three layers, I turn to Foucault’s (classic) Panopticon, as the keywords ‘discipline’ and ‘power’ might have already suggested. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault elucidates how the most effective ‘power-over’ is disciplinary power (170). He draws on the Panopticon, a system of control in which prisoners could be observed by merely one security guard at all times but are left unaware of when or if they are being watched, to illustrate his idea of disciplinary power. While extensively laying out the mechanism of society to establish a certain order and (force to) conformity, Foucault uses the panopticon as a metaphor to understand a transition from ‘sovereign power’ to ‘disciplinary power’:

The Panopticon’s solution to this problem is that the productive increase of power can be assured only if, on the one hand, it can be exercised continuously in the very foundations of society, in the subtlest possible way, and if, on the other hand, it functions outside these sudden, violent, discontinuous forms that are bound up with the exercise of sovereignty. . . . [T]he domain of panopticism is . . . that region of irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations . . . Panopticism is the general principle of a new ‘political anatomy’ whose object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline. (*Discipline and Punish* 208)

For Foucault, disciplinary power rests on the understanding that the constant threat of surveillance in the Panopticon promotes a certain conformability, one that anchors itself within a person to the extent that it both conceals its domination and makes itself more stable against resistance. Even in isolation or in the absence of direct scrutiny, the threat of scrutiny and exclusion governs behavior. Like the threat of surveillance that promotes self-discipline to conformity, the metaphorical surveillance that the threat of shame can instill incites a self-constraint and self-beratement that stabilizes the cultural script around ‘acceptable’ behavior.

Sonia Kruks brings Foucault's panopticism in conversation with Simone de Beauvoir's ethnographic work on shame. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir examines the gendered aspects of shame that contribute to the oppression of women that defines them as 'the Other.' Focusing largely on shamed experiences in childhood and adolescence, de Beauvoir argues that, "[an adolescent girl's] inferiority was sensed at first merely as a deprivation; but the lack of a penis has now become defilement and transgression. So she goes onward towards the future, wounded, shameful, culpable" (*The Second Sex* 326). For Kruks, the "self-surveillance and self-discipline that Foucault attributes to the panoptic gaze [are the] effect not directly of the gaze itself so much as of the shame with which it forces her to see 'herself'" (64), connecting it to the female experience de Beauvoir lays out. Foucault and de Beauvoir come together where the mere "exercise of power upon" develops further into an internalization; where "panopticism of daily life and the 'interior' experiences of shame they induce are crucial" (64).

Performances of shame resilience and resistance intersect with these dynamics. As being shamed incites retraction, demanding the shamed subject (as they cease to be a subject after all) to retract, resistance to shaming needs to utilize the spheres from which the dynamics of shaming demand to exclude themselves. It is with this consideration that I read Lucy Crawford's proclamation for honesty to be the "antidote to shame." These potential practices of (collectivized) resistance, I argue, engage in a (re-)shaping of places given that shaming processes and power relations construct places through exclusion (of, for instance, gendered subjects and their ability to claim experiences of sexualized violence).

Crawford and Burke's writing about shame in the paratexts of their autobiographical narratives are merely two introductory examples of the prominence of shame discussions in the #MeToo discourse that cannot be overstated. In a poem titled "closeted shame," which is part of the poetic memoir *SHOUT: The True Story of a Survivor Who Refused to be*, Laurie Anderson writes,

The taste of shame smells
like stubborn vomit in your hair
lingering no matter how often you wash it
sometimes you have to shave
yourself bald (31)

Here, she explores the comprehensive effects of shame on a self through different bodily senses and sensations. Anderson describes shame as persistent, requiring a bodily alteration to "start again," because it resists simple rejections. The varied sensory imagery here underlines both the tenacity of shame once it is experienced as well as the disgust one then might have for oneself. Comparing it to vomit, Anderson also hints at the internalization

of shame as that which is impossible to ‘wash off’—to reject—comes from within/oneself. Yet, in the image of having shame *on* oneself as vomit in one’s hair, it remains external enough to allow resistance. That resistance, in Anderson’s poetry, requires some radicalness. Further, reading hair as a symbol of femininity, it also requires an alteration—perhaps rejection—of one’s femininity to, as she writes, “start again.”

Given the well-documented connection between (internalizing) shame and sexualized violence, the ubiquity of shame declarations in #MeToo narratives appears hardly surprising. As Claire McKinnley argues, #MeToo narratives need to be regarded within the context of shame and stigma around (female) sexuality, or rather, sexualized violence. She further contends that,

When victims share their stories of assault, they simultaneously challenge two aspects of the construction of gender and sex even while risking and even experiencing the negative consequences of stigma. First, targets of coercion refuse to be reduced to their sex. Speaking out can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim one’s value and intentionality or a recuperation of a self as subject. Narrating experience requires people to claim their existence as a subject because they are both recounting an event and providing its meaning and potential interpretation. . . . Second, those who narrate their experience are creating the capacity for new community formation. This community formation involves inevitable risks and disagreements. (McKinney 86–87)

McKinnley addresses here that the practice of speaking out not only performs a self because it recounts an event and struggles for narrative power but also because it authors it. In this process, victims claim authority over their story. This, argues McKinnley, holds a potential for collectivization, as any story shared may foster a communal exchange. This potential, however, does not exist without the possibility of disbelief.

What is particularly prominent about shame in #MeToo narratives is not merely the clear and sometimes extensive acknowledgment of the victim’s shame or the dominant critique of it, but the specific placing of shame as it is constructed through the practices of #MeToo narratives. Rather than aiming for a definition of shame within the #MeToo context, the possibility of which is heavily debatable, I am interested in the placement of shame and the practices connected to it.

To illustrate, in *Athlete A*, a Netflix documentary about the USA Gymnastics sexual abuse scandal and former team doctor Larry Nassar, Rachael Denhollander recalls the victim impact statements given during the criminal case proceedings, stating, “Every time [prosecutor] Angela [Povilaitis] stood up and said, ‘Survivor XYZ is coming forward, and she has decided to speak publicly,’ that was just an incredibly powerful statement every single time. Because it meant that they were able to put the shame not on themselves, but on their abuser” (B. Cohen and Shenk 01:25:27). Denhollander also includes this statement in her memoir (249). Lacy Crawford wishes for honesty as the “antidote to

shame,” Tarana Burke writes about finding herself in a new place after caring for someone else’s shame helps her to heal hers. Laurie Anderson opens the possibility of radical change (to oneself) to reject shame. And Rachael Denhollander views the replacing of shame in the act of giving a victim impact statement in court and being publicly identified while doing so. Here, shame emerges as connected to silence and silencing. Any process aiming to disrupt, dismantle, or replace shame is then tied to a practice that resists (being) silence(d). In that process, a place to be heard is necessarily demanded, created, and claimed.

In a study on the depiction of female bodies in literary rape-revenge narratives, Lili Pâquet first identifies two and later three “options for fantasy therapy” (393): physical violence, legal retaliation, and “political power to ‘name and shame’” (393). For Pâquet, the public ‘breaking of silence’ is “a solution” that is ultimately “a fantasy that assumes the victim has political power over her rapists [which] does not work without the cooperation of patriarchal institutions” (397). While this does not render justice in a judicial sense impossible, it does rule out any possibility of overarching empowerment, as any striving for it can resist but not entirely escape patriarchal structures. Following Pâquet, the empowerment gained from ‘naming and shaming’ a perpetrator then remains fantastical, alongside the idea of actually holding political power. Within Pâquet’s conceptualization, change remains entirely impossible. If any type of empowerment is not attainable through a political power that forgoes patriarchal institutions, then the breakdown of these institutions can also only remain a fantasy. The analytically dangerous implication that any sociocultural institution is *inherently* patriarchal, which Pâquet’s argument creates, only serves to uphold these power dynamics.

Instead, what identifies the moving possibility of ‘naming and shaming’ are the moments of disruption it produces. The practice of naming and shaming an abuser disrupts the shame of sexual abuse because it disrupts its silencing aspect. This disruption, then, creates a possibility for movement, illustrated and perhaps initiated through the movement of shame. The shame that is attached to the experience of sexual violence does not dissolve. Rather, it turns from a debilitating affect (shame) into a practice (shaming). However, shame always follows a practice: the initial practice of shaming a victim of sexual abuse that the #MeToo movement calls out and responds to. Rather than merely a fantasy of empowerment, I read a victim’s practice of ‘naming and shaming’ as an act of resistance to the immobility of affective and embodied shame in a victim’s (self-)experience.

However, this practice of ‘naming and shaming’ is not at the forefront of the #MeToo movement. In an interview with Trevor Noah, Tarana Burke reiterates that “If, as a by-

product of people coming forward and telling their truth, then there's justice that happens . . . then that's fine. But our goal is really to support the survivors" (*The Daily Show*). This approach has also received criticism. Jessica Valenti, a columnist for *The Guardian*, for instance, asks, "Why have a list of victims when a list of perpetrators could be so much more useful?" (qtd. in Saguy 96). Abigail Saguy draws attention to a social media campaign in France that is now frequently referred to as the 'French #MeToo.' #BalanceTonPorc "loosely translated as 'squeal on your pig' or 'out your pig'" (7) preceded the hashtag #MeToo by a day. Regarding these campaigns in light of their narrative practices, #BalanceTonPorc reveals a stronger focus on shaming.

The narrative practice that is "#metoo" first and foremost is an act of solidarity and, in other steps, shame resistance. Stating "me too," within the context of the now-established movement, is a statement principally centering oneself in connection to another victim. In this construction of an affective collective, the perpetrator is given minimal space. Rather, the (introductory) narrative frames the public expression as focused on the collective 'me.' With that, the shaming properties à la "#BalanceTonPorc" are already limited. Unsurprisingly, most #MeToo narratives either do not name their perpetrator or do not engage in argumentation to condemn their actions. Rather, these narratives focus on the victims themselves negotiating their shame.

The centrality of descriptions of shame and shaming processes attached to not only the experiences of sexual assault and harassment but the declaration of these events in various spheres (judicial, professional, personal) indicate a demand for a further theorization of shame. Given the prevalence of gendered dynamics in sexual violence discourses in general and the #MeToo movement specifically, this theorization is also beholden to critically assess the relevance of gender in shame and shaming. Particularly in feminist theory, shame is understood as a powerful regulative tool that is not only "closely entangled with gender subjectification" (Shefer and Munt 146), but functioning specifically to uphold these. Martha Nussbaum describes shame as "the painful emotion that responds to [the] uncovering" of an "'abnormal' weakness" (*Hiding from Humanity* 173). Relevant, then, is not only what is explicitly shamed but what is culturally framed within the ideas of an 'abnormal' demanding hiding or, in other words, what is created and upheld as shameful. If gendered processes behind what is deemed shameful and what is deemed acceptable are culturally dominant, then shame functions specific to gender relations and it is hence in the interest of feminism to dismantle, annihilate, or redefine shame.

Debra Bergoffen, for instance, argues that

Though shame is a feeling of self-betrayal, the self that is betrayed is ambiguous. As a social self beholden to its culture's scripts, it shames itself for violating them. As a self-asserting its independence, it shames itself for betraying its principles by succumbing to the demand to conform. In the first case, shame is a powerful tool for enforcing and re-enforcing social norms. (2)

She further outlines that dominant patriarchal frames shape this cultural script. Ultimately, what is considered shameful and consequently shamed is hence a question of power, a notion and connection I shall discuss below. Bergoffen highlights the "social self" in relation to shame. For her, the experience of shame depends on a (social) sense of self that reflects on itself, a similar sentiment to Ahmed's assessment that shame is "bound up with how the self feels about itself" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 103). Notably, the concept of the (social) self deserves further attention.

Shame and the Self

It appears undoubtedly true that "... no single view of the way in which the self is defined in society predominates, nor is one likely to be forthcoming" (Bakhurst and Sypnowich, "Introduction: Problems of the Social Self" 1). George H. Mead has famously suggested that the self is not only a biological phenomenon but a social one. In Mead's theory, the development of the self is a process that depends on social practices:

I have been presenting the self and the mind in terms of a social process, as the importation of the conversation of gestures into the conduct of the individual organism, so that the individual organism takes these organized attitudes of the others called out by its own attitude, in the form of its gestures, and in reacting to that response calls out other organized attitudes in the others in the community to which the individual belongs. (186)

If understood as social, the specific self-consciousness of the self that Ahmed writes about in her understanding of shame is social as well. Self-consciousness, after all, depends on comparison and is thus always relational (Lewis 53). Francis Broucek notes the connection between self and shame, arguing that "[s]hame suggests that the self is a relational and contextual structure; it is dependent on the maintenance of coordinates ... locating us firmly in the interpersonal field" (7).

Erving Goffman's work is also considered highly influential for an understanding of the self. Goffman not only views the self as a social phenomenon but a situational one. He writes, "[t]he self, then, as a performed character, ... is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited" (Goffman 253). Thus, Goffman's conceptualization highlights not only the process of the self but enables an understanding of a multiplicity of selves. Since the concept of self eludes a clear conceptualization, so does shame. While it may be tempting to ascribe a certain inevitability to both, the self that is disappointed and

responds with the heightened, painful self-awareness that is crucial to shame is as constructed and dependent on a continuous cultural re-stabilizing as any idea of shame is. It hence remains crucial to consider the self as always a social self in that it is never beyond or outside the realms of culture.

Simone de Beauvoir's now infamous argument that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (qtd. in Bakhurst and Sypnowich, "Introduction: Problems of the Social Self" 6) encapsulates that "we are social selves because our very capacities to think and act are themselves socially constituted" (5). Instead of presuming the possibility or existence of a self that is generally autonomous but influenced by its role and identity-categorization in society, Bakhurst and Sypnowich describe the conceptualization of a social self that "can exist only in social space" (5). The very concept of a self can thus only describe the socially constructed categories with which the social self is aimed to be understood. It is thus not only the subject that is a social construction (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 3; Foucault, "The Subject and Power"; McLaren) but also (the notion of) the self. As Diana Coole writes, "[i]t is irrevocably situated and its identity inseparable from its values and beliefs, which in turn arise less from acts of pure choice than from shared cultural horizons and habitual practices" (124).

In a discussion about the gendered self, Diana Coole turns to Foucault, as Judith Butler also does in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* to (now famously) argue for the performativity of gender. Coole points out that, following Foucault, the notion of the self is a question of power. As Foucault writes, "... it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, can be identified and constituted as individuals" (qtd. in Coole 125). Following a postmodernist conceptualization of the self, the self is not influenced or oppressed by power but constructed by it. So instead of asking "the question of power . . . where the integrity of the self might be threatened," it has already arisen "at the level where [selves] are discursively constructed" (127). Similarly, Bakhurst and Sypnowich argue that "... the fundamental powers at the heart of our identity as persons can exist only in social space" (5).

Within the scope of this study, I am specifically concerned with the narrated self, as my focus is on the autobiographical writings of the #MeToo movement. To start, the self in autobiographical narratives is as much a constructed one as a self outside of autobiographical practices. Judith Butler suggests that the process of self-narration continuously constructs the self. They write about self-narration as "giving an account of oneself" to an Other in which this 'Other' is not necessarily singular but the (culturally specific) set of norms that

prescribes the frame within which recognizability is possible (Butler, “Giving an Account of Oneself” 22). The self is thus already dispossessed in the process of giving an account of itself through the same (discursive) processes that construct it in the first place (26). Especially evident in the narrated self in autobiographical writings, this is also a question of memory (Fivush and Haden). In many feminist writings, memory is also considered to be part of a social practice⁸ (E. Anderson et al.; Brison). Consequently, the process of autobiographical writing within the #MeToo movement is not merely an isolated practice of self-depiction but, rather, a construction of a narrated self, embedded in social practices and collective identities. This understanding also opens the potential for the collectivization of shame.

Shame, Sexualized Violence, and (In)Evitability

Shame is, first and foremost, a political phenomenon masking as a personal, perhaps even intimate, affect. “Shame and shaming processes are personal and political, constituting powerful material and discursive performances of the long-standing and still salient feminist dictum ‘the personal is political’” (Shefer and Munt 145–146). Accordingly, experiences of shame and their placement and potential performative rejections/resistance, especially as they are collectively expressed or collectivized, engage with, reflect on, and shape the social

⁸ Albeit consistently presented as something deeply personal, especially in autobiographical (trauma) narratives, memory as not merely something ‘individual.’ Rather as, among others, Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith have laid out, cultural memory is influential to the self-narration, the possibilities of narration, and, overall, processes of meaning-making (in relation to gender). Instead of mere episodic depictions of memory, autobiographical writings are mediated narratives of happenings “about a self that has an emotional stake in the event and its consequences” (Fivush 85). These depend on and practice a construction of memory as something deeply personal now shared through the process of writing. Although presented with particular authority, the mediated memory allows no assessment of its accuracy. Further, the notion of accuracy in memory is analytically strenuous in the first place given that there is, as I contend, no un-mediated memory (Radstone and Hodgkin 9–10) and no memory before narration. The processes of narration may uncover that memories are not merely personal (regardless if they are shared or not). Instead, it is in the process of the narrativizing of memories that, for instance, “women’s individual experience becomes understood by women as linked to wider social and economic issues that then in turn changes the woman’s self-representation” (Reading 203), a process Janice Haaken has termed “transformative remembering” (*Pillar of Salt* 14).

I consider autobiographical narratives not as a demonstration of memory but a performance of memory. While memory gaps might be addressed especially in writings about trauma, the authority of an autobiographical narrative’s author depends to a great extent on the believability of their memory. Hence, autobiographical narratives put forth a notion of precise memory—a notion that is, of course, fictitious. Particularly in the context of sexualized violence narratives, authors of autobiographical narratives respond to a history in which there is a (gender-specific) systemic disbelief of victims’ memories (Haaken *Pillar of Salt*). In autographical stories “[m]emory is not simply about recalling what happened” (Reading 203) but, rather, about the claim to (narrative) agency.

processes that produce and place shame in the first place. Following Tamara Shefer and Sally Munt, a resistance to shame and shaming is both personal and political. However, the usefulness of ‘political,’ especially in dichotomy to ‘personal,’ appears questionable. Indeed, there is no shame outside of or “*prior to* culture” (Heller 215). Merely regarding the relevance of gender (itself a cultural phenomenon) in relation to shame outlines that despite the desire for privacy that feeling (a)shamed incites, it is neither a private emotion nor a mere biological phenomenon that would not be beholden to the power dynamics that construct and shape cultural practices.

Perhaps more trenchant than Shefer and Munt’s assessment is Bergoffen’s argument that “. . . shame operates on two levels: one is phenomenological, the other is cultural and moral” (4). Her argument here rests on a specific example: Jean-Paul Sartre’s story “The Look.” What is clear in Sartre’s story, as Bergoffen argues, is that shame is concerned with a specific self-consciousness: a heightened awareness of ourselves and how we might be looked upon. This phenomenological level explains shame to the extent that we judge ourselves because we have an awareness of a potential or perhaps imagined judgment of others. However, the cultural and moral level Bergoffen addresses is what dictates the (imagined) ‘Other’ through which we see and judge ourselves, which is not a neutral, unmediated assessment of ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’ Rather, it is an unstable cultural script.

At the core of the research on shame in feminist theory is, ultimately, not primarily the phenomenological experience of shame but “a consideration of the social and political deployment and manipulation of shame, and the reported divergence in the shame experience itself, which feminists have attributed to its manifestation through, among others, gender” (Fischer 1). What Clara Fischer calls the “*politics of shame*” (1) describes, essentially, the way shame is collectively practiced, constructing and stabilizing sets of norms in the process. One focus of feminist writings, specifically in psychological realms, has been the “silencing and ‘othering’ function of shame in relation to experiences of gender-based violence” (Shefer and Munt 147). This includes a focus on the cultural narratives that “shape the overriding entanglement of rape with shame” (Weiss qtd. in Shefer and Munt 147). This entanglement focuses not on a cultural shaming of perpetrators but on the shame experienced by victims of sexualized violence. With its connection to sexuality, which also carries a historically extensive connection to gendered shaming dynamics, the shame a victim of rape or other forms of sexualized violence experiences has emerged to be considered not only widely spread but somewhat self-evident. This self-evidence only serves to uphold the culturally constructed and consistently upheld connection between sexualized violence and

shame, implicitly perpetuating that being a victim of sexualized violence is perhaps not inherently but surely inescapably shameful. It is, however, in the hands of a feminist conception of shame to consistently think through the understanding of shame as socially constructed. This carries the destabilization of the self-evidence of the connection between rape and shame.

The connection between shame and sexualized violence should first and foremost serve to underline that sexualized violence is a distinct form of violence.⁹ A perpetrator of sexualized violence has claimed a right to something culturally considered and (oftentimes) experienced as particularly intimate and vulnerable. Expressing this experience—for instance in the legal realm, orally in a personal environment, or through literature—thus requires a distinct disclosure. Given that expressing these experiences and the shame experienced as a result of having been sexually violated is a core practice through which a performance of shame resistance can be constructed, the idiosyncrasy of the disclosure that sexualized violence requires contributes to the de-placing practices—and, consequently, the placelessness—specific to sexualized violence. Reading shame as a process enables a questioning of the social dynamics that uphold it and produce its affective properties as well as connected practices, particularly of (spatially) retracting and being silent/silenced.

Diana Taylor argues that feminist efforts to counteract sexual violence need to resist a neoliberal individualization that promotes an individual resilience to humiliation that ultimately does little more than victim-blaming. Instead, as Taylor points out:

Feminist innovation aimed at countering individuation will focus on mining, creating, and experimenting with practices that oppose and therefore possess the potential to undermine the logic of individuation—in other words, collective, inclusive, public, and, in light of the nature of sexual violence as an embodied violation, corporeal practices. (“Humiliation as a Harm of Sexual Violence: Feminist versus Neoliberal Perspectives” 447)

With a focus on practices that promote collectivity, Taylor’s argument brings us back to the collective potential of autobiographical practices. While Taylor focuses on humiliation, which she rightly differentiates from shame, the premise she puts forth can be applied to both experiences nonetheless. Shame and humiliation both “individuate” (439), so a collectivizing effort represents a disruption. Considering the practice of shaming, which is

⁹ Among others, Foucault has (famously) disputed this—an argument I shall discuss further below. Much of feminist literature on this rests on the assessment that sexualized violence is distinct from other forms of violence because it foregrounds the dynamics of gendered domination at play, positioning rape as the pinnacle of patriarchal violence (Brownmiller; Cahill *Rethinking Rape* 2; MacKinnon *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 184). I contend that sexualized violence is especially associated with shame through the culturally dominant linkage between (a victim’s) sexuality and sexualized violence. This, of course, also stands in a gender-specific context in which women’s sexuality specifically has historically been regulated through the inflation of shame. Consequently, the shame that may be experienced as a result of having been sexually violated is specific to these dynamics.

largely absent from Taylor's analysis, allows for a reconsideration of the clear differentiation between shame/shaming and humiliation. Taylor first turns to Avishai Margalit, who argues that while humiliation targets someone's identity, shaming targets someone's actions (or lack thereof) (438). Given the instability of this distinction, the line between shaming and humiliation seems blurred.

Taylor further turns to Lisa Guenther, who argues that humiliation involves dehumanization and subsequent exclusion (439). For Guenther, humiliation describes a process of isolation more so than shame, for which the shamed subject's relation to others/the Other remains foregrounded. While shame, for Guenther, describes the Other's gaze upon oneself, humiliation is the process through which the subject is dehumanized to the point of desubjectification. This distinction, however, appears both somewhat arbitrary and short-sighted. Humiliation is as relational as shaming, as it also depends on a subject's degradation based on the specific cultural context that frames a repertoire of supposed shameful or humiliating acts, enabling shaming or humiliation in the first place. Understanding humiliation as having passed the threshold of shaming toward not only exclusion but dehumanization makes the processes of humiliation no less relational than those of shame. Guenther's distinction rests on an understanding of shame that reduces it to the affective sensation of the shamed subject. However, shame is not merely a subject's preoccupation with the Other's gaze or a discomfort with the inability to control this gaze. Rather, the notion of 'the Other' here is crucial as it uncovers shaming as a powerful regulatory tool, given that the (presumed) gaze is culturally constructed on the basis of what is (hegemonically) deemed shameful. So, shame is effectively "used to enforce a culture's values . . ." (Bergoffen 5) and depends on (the threat of) exclusion or, taken to its extreme, dehumanization. The process of desubjectification is inextricably tied to shame insofar that the possibilities of shame reveal the instability of the (autonomous) subject to begin with.

Martha Nussbaum explains the connection (and distinction) of shame and humiliation by contending that humiliation is "the active, public face of shame. To humiliate someone is to expose them to shame; and to shame someone is, in most cases, to humiliate them (at least if the shaming is severe enough)" (*Hiding from Humanity* 203). One clear example of this kind of humiliation is slut-shaming. "Slut-shaming works as a way to embarrass, humiliate, and 'police' women and girls for real or suspected sexual activity that is not considered socially acceptable" and is thus ultimately "about the control of women's sexuality" (Ralston 5–6). The effectiveness of slut-shaming depends on the rendering of certain sexual activities as shameful (for certain people) and that the public exposure of this

behavior—be it factual or presumed—is deemed acceptable. Slut-shaming is also discussed in the context of #MeToo (Maruna and Pali; Ralston). Further, the overall phenomenon of ‘victim-blaming’ also illustrates the issue of humiliation in connection to sexualized violence.

The narration of encountering comments after pursuing legal action against Brock Allen Turner in Chanel Miller’s memoir *Know My Name* is an example of this. Upon the publication of news articles prior to the trial, Miller describes her experience scrolling through the articles’ comments. In italics, she includes several, presumably exemplary, comments.

*He was only nineteen! She hooked up with a freshman? Doesn't that make her the predator? Haven't you ever heard of gang rape in India. There are women out there suffering real abuse and you want to call this assault. Bored suburban kids can't keep it in their pants. Lame. It's not like he dragged her. If she had a boyfriend why wasn't he there? Mother of the year award. What kind of mom dumps her two daughters at a frat party? Not trying to blame the victim but something is wrong if you drink yourself to unconsciousness . . . She didn't even go to Stanford. Did she pass out with her underwear off while peeing? Whatever happened to the buddy system? I, for one, am not convinced there was a crime of the felony magnitudes charged here, and possibly no crime at all aside from consensual lewd behavior. Did he give her a roofie? If not, why would any woman get so drunk? I have never allowed myself to get so drunk that I don't know what I am doing. (C. Miller, *Know My Name* 45)*

While it is clear that these are separate comments, the array does not differentiate them, nor allows for a definite conclusion where one ends and the next one begins. Through this rhetorical device, Miller positions these reactions as one condemning collective as opposed to singular, individual opinions. This collectivizes them to indicate a larger, general attitude and highlights this sentiment rather than the specificity of each comment.

Ultimately, Miller describes the experience of encountering these reactions—or rather, these kinds of reactions—as degrading:

That night I understood a few things to be true: I knew he led the Oakwood team to state championship two years in a row. I knew he was a heavily recruited athlete, a dominant swimmer, who finished second in the 200-yard backstroke. I knew there were multiple jokes made about breaststroke. I knew they called me finger lickin' good. I knew I did not deserve help, because this was not real trauma. He was a kid, not a criminal. Accomplished, not dangerous. He was the one who lost everything. I was just the nobody it happened to. (45)

In her experience, a substantial part of the public reaction to her experience of sexual violence was concerned with the identity of the perpetrator while her identity was deflated as ‘the victim.’ As she describes, this kind of humiliation at least partly influenced how she thought about herself, emphasized by the way she summarizes the reactions as things she “understood . . . to be true.” At this point, Miller’s identity remained anonymous and her declaration that she fears “[i]f anyone ever found out, I understood I’d be publicly disgraced, permanently branded” (45) indicates the silencing effect of shaming. This example serves to

illustrate Nussbaum's assessment that humiliation is the "active, public face of shame," despite that, to the public, Miller was anonymous. What she narrates in this part of her memoir reveals an experience of humiliation through the dynamics of shame.

Viewing shame as not merely an affect but necessarily including the (social) practice of shaming renders a distinction between humiliation and shame hardly useful. Instead, I employ shame specifically because it is a broader concept (M. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity* 204). This also allows the consideration of the shaming practices that precede the affective experience of shame. As many #MeToo narratives reveal, victims experience public shaming after they come forward but have already experienced substantial shame connected to sexual assault or harassment. For instance, in *What is a Little Girl Worth?*, Rachael Denhollander narrates her thoughts moments after being molested by Larry Nassar:

I did everything I could to appear normal. I didn't want him to know how ashamed and afraid I'd been. I now realize that at some level I understood that, though I'd failed at keeping him from my body, I could keep him from my mind. I could protect my thoughts and emotions. I could shut him out of those. *Who else has he done this to?* I could protect myself by not drawing extra attention to the shame. I smiled and thanked him, and we left. (88)

Here, Denhollander describes her immediate reaction to the first encounter of sexual assault as a sense of failure. Her shame, as she narrates, is the result of this sense of failure. Throughout the memoir, Denhollander narrates that while she did experience confusion and self-doubt about the incident, she ultimately "knew what the truth was, but it didn't bring clarity" (89). She also describes that even when she was sure of not being the one to blame, she was sure that her experience would be belittled or not believed (89–93). Yet, the shame returns when she is faced with disclosing the assault. She writes, "The thought of putting what I had experienced into words filled me with shame and fear" (112). For Denhollander, there is an initial, emotional shame response after the assault that did not withstand her reasoning. However, this initial emotional shame response reappears while talking about it. Thus, shame remains connected to her experience.

An important example of this is the statement that Dr. Christine Blasey Ford gave during a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Before that, Judge Brett Kavanaugh had been nominated to become an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Shortly after this became public, Blasey Ford came forward with allegations of sexual assault against Kavanaugh. First remaining anonymous, Blasey Ford eventually declared her identity publicly. She testified that, in the summer of 1982, Kavanaugh tried to rape her during a party in Maryland. The allegations became part of the nomination process and a public hearing, with Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh as witnesses, was held. In her opening statement, Blasey Ford explains,

I am here today not because I want to be. I am terrified. I am here because I believe it is my civic duty to tell you what happened to me while Brett Kavanaugh and I were in high school. . . . Brett's assault on me drastically altered my life. For a very long time, I was too afraid and ashamed to tell anyone the details. I did not want to tell my parents that I, at age 15, was in a house without any parents present, drinking beer with boys. ("Opening Statement For Senate Hearing")

Previous to anybody knowing about the attack, Blasey Ford describes immediately responding with shame. She addresses the aspects of the story that could be picked up to, at least partially, blame her. Further, she clearly anticipates or has already encountered skepticism about why she did not report the incident shortly after it occurred and names her fear and shame as an answer.

In these narratives, Christine Blasey Ford and Rachael Denhollander both justify their behavior either during the attack or afterward. These justifications read as responses to the lingering, anticipated questions about 'why didn't you fight back?' and 'why didn't you say something?' Blasey Ford's and Denhollander's statements about this make it evident that these questions appear self-evident to them. Denhollander specifically describes these thoughts only moments after the incident, framing her shame response as almost intuitive. In the case of Blasey Ford, the confrontation with these questions not only occurred on an immensely broad scale through social media reactions but was also part of the televised hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Further, several high-profile political commentators, politicians, and the President of the United States at the time, Donald Trump, voiced these (rhetorical) questions as a way to discredit Blasey Ford's allegations against Kavanaugh (P. Baker).

In light of these events, the hashtag #WhyIDidntReport emerged in September 2018 primarily on Twitter. Having analyzed around 40,000 tweets posted under that hashtag, Abigail Garrett and Naeemul Hassan find that shame, fear, and hopelessness were particularly prevalent (651). In a content analysis of 172 victim impact statements given during the Larry Nassar trial, Ashley Wellman et al. similarly highlight the prevalence of victims' shame before reporting the abuse (334). This illustrates the ubiquitous 'public' that social shaming processes create. Victims experience shame within themselves not only because they encountered public judgment but because they have internalized the, at this point, anticipated messages that something about their behavior either before or during the attack was shameful and blameful.

This direct and almost intuitive shame is, in many #MeToo narratives, more central than the public shaming that occurs after coming forward. In the essay "Wishing on Silver Dollar," written by Jennifer Brown and published as part of the anthology *You Too? 25 Voices Share their #MeToo Stories* (Gurtler), Brown even states that "shame is a mystifying

and powerful beast. It's the *natural* by-product of harassment" (29; emphasis added). Yet, the first instance of encountering shame connected to being a victim of sexual harassment and abuse is also an effect of shaming. As Agnes Heller writes, "[t]he shame affect cannot even be conceived of *prior to* culture (as, for instance, fear can be)" (Heller 215). The affect of shame that arises in connection to being a victim of sexual violence is the result of an acute awareness of a cultural script that has shamed, for instance, female sexuality overall or a particular idea of victimhood. This acute awareness of a cultural script—what is deemed shameful and thus threatens exclusion and de-placing—may also be conceptualized as an ever-present 'Other.' Shame thus does not require an immediate witness.

Sartre argues that shame is dependent on a witness because feeling ashamed means "passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other" (qtd. in Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* 85). Sandra Bartky responds to this argument:

Preoccupied with the role of the Other as audience, [Sartre] has little to say about the mechanisms that can forge an identification of self and Other in an experience of shame. Once an actual Other has revealed my object-character to me, I can become an object for myself; I can come to see myself as I might be seen by another, caught in the shameful act. (85)

Here, Bartky highlights that the process through which one judges themselves from the perspective of a (presumed) Other is a process in which a subject becomes an object even before themselves, adapting, or rather, internalizing, condemnation. However, this process requires only the lingering threat of an Other or, in other words, the awareness of having violated a cultural script. From its inception, shame masks as an internal process albeit having been dictated by the dominant cultural frames that construct shame all along. So, there is no process in which someone is shamed and thus desubjectified upon internalizing a witness' gaze or judgment, be it an individual witness or a symbolic notion of witnessing. Rather, dominant frames of shame have already been present, functioning as a regulatory mechanism, prior to any putative shameful act. The fundamental power of shame is its establishment of a ubiquitous 'Other.'

Yet, while social-constructionist perspectives on shame touch on the utilization of shame as a tool of oppressive regulation, shame remains taken for granted as "a permanent, necessary and structuring factor of identity . . ." (Dolezal 15), assuming an inevitable or naturalness attached to it. Throughout her theorization of 'body shame,' Luna Dolezal argues for the inevitability of understanding shame structurally and a potential mechanism for "oppression of a particular social group, [making] body shame . . . highly political" (90) and thus underlining the relevance of social-constructionism. Striking in the study of shame is, however, a seemingly self-evident acknowledgment of its unavoidable existence and

continued presence (xx). Indeed, studies of shame and critical feminist studies of shame seem to be in agreement that shame belongs to discussions of identity and is unavoidable, a ‘natural’ fact of human life. When Bonnie Morris contends that “. . . shame and blame automatically accompany female identity in our culture” (202), she may be on to a core observation, namely the gendered dynamics of shame. But the use of the term ‘automatically’ here underlines that a failure to acknowledge how cultural power relations that shame women or victims of sexualized violence continuously discursively sustain themselves—that is, do not simply occur ‘automatically’—construct an inevitability and obstruct any meaningful theorization of shame. As Karren Weiss argues, “[e]motions do not occur in a vacuum, yet studies on shame often take for granted its existence with little or no reference to the cultural influences that define and perpetuate specific situations and experiences as shameful” (288). Clearly, differentiation is needed.

The Symbolic Violence of Shame

Understanding shame as an essentially unavoidable fact of society as it is contemporarily conceptualized does not negate a critical assessment of how and where shame is experienced, how particular practices connected to shaming emerge socially, or how it might even be strategically and collectively used. Accepting shame as a social reality evidently does not inherently connect particular shaming processes to, for instance, gender, a phenomenon for whose ‘natural existence’ one would be hard-pressed to find a considerable argument. We may understand shame as an integral part of social life. However, this moves the questions of its structural functions even more so in the foreground than grants claims of its inevitability in life. Clearly, questioning a self-evident necessity of shame is vital. Having established the inseparability of shame and shaming throughout this chapter so far, this is, of course, true for both affective shame and the practices of shaming.

Shame is read as a “ubiquitous emotion in social life” (M. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity* 173). Further, as Nussbaum’s assessment indicates, it seemingly gains its particular relevance in the context of social life. Every form of shame, then, needs to be considered as a social phenomenon. Consequently, and perhaps unsurprisingly, “[a] large body of feminist scholarship flags the way in which shame is imbricated within intersectional gender inequalities, with shame serving as a mechanism of surveillance and policing . . .” (Shefer and Munt 146). With this conceptualization, I argue to consider shame in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence.’

Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as, “a gentle violence imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling” (*Masculine Domination* 1–2). For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is a part of (upholding) power. In his conceptualization, Bourdieu distinguishes between the dominant and the dominated. Those with more capital, and thus more power, can exercise symbolic violence and thus uphold their position. Symbolic violence follows Bourdieu’s theories on habitus and field, which “help to perpetuate the illusion” (Chakraborty 6) that the practices that Bourdieu describes as symbolic violence appear natural or inevitable. This illusion provides “the material condition necessary for the perpetuation of symbolic violence in society” (6).

Chris Samuel argues that experiencing symbolic violence means “feeling out of place, anxious, awkward, shamed, stupid and so on . . .” and emphasizes that “[s]ymbolic violence consists of both the objective hardship and the subjective experience of self-blame, hesitation, self-censorship and so on” (6). While the differentiation between an “objective hardship” and a “subjective experience” seems questionable here, Samuel’s argument does point to the importance of internalization which is part of the power of symbolic violence. Viewing shame as symbolic violence hence underscores that shame/shaming functions to uphold power dynamics and do so in a way that can, at times, be hardly recognizable, functioning to naturalize the status quo. Further, it accentuates that part of (the violence of) shaming is the effect it has on one’s self-perception.

It appears important to emphasize that both the word “symbolic” as well as Bourdieu’s definition of symbolic violence as “a gentle violence” do not position symbolic violence in opposition to “real” violence. This misreading, according to Bourdieu, rests on a profound misunderstanding of his use of the term ‘symbolic.’:

Taking ‘symbolic’ in one of its commonest senses, people sometimes assume that to emphasize symbolic violence is to minimize the role of physical violence, to forget (and make people forget) that there are battered, raped and exploited women, or worse, to seek to exculpate men from that form of violence—which is obviously not the case. Understanding ‘symbolic’ as the opposite of ‘real, actual’, people suppose that symbolic violence is a purely ‘spiritual’ violence which ultimately has no real effects. It is this naive distinction, characteristic of a crude materialism, that the materialist theory of the economy of symbolic goods, which I have been trying to build up over many years, to destroy, by giving its proper place in theory to the objectivity of the subjective experience of relations of domination. (*Masculine Domination* 34)

Rather, symbolic violence describes violence that is both outside of physical violence and (hardly) recognized as violence. While distinguished from physical violence, Bourdieu does acknowledge that “[s]ymbolic force is a form of power that is exerted on bodies, directly and as if by magic, without any physical constraint . . .” (38). Again, we find the dynamics

of shame along the lines of this conceptualization. While shame is a bodily affect (Locke 148; Probyn 330), reading shaming as physical violence is misleading, obscuring its dominant mechanisms. Understanding shaming as symbolic violence can recognize both its physical effects on the dominated without obscuring the mechanisms of shaming as purely physical, which would only lead us to remain ignorant to the workings of shaming in its violent properties.

For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is “the violence *which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 167). Especially when reading shame as symbolic violence, this claim demands differentiation. While Bourdieu might be (mis)read here to argue for the (moral) weakness of the disempowered, he rather argues that symbolic violence functions through misrecognition. As Bourdieu writes, “[s]ymbolic violence can only be exercised by the person who exercises it, and endured by the person who endures it, in a form which results in its misrecognition as such, in other words, which results in its recognition as legitimate” (*Language and Symbolic Power* 140). Bourdieu employs the concept of symbolic violence to examine a type of violence that is not recognized as such but instead is continuously upheld as inevitable.

For Bourdieu, “masculine domination,” the prevailing gendered power imbalance, is

. . . the prime example of . . . symbolic violence . . . This extraordinarily ordinary social relation thus offers a privileged opportunity to grasp the logic of the domination exerted in the name of a symbolic principle known and recognized both by the dominant and by the dominated—a language (or a pronunciation), a lifestyle (or a way of thinking, speaking and acting)—and, more generally, a distinctive property, whether emblem or stigma . . . (*Masculine Domination* 1)

Given the gendered property of shame, Bourdieu’s conceptualization here further enables us to embed shaming processes in the concept of symbolic violence. Shame operates through symbolic acts and creates or perpetuates a social order that then is disguised as natural. Everyday practices thus stabilize the power dynamics that continuously reproduce the ability to shame and be shamed for certain experiences or practices. As the power dynamics that shame functions to uphold dictate what can be shamed or is considered shameful, this also serves to explain the properties of shame as they operate along the lines of gender, race, and class. After all, which experiences or practices are considered shameful varies greatly depending on the “distinctive propert[ies]” and thus the (social) capital of the person who is shamed.

Bourdieu recognizes shame as an effect of symbolic violence:

The practical acts of knowledge and recognition of the magical frontier between the dominant and the dominated that are triggered by the magic of symbolic power and through which the dominated, often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed, often take the form of

bodily emotions - shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt—or passions and sentiments—love, admiration, respect. (*Masculine Domination* 38)

Staying with the case of shame, the use of the idea of “accepting the limits imposed” needs to be treated with caution. Taking a look at the writings of the #MeToo movement, it appears untenable to argue that feeling or experiencing, for instance, shame or humiliation, constitutes acceptance and negates a type of possibility for resistance. Rather, many victims write about being torn between an emotional experience of responding with shame and a conscious awareness that they are neither to blame nor deserving of shame or humiliation. Jennifer Brown, who describes shame as “the natural by-product of harassment,” also declares that feeling “[s]hame over being harassed is also ridiculous because I shouldn’t have been ashamed of being a victim” (29). Despite this tenet, Brown nevertheless writes about experiencing shame as a result of having been sexually violated with an assertion of its inevitability:

[We] carry our shame like an extra appendage and ask ourselves what we could have done differently to keep that from happening to us next time. Because if we know one thing for sure, we know there *will* be a next time. . . . I wish I hadn’t felt like I had done something wrong by wearing the wrong thing. I wish I hadn’t decided that his mortifying comment was my fault; something I had brought upon myself. I wish I hadn’t felt like somehow I had done something that made it okay for a boy to loudly and publicly assess what my naked body might look like. I wish I hadn’t just accepted that these kinds of comments were a girl’s burden to bear. I wish I had refused to shoulder that backpack. More than anything, I wish someone had taught Michael better. (32–33)

Here, Brown is upfront about the shame she experiences. She further speaks for other victims as well, declaring that her experience is not only valid but common. Yet, when Brown lists regrets that are phrased as her failures, she embeds the desire to shed that sense of self-blame. Here, she conveys the tension between feeling shame and rejecting it at the same time. Ultimately, she concludes not by expressing regret for something that she did. Rather, she emphasizes the blame that she does not fully put on herself. Sidelining her attacker’s (Michael’s) culpability, Brown blames those who have not “taught [him] better,” implying cultural blame. This is exemplary of an aspect true for any #MeToo narrative: these are stories never merely between the victim and the perpetrator. They always include larger cultural narratives, structures, and institutions.

In her memoir *Know My Name*, Chanel Miller narrates an ambiguity when it comes to shame. For instance, she describes a moment during the court hearing:

Can you describe was it just one pine needle, how many pine needles were in your hair? Pushing and pushing, every detail, every feeling. Did a nurse perform an exam on your genitals? It was a fairly invasive exam? At this I paused, sat for a moment, wiping my face. If I shared too much, I’d make everyone uncomfortable. But she was asking me. Why should I carry the shame for the things that were done to my body. (129)

Here, Miller describes a moment in which a sense of shame arose, making her pause. Yet, she poses the (rhetorical) question “Why should I carry the shame for the things that were

done to my body,” notably not ending it with a question mark. She then narrates that she “. . . stated my truth unapologetically, and for a moment I’d held the power, made the men fidget, cast their eyes down” (129). Though she is upfront about the moment that caused her a sense of shame, she shamelessly narrates her rejection and a sense of empowerment openly and unapologetically.

Later in her memoir, Miller acknowledges that she experiences deep-rooted shame. She writes, “[s]ome of the shame had calcified, impervious to praise” (284). Miller places this proclamation in the narrative of reading through the court transcripts, including the days she was not present in the courtroom.

I annotated the transcript in red pen; *dummy ass nut piece of shit*. For all the clarity and catharsis of the statement, I still struggled. We understand a victim’s antagonists to be the perpetrators and lawyers but overlook the enemy who is the victim herself. Old ideas about who I was resurfaced, told me I was damaged, unworthy. (284)

Miller narrates the ambiguity between rejecting shame, conveying why she is not deserving of it, and declaring her shame nonetheless. When she writes that the shame is “calcified” and makes her feel “damaged, unworthy,” the powerful effect of shame on her sense of self is apparent. It is, following her narrative, not merely the victim’s shame that becomes their “antagonists” but “the victim herself.”

As symbolic violence, shaming is profoundly disempowering. Locke points out that “. . . repetitive shame wears on the subject’s ability to inhabit, much less participate in and transform, the political world” (153). Further, shaming is extensively powerful as it is not recognized as violence but misrecognized as natural. Consequently, the perhaps most powerful property of shame—that it is internalized by those who are shamed, placing the blame entirely on the dominated—is also at the core of Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence. However, reading shame along the lines of symbolic violence also means positioning it outside the realms of a strategic tool of resistance to power. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is

exerted not in the pure logic of knowing consciousnesses but through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action that are constitutive of habitus and which, below the level of the decisions of consciousness and the controls of the will, set up a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure to itself. (*Masculine Domination* 37)

So, most defining for the concept of symbolic violence is that it takes place not at the level of recognition but is more subtle, ritualized, and, consequentially, harder to identify either as harmful in the first place or precisely as violence. Symbolic violence depends on this obscurity.

The overwhelming power of these shaming processes is rooted in their persistence as social practices, not in individual displays of dominance. As Pollino points out, “[o]ppressive

articulations of sexual violence have become so naturalized in media discourses that society passively accepts existing patriarchal power structures that shame and condemn victims” (“[Mis]Representations of Sexual Violence” 4). Nevertheless, shame as symbolic violence does not entirely negate the notion that it could be used strategically in and through a broad collective. This brings up the potential for resistance to (shame as) symbolic violence. A conceptualization of women as merely dominated, in the context of gender dominance that Bourdieu writes about in *Masculine Domination*, is as incomplete as an understanding of shamed victims of sexual abuse, for instance, as entirely powerless. Bourdieu is, as Steph Lawler argues, “characteristically pessimistic about the possibilities of effective resistance not because he characterizes people as passive but because of the character of relations of domination” (1423). While the tenor of symbolic violence is its misrecognition as natural, Bourdieu does not view awareness of the means through which and on whom symbolic violence is inflicted as sufficient to dismantle or even disrupt it. He argues that “. . . the foundation of symbolic violence lies not in mystified consciousnesses that only need to be enlightened but in dispositions attuned to the structure of domination of which they are the product . . .” (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 41).

Here, Bourdieu renders symbolic violence as an effect and mechanism of power and negates the possibility that disruption of symbolic violence could lead to any substantial change in social structures. Reading shaming as symbolic violence means, if we follow Bourdieu, that shaming occurs unidirectionally. In a strict Bourdieusian sense, shaming is only an example of symbolic violence when those in power shame those with less social capital. Because symbolic violence is characterized by its unintentionality, the shaming that is inflicted by those with less social capital to disrupt these power dynamics moves beyond the boundaries of Bourdieu’s concept. While Bourdieu argues that being “enlightened” about the dynamics of (invisible) symbolic violence is not enough to disrupt the power dynamics that have produced it, it is enough to disrupt the mechanism of symbolic violence. The specific power of symbolic violence is its misrecognition as ‘natural’ or, at least, inevitable. Consequently, enlightenment of the fact that it is, in fact, a social tool deeply connected to and demonstrating power, not only disrupts symbolic violence, it also opens up the possibility for the same mechanisms to be used strategically to further disrupt power dynamics.

If the disempowered have recognized the magnitude of being (a)shamed and the symbols through which shaming occurs, shaming ceases to be symbolic violence in the Bourdieusian sense but can instead become a strategic tool of resistance. There are two

principal practices for this resistance: 1) disclosing one's own shame; 2) deliberately shaming those in power. I introduced this chapter by highlighting the importance of shame disclosure in autobiographical #MeToo narratives. Shaming functions as an oppressive tool for victims of sexual violence because it isolates, silences, and disempowers them. Consequently, a movement out of these structures through the act of disclosing one's shame disrupts its properties. As Bergoffen argues, "[t]urning their backs on shame, #MeToo women de-fang its misogynous power. Discredit the norms. Turn the tables on shame" (5). The actual experience of shaming is subordinate here. What disrupts the dynamics of shame as symbolic violence is rejecting to follow its consequences. Victims perform this rejection by disclosing their shame. Sara Ahmed observes about queer shame/pride that "[t]o embrace or affirm the experience of shame, for instance, sounds very much like taking a pride in one's shame—a conversion of a bad feeling into a good feeling" (*Queer Phenomenology* 175). In the absence of a possibility to entirely reject shame, this inversion nevertheless performs a shame resistance that establishes agency and, in the collectivity that #MeToo constructs, enables movement.

Orienting Shame, or: Where to Place Shame?

Declarations of shame shape the 'genre' of #MeToo autobiographical writings entirely. Tanya Serisier makes this argument extensively in *Speaking Out Feminism, Rape and Narrative Politics*:

In many ways, to refer to these texts as 'rape memoirs' is a misnomer. Rather than books about rape and its effects, they are books about speaking out about rape, its necessity and its consequences. They are written to change social responses to rape through fighting the silence that surrounds and enables it, to help other survivors and to produce individual healing and empowerment. (51)

The disrupting quality of disclosing shame not only stems from the rejection of the properties of shame (as symbolic violence) but also from the collective identity it constructs. A collective disclosure of shame disrupts both the isolating as well as the silencing effects of shaming.

For instance, in the last pages of her memoir, Chanel Miller describes seeing Blasey Ford's testimony during the hearing before the Senate judiciary committee on the news. She describes being empowered by Christine Blasey Ford, stating "For years, the crime of sexual assault depended on our silence. . . . Ford broke all the rules. The barricades that held us down will not work anymore. And when silence and shame are gone, there will be nothing to stop us" (340). Then, Miller further elaborates on her empowerment, stating

But I remember the attorney's still shoulders as guilty was read. I know Brock slept ninety days in a stiff cot in a jail cell. The judge will never step foot in a courtroom again. The appellate attorney's claims were shut down. One by one, they became powerless, fell away, and when the dust settled, I looked around to see who was left. Only Emily Doe. (342)

While Miller focuses this proclamation of empowerment solely on herself although she returns to her anonymized "name." She positions herself as the only one left standing and thus, ultimately, having won. Yet, Miller has connected this empowerment to Christine Blasey Ford, embracing an ambiguity between a very personal journey and the formation of a unique collective.

Elsewhere in the memoir, Miller narrates a similar sentiment. She describes seeing the court proceedings around Larry Nassar on television and being inspired by the victims who came forward to give a victim impact statement:

As the voices of these young women entered the room, I let everything burn, the steam rising as I sat mesmerized, watching them. Their words were made of steel. Even when their voices quivered, their eyes stayed fixed. I thought, if I, as a survivor, am made up of the same fibers as them, if it is true we are built of similar threads, I am unshakable. (306)

Through identifying with other survivors of sexual assault, Miller proclaims finding her own sense of power. Notably, the notion that expressing one's shame not only performs a rejection to it because it breaks the silence that results from shame but also because it can build a collective is an important, frequently emphasized part of the survivors' narrative in the USA Gymnastics sexual abuse scandal.

For instance, the documentary *At the Heart of Gold* (Carr), which depicts the scandal around Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics, features an interview with Judge Rosemarie Aquilina, who trialed Nassar in the criminal case. About the victim impact statements, she says, "When it first started, there were only about six who were actually going to come public with their name. One girl empowered the next, empowered the next" (01:08:22). Katie Gibson argues that the victims in this case, "collectivized their victim impact statements to advance a rhetorical rupture at the sentencing hearing of Nassar" (520), a sentiment reiterated in various media depictions of the narrative. The documentaries *Athlete A* and *Athlete the Heart of Gold* are two examples of this.

Another pointed example of this is the 2018 ESPY (Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly) Award show, in which those who came forward against Larry Nassar received the Arthur Ashe Courage Award, an award given out annually by the sports channel ESPN. The award winners are credited as "sister survivors." As presumably around a hundred women come on stage to (representatively) accept the award, they align, hold hands, and face an audience giving a standing ovation (ESPN 00:18–01:15). Standing on a stage, publicly declaring their experience of sexual assault—not only in the public of the physical audience

as the event is, of course, televised and remains retrievable on YouTube and various social media platforms—this is, first and foremost, a performance rejecting silence/silencing. However, the individual experiences are not highlighted, rather, a clear collective, even kinship, among the victims is depicted, most evident in their description as “sister survivors.” Beyond aiming to disrupt the shaming of victims of sexual violence, the #MeToo movement has, in some cases, demonstrated a goal to not abandon the power of shame but rather redirect it. The case of Larry Nassar is also a clear example of this. While victims perform a rejection of their shame, they also frequently highlight the shameful nature of Nassar’s actions. Taking it one step further, many victims connected to the Nassar case emphasized not only the shameful nature of his actions but also the shameful nature of the many coaches and officials from USA Gymnastics who failed to respond to warning signs and allegations properly (Saguy 108).

Another important example of shaming in the #MeToo movement is an article titled “After Weinstein: 71 Men Accused of Sexual Misconduct and Their Fall from Power” in which a “hall of shame,” as researchers Chianoning Su et al. refer to it, is displayed. Su et al. argue that the aspirations of the #MeToo movement are “intended to empower survivors to name their experience, shame their attackers, lay bare the ideologies that normalize sexual violence, and bring about social justice and change” (2). This “hall of shame,” where journalists Sarah Almukhtar et al. list “high-profile men” in the Hollywood sphere who were accused of sexual abuse or harassment, is a prime example of ‘naming and shaming,’ with the intent to seek justice mostly outside of the judicial realm. However, this practice of shaming remains a journalistic contribution. While the men listed were accused in what I would refer to as a ‘wave’ of the #MeToo movement, the shaming that occurs here is not directed by the accusers. This begs the question of whether we can understand this shaming practice as part of the #MeToo movement or merely the public reaction to it. In many of the high-profile #MeToo cases in the entertainment industry, the public negotiation about shaming and fallout demands clearly occurs in the name of or in association with the #MeToo movement. Yet, the accuser—the (alleged) victim—is either not the center of these discourses or not present at all.

The case of Harvey Weinstein is one example of this. After numerous allegations of sexual harassment, assault, and rape were reported by *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* in October 2017, Weinstein was publicly shamed and faced consequences. At this point, a few women made their identities publicly known but many remained anonymous. While their stories are at the center of the reporting, their voices were not at the center of the

public shaming of Weinstein. Many of the women who have accused Weinstein retracted themselves from the public attention that followed the publications of the articles.

Actress Rose McGowan is perhaps the most prominent among those who accused Weinstein in publicly shaming him. Notably, she does not name him, however. Throughout her memoir and in interviews, she refers to him as “the Pig Monster,” or “the studio head.” McGowan states that she does so to take power away from him. In her memoir, she addresses this only briefly, stating “I do not like the Monster’s name, and though I know it, and maybe you know it, I refuse to have his name in my book” (115). In an interview for *Nightline*, McGowan says, “I never wanted him to have residency with my words” (*ABC*). Through this, McGowan highlights herself and her experience, actively disparaging someone who is otherwise characterized particularly through his power. Yet, while McGowan clearly shames Weinstein, she also aims to sideline his presence entirely, therefore limiting her shaming practices to rather focus on her own experience.

Yet, if the #MeToo movement strategically implores the shaming of (alleged) perpetrators to seek justice beyond the judicial realm, then the journalistic accounts, broad public reaction, and activity on social media cannot be entirely separated from the inner-movement practices. After all, the kind of structural change that is #MeToo’s objective would require a broad, public shaming that cannot merely center around or stem from the individual victim or a movement collective. Instead, the movement relies on shaming, exemplified by social media pressure, to elicit a reaction from individuals in positions with enough power to initiate consequences, such as the perpetrator’s job loss.

The question of shaming in the #MeToo movement has, however, sparked controversial debates about pretrial judgments. French actress Catherine Deneuve, for instance, has referred to the movement as a “witch-hunt” (Pipyrou 415). Similarly, Australian columnist Janet Albrechtsen has criticized the movement for “turning an old-fashioned lynch mob into a roving online alternative justice system . . .” and Terry Gilliam compared it to a “mob rule” (Pipyrou 415). In the extreme of this discussion, Stavroula Pipyrou identifies two opposing positions:

On the one hand, #MeToo is little more than mob rule premised on vigilantism that foregoes judicial procedure in favor of public shaming. . . . On the other hand, #MeToo provides a form of social justice that allows the sharing of taboo issues and helps break the silence surrounding serious crimes that can then be dealt with through official legal channels. (416)

The fear of #MeToo as a “mob” publicly shaming potential perpetrators before a just trial underscores the power of shaming in general and indicates an assumed power of the #MeToo movement to (conceivably) use this power.

Thinking through the dynamics of shaming along the lines of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, shame emerges as a rather ambiguous concept. It encapsulates unjust mechanisms of power, maintaining an oppressive social order and demonstrating its far-reaching, emotionally devastating effects; yet, having proven itself as a social regulating tool too powerful to resist, the strategy of using shaming to disrupt, for instance, gendered power imbalance remains. When #MeToo victims use shame to denounce their perpetrator, seeking justice and/or emotional healing, it is premised on the idea that shaming will work in the same regulatory manner when those with more power are shamed, then when the power dynamics are reversed. The 'hall of shame' in Almukhtar et al.'s article or the case of Larry Nassar exemplifies that this can work, at least on a limited scale. It remains questionable, however, if broad structural change can be achieved through employing shaming rather than or alongside disrupting the dynamics of being shamed.

Jennifer Manion, for instance, makes a case for "the moral relevance of shame." She argues that although we feel shame about amoral things, it remains significant for our sense of morality and can have a "potential positive function for the person experiencing it" (85). Yet, Manion offers a caveat, stating, "We must acknowledge that shaming can be an effective tool in the hands of the powerful to control the behavior of groups. Clearly, we cannot and should not issue a blanket approval" (85). Nevertheless, "[t]hat men and women do not generally experience shame for the same transgressions does not undo shame's ethical significance. . . . Part of the feminist project then becomes rewriting the scripts that trigger shame" (Locke 150). This assessment premises that feeling (a)shamed can lead to a changed sense of morality and, thus, changed behavior. Jill Locke points out that, for instance, Kathleen Woodward disagrees, assuming "subjects ensnared in traumatic shame are unable to access the ethical process celebrated by Manion" (150). However, shaming is particularly powerful because it threatens social exclusion. For instance, if someone is shamed for sexually harassing a co-worker, regardless of whether that experience of being shamed translates into being *ashamed* and entails a moral betterment, the mere threat of social exclusion promotes changed behavior.

Jill Locke displays a notably different approach to shame. While not "mak[ing] a case against shame as such" (159), she ultimately argues that

. . . rather than focusing on shaming those who shame us, let's make films, tell stories, tend parks, paint murals, open farmers' markets, build schools and universities, support clinics, and foster misfit salons. These worlds will not wash away bigotry, ignorance, and traumatic shame whole cloth, and full inclusion may be beyond their scope. But alternative places and worlds 'house[s] where freedom can dwell'—may lessen shame's grip. A feminist-democratic future should hope for. (159)

Locke acknowledges that, historically, shame has been considered a ‘feminine’ emotion. She also turns to Bartky to point out that some are more vulnerable to shame than others, questioning the idea that freedom could or should “depend” on shame. As Sandra Bartky argues, “for the shame-ridden and shame-prone, it is not a penance that restores the miscreant to the proper moral equilibrium” (qtd. in Locke 158). Locke thus calls for “building a world for the shame ridden and shame prone—creating counterpublics and spaces where alternative images of life can emerge” (159).

I find this desire in the writings of the #MeToo movement, for instance, in Chanel Miller’s *Know My Name*. In a narrative about the redesigning of the fraternity yard—the place where Miller was abused—she writes about her negotiations with a Stanford representative that she refers to as Appleseed because “[e]ating one apple seed is harmless. But eat enough over time and they can be toxic, subtle and corrosive, impossible to break down” (*Know My Name* 311). The place behind the dumpster where Miller was assaulted was supposed to be converted into a garden, “accompanied by a plaque with a quote of my choosing” (312). For this, Miller writes about suggesting “You made me a victim... I had to force myself to relearn my name, my identity [...],” which was rejected in preference for a more “inspirational quote,” such as “I’m right here, I’m okay, everything’s okay, I’m right here” (321–23). These were, as Miller writes, “words I’d used to comfort my sister straight out of the hospital in the moments I was least okay” (323). She describes the suggestion as absurd.

Ultimately, no agreement was reached. Miller writes about the ridiculousness of the garden (something she frames as Stanford’s attempt to clean up an ugly spot in campus history) calling the planned reveal of it a “rape garden ceremony” (322) and imagines the art installations she finds more appropriate:

a piece called *Construction*; each victim is given a nail for every day she has lived with what happened to her. There’s a haphazard pile of wood in the center of campus. Victims can come as they please, hammering nails into the wood. All day people hear the banging, all the drilling and incessant interruption. (322)

This is an example of the counterpublic Locke describes. Miller describes a place-making practice that is focused on a victim’s healing and outside the realms of shaming processes. While the art installation did not materialize, the very narration nevertheless creates that place. I will return to this narration in the analysis of the #MeToo movement’s construction of ‘the site of abuse’ (Chapter 4.3.).

Miller claims she belongs to the place where she was abused while narratively outlining all the ways in which she is powerless in it. Through that, Miller performs a placed-based resistance to 1) her shame; 2) her powerlessness; and 3) her sense of social exclusion

as a woman and as a victim of sexual abuse. Writing the narrative and having it read creates a certain place and preserves the existence of a certain place that is symbolic and accessible through its rhetorical function and its sociocultural meaning as a site of abuse, systemic failure, and gendered unsafety. Miller's writing here performs a certain visibility. Given the affective dimension of shame that seemingly leads us to hide and inhibits us from talking or writing about the thing that makes us feel ashamed, this practice connotes a productive instability. Here, shame is ultimately inextricable from reorientation. Consequently, I think of the dynamics of shame as impacting the way we move through places. Firstly, shame can do this either by the effect it has on a sense of self, leading one to essentially silence oneself in fear of rejection. Secondly, shame may alter movement when it impacts social standing. In both cases, the threat of exclusion—be it actual or not—is what results in a reorientation.

Gaze in the Courtroom: Replacing Shame

Miller's memoir also entails a narrative of redirecting shame in a (brief) moment of resistance to the hegemonic power dynamics unmistakably apparent in a courtroom situation. I briefly addressed the passage in Miller's book, in which she writes about her dilemma of being asked a question the answer to which, she presumes, will "make everyone uncomfortable" (115). She continues the narration upon having answered that the exam she was subjected to was, indeed, invasive:

I had a plastic beak stuck in me, I said, I had Q-tips in my anus. They painted my vagina blue I think to look for abrasions. They spread my legs. Photographed me. They photographed me naked. So yes.

I felt a little lighter. I'd stated my truth unapologetically, and for a moment I'd held the power, made the men fidget, cast their eyes down. I wanted to say into the microphone again, *anus*. I'd let go of my posture, my hair was out of its clips, I was exhausted. (115)

Producing an imaginary where Miller's resilience to her shame, allowing her to recount the "things that were done to [her] body" detailed enough to presume discomfort, Miller uses the 'them' vs. 'me' power dynamic she presumes and narrates at this moment to establish a (brief) sense of empowerment rather than to underline her voicelessness. As this requires her to overcome a sense of shame (a sense she explicitly calls into question), the particular resilience she then describes provides a sense of empowerment. Crucially, Miller describes gaining that moment of power not only because she "stated her truth unapologetically" but because she "made the men fidget, cast their eyes down." In this moment, she is in control, dictating shame. This occurs in a setting in which she is on display and has narrated an immobility that renders her looking away as the only way to find any sense of escape, all the

while knowing that hiding her face does not inhibit the gazes she aims to avoid, as these are, in her narration, projections of her experience of herself due to the shaming scripts she is well aware of. In this moment, however, she describes controlling these gazes. It is a powerful disruption, the enjoyment of which Miller makes evident. In this context, she constructs a sense of control over the place by establishing a moment in which the previously desired but impossible disappearance becomes possible. By constructing an image in which “the men fidget, cast their eyes down,” her shame about “the things that were done to my body” is replaced.

Similarly, Denhollander also uses the narration of a particular gaze in her memoir to restructure the courtroom and perform a replacing of shame. Denhollander describes walking into the courtroom as a witness, making “a point not even to glance toward Larry. I wanted him to know that he had no control anymore” (258). She also describes the room as carceral. First, Denhollander explains “The room was tighter than I thought it would be, and Larry was closer than I’d expected” (258). Later, she describes “waiting for [the door] to be unlocked” (261). After Denhollander reiterates her desire to not acknowledge Larry with a look, she recalls being somewhat forced to when the prosecutor asks, “Can you just . . . can you point to the person you known as Dr. Nassar? Describe for me what he is wearing” (258). So, she narrates,

For the first time, I looked in Larry’s direction. He raised his head to look back and meet my eyes. I pointed toward him and intentionally held the gesture longer than necessary. ‘He is wearing a striped suit,’ I responded crisply, still matching his gaze. *Make him look away first.* Larry had spent decades mastering the art of silent control and dominance. I wanted him to know that I saw the subtle manipulation and the hidden power plays—I saw them, and it was over. I continued to meet his gaze until his eyes shifted away and turned back to his papers. (258–59)

Amid a place and process in which the roles are clearly determined; Denhollander, here, constructs a moment in which she steps out of it. A performance of holding the gaze—of precisely *not* turning away in shame—is, in Denhollander’s narrative, a moment of disruption from the cross-examination that renders her powerless. Denhollander is not in control of the mediatization of her presence in court but rather subjected to their gaze, as she describes the press box as directly facing her. Nevertheless, in the practice of writing about holding Nassar’s gaze until he looks away, Denhollander evokes an image in which she holds power in an imaginary courtroom. In her narrative, this courtroom becomes the place of succeeding, rendering the previously seemingly invincible Nassar entirely powerless. It is this shift that enables Denhollander to construct a symbolic moment in which she replaces her shame through the courtroom as it is the setting in which she publicly faces her abuser amid a renegotiation of power dynamics.

Denhollander's narrative practice constructs another moment of disruption from an assumed stability when she describes the examination by Nassar's attorney. Still, she is in the witness box, subjected to a process of justification. Nassar's attorney states, "You are the one who wanted all of the cameras in the courtroom and the print papers . . . correct?" despite Denhollander having testified that "the only thing worse than being sexually assaulted is having an audience" (266). Clearly, what is particularly important here is what is not said or what is left implied. This implication is only readable against the backdrop of a cultural script allowing for the possibility or even a probability of victims of sexual abuse seeking a legal process in a desire to gain attention, perhaps fame, or money. It is this backdrop against which Denhollander describes finding her accusations against Nassar throughout the entire process, including before even voicing her accusations. At that point, a ubiquitous public that threatens ostracism influences her (affective) ability to move into the public. Nassar's lawyer now utilizes this script, perpetuating silencing mechanisms at the core of the #MeToo movement's grievances.

Denhollander, however, reframes the presence of the press in the courtroom. She writes responding to Nassar's lawyer that,

‘I did not want Larry Nassar to walk in here thinking he had won a victory.’ I paused and looked directly at Larry. ‘I want him and I want the public to know that I know where the shame and the guilt for this lies. It lies on him. It does not lie on me, and I am not afraid of the truth.’ (266)

Earlier in her memoir, Denhollander recalls, “. . . Larry and his attorneys walked into court and demanded the courtroom be as open as possible. Cameras. Reporters. Recordings. Only the survivor's face and name should be protected, they argued. Everything else was fair game” (2019, 248). So, to participate in the fight for narrative control publicly, Denhollander writes about requesting

for the courtroom to be 100 percent open for my testimony, including allowing video, name, everything. I do NOT want him to go into the courtroom having won any victory, no matter how small. [It] puts him in the position of power starting the hearing, and I do not want that to be the case. (248)

In the narration of this, Denhollander reiterates the rejection of shame that her public testament to the abuse indicates. The courtroom in Denhollander's memoir is an entirely public place, in which she forgoes a description of an affective negotiation with her shame. Instead, the courtroom is constructed with the rejection of shame that Denhollander performs through it. In this practice, Denhollander fundamentally calls into question the intricate relationship between sexualized violence and shame. The hardship in voicing her accusations publicly is, in Denhollander's memoir, largely detached from the legal process. Instead, the legal process emerges as the foundational setting for changed power dynamics.

Writing about a particular gaze, a notable contrast to the displacing properties of shame, is an underscoring of the affective empowering Denhollander almost linearly describes throughout the legal process and, most prominently, the courtroom in which she performs full control.

As most #MeToo narratives are stories about how the ritualized construction of the courtroom displaces victims of sexualized violence, practices like Miller and Denhollander's writing about holding a gaze in a way that disrupts these rituals, constructing an entirely different place, are overshadowed by narratives that underline the author's placelessness and lack of agency. A poem titled "Yes, Those Were Crimes of Violence" by Marshall L. published in *Resistance: Righteous Rage in the Age of #MeToo* (Goyette) narrates a linear process of not shame rejection but shame relief as granted by the authority of public recognition through the courtroom. The poem starts with the refrain:

Shame
Shame
Shame
I'm the one to blame (103)

Throughout, the lyrical I describes their strong conviction of this premise not only through the repetition of this refrain. Only the early assertion that "I knew my silence couldn't last" (L. 103) opens up the possibility of an imminent change. So, the part of the poem that is headlined "Part 1" ultimately concludes that through the process of

Two years of changed identity
And in One Year I'm ready (103)

This readiness refers to the victim's willingness to openly and, crucially, publicly talk about the abuse they experienced, as it has been made clear through the equating of silence with suffering throughout the poem. Part 2 then moves the story to the courtroom, which may also serve as a symbol for the public (not merely judicial) validation the lyrical I receives:

Waiting for persecution
To be shamed by this institution ... and this is what I hear:
'The judge and the courts bear witness to the case of a child that came
into this
world sinless. Subject to violations and tribulations. Subject to the touch
of another
in ways and places inappropriate for a mother. So let this case be laid
to rest with
testament made and verdict known, for a child put to the severest test
who suffered
those years alone.
'Yes, these were crimes of violence. Yes, you were the victim'
... No more years of holding silence
... No more dreams of violence (104)

Although expecting further shame, the narrator here describes a validation of both their experience of sexualized violence, as, in fact, "crimes of violence," as well as their

innocence. With that, the shame—the refrain—ends along with the continued remembering of the assault. Instead, a new dictum replaces the previous refrain, following its structure stylistically to indicate this replacement:

Yes, those were crimes of violence
And yes, I was the victim
Yes, those were crimes of violence
And yes, I was the victim (104)

So, the narrator in this poem finds a (novel) conviction in their perception in the public recognition of their experience. The courtroom, be it a setting narrating the legal consequences of the abuse suffered or a symbol for the belief and validation with which the lyrical I was met after publicizing their story in some way, is the place in which the previously narrated trauma and shame is “laid to rest.” Thus, it is rendered as the (just) arena in which the potential for victims to replace their shame is negotiated. In this case, shame is dissolved and the publicness of the court’s negotiation of the sexualized violence signals the transition from harmful loneliness to the satisfied conviction “I’m not alone anymore”—the poem’s last sentence. The poem both presumes and further constructs the authority of the court as the place in which the public negotiates believability and, with that, holds the profound power to enable the replacing of shame. With that, the poem does not position an agentic reaching of a catharsis, perpetuating and disclosing the dependency on the court’s (here a symbol of the public) conviction in the victim’s believability.

Crucially, the court reaches this conviction in the poem without the lyrical I’s involvement in the negotiated narrative about the violence. Instead, despite the lyrical I’s conviction of being “the one to blame,” anticipating “[t]o be shamed by this institution,” the institution nevertheless reaches a different conclusion. The presentation of the victim’s narrative, which might indeed question their own blame, is omitted. So, the narrated courtroom is not a place in which narrative power is negotiated. As the process of justification is left out, the courtroom becomes a place in which shame and trauma dissolve through the authoritative public recognition that, as Part 2 of the poem concludes, “. . . we recognize the pain you feel” (104).

At the core of the shame resistance practice that is part of the #MeToo movement is publicness: Only when shame is publicly declared are the pillars of shame as symbolic violence destabilized. For instance, the moment in which Miller controls the gaze in the courtroom becomes as powerful as it is through the writing and witnessing of it. Had it remained a fleeting moment in an almost empty courtroom, the performance of this shame resistance would have also remained invisible. More precisely, the movement practices of the #MeToo movement concern the (public) writing about the gaze, not merely the moment

of the gaze. At the beginning of this chapter, I have briefly addressed the particular ‘publicness’ of shame as it functions through the infliction of a (social) ‘Other’ and the subsequent threat of exclusion, arguing that shame always begins with a notion of publicness. The ambiguous negotiations of shame that I have explored so far as well as the #MeToo narratives that, in parts, embrace shame again and again point to this idea of publicness.

Shame and Publicness

The conceptualization of publicness as the antidote to shaming processes—a space in which the practice of shame declaration disrupts the processes of shame as symbolic violence—seemingly presumes ‘the public’ in which a place is claimed to be a hegemonic one. This is a sharp divergence from the Habermasian public sphere; an idealized notion of “private people com[ing] together as a public” (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 27). I am using “idealized” here to refer to both the frequent critique that Habermas idealizes the early bourgeois public sphere (Benhabib 15; Fleming; Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere” 60; Landes, “The Public and the Private Sphere” 143) as well as to refer to his own admission that “. . . this idea of the public was [not] actually realized in earnest in the coffee houses, the *salons*, and the societies; but as an idea it had become institutionalized and thereby stated as an objective claim. If not realized, it was at least consequential” (Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 36). The very properties of shame that I have laid out so far do not materialize in a Habermasian public sphere because they require exclusion (or the threat of it) and affective dynamics that find no space in the ‘rational’ debate Habermas reminisces about. As extensively laid out by, among others, Nancy Fraser (“Rethinking the Public Sphere”), Lisa McLaughlin, Seyla Benhabib, Joan B. Landes (*Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*; “The Public and the Private Sphere”), Jean L. J. L. Cohen, and Marie Fleming, the Habermasian public sphere reveals its shortcomings and limits in, perhaps most prominently, feminist analyses.

The Habermasian public sphere does not allow for an analysis of shame, negating or foregoing the very dynamics that create and uphold it. When Habermas describes a sphere in which, “a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether” was “preserved” (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 36) and matters of “public concern” are ‘rationally’ discussed to find, or rather produce, public opinion, the breakdown of the influence of the somehow disregarded differences in status on what is a) rational and b) of public concern becomes impossible.

Further, regarding the result of this conceptual discussion as public opinion negates the possibility of the impossibility of a uniform public opinion, or the potential move toward “greater democracy” (Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere” 62). These shortcomings have been adequately addressed by, most prominently, Nancy Fraser.

Consequently, the Habermasian public sphere also is not the sphere in which the declaration of shame becomes mobilizing. What I take from feminist scholars’ critique of Habermas is a consideration of multiple publics here. Taking #MeToo as a case study, Elizabeth Brunner and Sarah Partlow-Lefevre develop a notion of ‘wild public networks:’

Wild public networks (WPN) consider the changes precipitated by our contemporary media environment, which is not a sphere but a dense shifting assemblage of overlapping networks wherein myriad unique users interact in real time across vast distance. Reconceptualizing the public sphere as WPN reveals not rational debate, but largely affective pleas . . . (4).

For Brunner and Partlow-Lefevre the rhizomatic quality of these wild public networks—a theorization born out of a combination of Kevin M. DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples’ ‘public screens,’ Damien Pfister’s ‘networked rhetorics,’ and Bruno Latour’s actant network theory—is central to their ability to ‘raise awareness’ and to “link women in collective and diverse efforts, a move necessary for contemporary feminist movements to survive and succeed” (7). Brunner and Partlow-Lefevre resist a notion of homogeneity or even ‘unity’ to conceptualize a ‘public.’ Instead, WPN consist of disconnected actors nevertheless forming a collective. In this “rhizomatically networked collective” (2), there is no desire for or claim to rational debate but, instead, “affective pleas” and affective declarations such as “me too,” a shorthand for “I, too, have been a victim of sexualized violence.”

Paul Dawson reads the #MeToo movement as a “prime example” of Zizi Papacharissi’s notion of ‘affective publics.’ Papacharissi describes “public formations that are textually rendered into being through emotive expression that spread virally through networked crowds” (“Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling” 14) as ‘affective publics.’ Exploring #MeToo as a “narrative phenomenon” (969), Paul Dawson highlights the “broad appeal to the experiential truth of a narrative rather than its verifiable referential status” as it is “heightened by the sheer scale of the #MeToo macro-narrative, for doubting or disproving individual stories cannot undermine the overall truth of the shared experience” (980). In other words: the #MeToo movement is a collective based on shared affective experiences because its foundation concerns itself more with the movement’s ‘macro-narratives’ as well as the affective dimension of individual stories than with the factual accuracy of each narrative as indicated by the ‘entrance narrative’ “me too.”

Zizi Papacharissi also focuses on the medium of the hashtag in her research. She argues that hashtags allow for “crowds to be rendered into publics; networked publics that want to tell their story collaboratively and on their own terms. These networked publics come together and/or disband around bonds of sentiment” (*Affective Publics* 308). These properties are surely realizable without hashtags, nevertheless, their functionality makes the collectivization through digital media blatantly obvious. While this has been researched somewhat extensively with a focus on the broad reach these hashtag narratives can have, Papacharissi makes an important addition by pointing to the affective dimension that bonds these narratives beyond their digitally entangled placing.

As Dawson’s centering of the narrative properties of the #MeToo movement to read them as an ‘affective public’ indicates, it is ultimately the expression of affect that is bounding and productive here. However, the characterization of a “me too” narrative as an ‘expression’ demands differentiation. When, for instance, researchers explain the movement as a process in which, “. . . female victims report their experience of sexual abuse and consequent trauma to the public” (Hu et al. 1), this public is at least twofold: on one hand, victims report their experience to an (imagined) hegemonic public as the story is available to, seemingly, everyone (confession), on the other hand, each story also produces what can be conceptualized as a ‘public’ itself (expression).

I use the term *expression* for the latter to differentiate between the (readings of the) stories that engender processes of justification, rendering the initial utterance a *confession* vis-à-vis a powerful Other. “Me too” as an expression, however, centers the author or, rather, the act of telling the story, in which this very practice carries an expectation for catharsis. A confession rather describes the process of admission in which the notion of nonconformance is lingering. With this conceptualization, the expression “me too” now, presuming a cultural prominence of the #MeToo movement, produces an affective public. Yet, the confession “me too” stands before a hegemonic public that negotiates the framing and placing of each confession. When focusing on shame, the property of that changes when shame is regarded as productive or collectivizing—an affective public—or when it is the subject of confession. Broadly speaking, the #MeToo movement produces an “affective focus on pain” (Tambe 200). Each “me too” story is, principally, both an expression and a confession of that pain. This extends from the writing of these stories to the reading of them. As Leigh Gilmore writes, “[w]hile the act of sharing #MeToo entailed writing, *reading* those words persuaded millions to join a community of survivors that was emerging from the shadows” (“More Than Angry” 179).

Gilmore here hints at the production of a space through the practices of writing and reading #MeToo narratives. While she writes of “a community,” a rather broad notion that merely indicates the coming together of individuals, I consider these dynamics through the lens of the discussed affective publics and wild public networks. I situate these notions— affective publics and wild public networks—along the lines of conceptualizations of ‘counterpublics,’ an approach demanding further attention. Nancy Fraser rightly points out that these “competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women’s publics, and working class publics [where there] . . . not just from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Habermas implies” (“Rethinking the Public Sphere” 61). Principally shaped by the study of feminist counterpublics through literature (Felski), analyses of *feminist* counterpublics range from, for instance, women’s centers (Maguire and Mohtar) to affective storytelling (Larson; Schiltermandl et al.) to, inevitably, media productions and digital spheres (Holm; S. J. Jackson and Banaszczyk; Matar; Travers; Warner).

Taking the term ‘counterpublic’ from Rita Felski, Nancy Fraser specifically conceptualizes subaltern counterpublics,

in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. (“Rethinking the Public Sphere” 67)

Throughout, opposition to another public/or publics is implied. In feminist considerations of counterpublics, these conceptualizations do not merely presume the coexistence of multiple, parallel counterpublics but instead stress the opposition (counter) as much as the plural (publics) (Felski 166). Evidently, it is principle in the construction and functionality of counterpublics that they are oppositional.

Clearly, the engagement of counterpublics with a hegemonic public is paramount. A notion of a twofold ‘public’ in “me too” declarations—both vis-à-vis a hegemonic public (*confession*) and a process of constructing an affective counterpublic (*expression*)—crumbles. It is the confessional properties of any “me too” expression that enables its production of a *counterpublic* in the first place. In other words: the context in which the MeToo movement emerges is present throughout its practices. This context entails both the omnipresence of sexualized violence as well as a culturally collective inability to discuss these manners, which incites further insecurity, disempowerment, and injustice or, put simply, ‘rape culture.’ Any “me too” *expression* carries that ontology of being a *confession* first and foremost. It is this dimension—the lingering presence of nonconformance—that also explains the presence and importance of shame in MeToo narratives. Further, while

MeToo narratives resist particular properties of shame, they also clearly indicate that shame does not dissipate in the affective public that the movement's practices produce. Yet, shame, in these publics, is uncovered as precisely *not* a private emotion but a profoundly cultural (and collective) affect. As both expression and confession exist simultaneously, this also affects the hegemonic public in which "me too" is declared through (rather than in) an affective public.

Domestic violence advocacy activism is one example of these processes. As Nancy Fraser has argued, the issue of domestic violence is exemplary of how Habermas' idea of a public sphere in which matters of 'the public,' in opposition to private manners, are debated is short-sighted because it is a hegemonic, patriarchal public that has already established which grievances can be considered in these realms. Up until the 1970s at the earliest, domestic violence was perceived and discussed as outside of 'public concern' (Moore; Schechter). "Then, feminists formed a subaltern counterpublic from which we disseminated a view of domestic violence as a widespread systemic feature of male-dominated societies. Eventually, after sustained discursive contestation, we succeeded in making it a common concern" (Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere" 71).

A similar story can be told about gendered, sexualized violence in any sphere (Matthews; Schechter 34–43; Weeks et al.). This is apparent at the very beginning of any discussion or declaration of (gendered) sexualized violence as it is always necessarily also a conversation about seemingly overcoming the stigmatization of sexualized violence to even discuss it. It is present in Chanel Miller's memoir in the title alone (*Know My Name*), to be read in the context of her now-lifted anonymity as her victimhood was public before her name was. Or, to name another example, it is present in the *TIME* magazine-given title "The Silence Breakers," referencing some of the (famous) women who have taken space in the 'me too' discussion (Zacharek et al.), as it indicates the loud silence that permeated public negotiation of sexualized violence.

What these examples demonstrate is that a dichotomous conceptualization of an affective public that emerges in opposition to a hegemonic public is inadequate. Additionally, such a notion would further exclude (female) victims of sexualized violence from 'the public,' a theorization that would do little to point out the actuality of exclusion and negate any (collective) agency for those historically disempowered. Yet, it is necessary to account for the specific public in which shame declarations and expression occur and, more specifically, the spheres they produce. Specific witnessing practices produce these spheres. As Leigh Gilmore argues, "[p]art 'imagined community,' part 'intimate public,'

those who showed up for and shared autobiographical accounts of sexual violence represented a market for life stories by women” (“More Than Angry” 179).

While developing neither “imagined community” nor “intimate public” further, Gilmore does point to Lauren Berlant’s conceptualization of the ‘intimate public’ (*The Female Complaint*). For Berlant, an ‘intimate public’ is not precisely “a public sphere organized by autobiographical confession and chest-baring, although there is often a significant amount of first-person narrative in an intimate public” (viii). Instead, intimate publics are characterized by

an expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff *already* share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience. A certain circularity structures an intimate public, therefore: its consumer participants are perceived to be marked by a commonly lived history; its narratives and things are deemed expressive of that history while also shaping its conventions of belonging; and, expressing the sensational, embodied experience of living as a certain kind of being in the world, it promises also to provide a better experience of social belonging . . . (viii)

Intimate publics thus both presume and reproduce a notion of shared perspectives between certain consumer groups. The presumption of a particular market circularly perpetuates the supposed desires these consumers share, which, of course, rests on the understanding that the products—the stories—marketed to people, a process that constructs intimate publics, influence their view (about the world and themselves) and practices of belonging.

Anna Poletti argues that digital storytelling in particular can generate these intimate publics. Digital storytelling “legitimizes qualities, ways of being, and entire lives that have otherwise been deemed puny or discarded. It creates *situations* where those qualities can appear as luminous” (Berlant, *The Female Complaint* 62), encompassing the core of Berlant’s notion of ‘intimate publics.’ In this context, Poletti points to the digital properties that generate what is oftentimes referred to and studied as “echo chambers.” While certainly a development particularly of interest to social movement study (Bouvier; Ragnedda and Muschert)—and one for which we undoubtedly still lack a clear understanding—a problematization of “echo chambers,” which sometimes can romanticize a pre-digital age (Bruns; Möller), does not do justice to Berlant’s conceptualization of ‘intimate publics.’

Berlant begins her analysis through Reaganite right-wing agency, which, as she argues, “bases its affirmative theories on a nationalist politics of intimacy, which it contrasts to threatening practices of nonfamilial sexuality and, by implication, other forms of racial and economic alterity” (*The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* 7). Outlining the presence of “intimate things” (1) in US public life since the Reagan-era—“the process of collapsing the political and the personal into a world of public intimacy” (1)—Berlant argues that “there is no public sphere in the contemporary United States, no context of

communication and debate that makes ordinary citizens feel that they have a common public culture, or influence on a state that holds itself accountable to their opinions, critical or otherwise” (3). Berlant views the US as a “patriotically-permeated pseudopublic sphere” that is an intimate public sphere because its politics is not dominated by “a view of the nation as a space of struggle violently separated by racial, sexual, and economic inequalities . . .” but permeated by “the dominant idea [of] a core nation whose survival depends on personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidian” (4). Thus, what characterizes this “pseudopublic sphere” is precisely not the exchange that a Habermasian public sphere theorizes or envision but the drowning of a public political struggle in individuality, or rather individualization, through the everyday, which construction a notion of ‘the intimate.’

José Muñoz writes, “[t]he intimate public sphere unmask[s] the fake publicness of North American culture’s public sphere” (398). Escaping Habermas’ centrality of reason in public spheres, Berlant theorizes public spheres as “affect worlds . . . to which people are bound, when they are, by affective projections of a constantly negotiated common interestedness” (*Cruel Optimism* 226) while rejecting an oppositional juxtaposing of affect and reason. But within the ‘affect worlds’ of public spheres, intimate spheres, according to Berlant, are concerned with “matters of survival” (226). Here, it appears that “collective mediation through narration and audition might provide some routes out of the impasse and the struggle of the present, or at least some sense that there would be recognition were the participants in the room together” (226).

Yet, Berlant is critical of the notion of belonging this might suggest. In her study of ‘women’s culture,’ Berlant points to the circularity of ‘belonging.’ As a market claims to speak to a certain collective, the productions that emerge perpetuate the affect connected to that group and, with that, a sense of shared affects and experiences. Berlant writes, “[w]hen this kind of ‘culture of circulation’ takes hold, participants in the intimate public feel as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions” (*The Female Complaint* 5). Or, in other words: intimate publics do not emerge out of a sense of collectivity but produce it. Most importantly, this points to the mediation that has already taken place before a seemingly personal declaration as an intimate public “sees collective sociality routed in revelations of what is personal, regardless of how what is personal has itself been threaded through mediating institutions and social hierarchy” (10).

Besides the circularity of notions of collectivity, Berlant also points to the political paralysis this leads to. As she states, “[i]ntimate publics usually flourish to one side of politics, referring to historical subordinations without mobilizing a fundamental activism with respect to them” (Berlant and Prosser 184). However, centering the negotiations of shame in #MeToo narratives points us to dynamics in which the circulating re-affirmation does reveal mobilizing properties. Considering shame as profoundly inhibiting even circular narratives of shame expression has a disruptive quality. Yet, Berlant provides a reminder that the affects expressed in intimate publics are not merely the result of collectivized shared experiences but, rather, a space of production for the notion of shared experiences. So, the ubiquity of shame in #MeToo narratives re-emphasizes and (re-)produces the connection between shame and being a victim of sexualized violence even in its resistance. Most notably, #MeToo narratives do express an intellectual rejection of their shame but do not question the affective emergence and persistence of their shame, framing it as self-evident. In this intimate public, shame does not dissipate merely with its expression.

Nevertheless, I have argued that any counterpublic is, first and foremost, a space for grievances and contestation. So, it needs to be regarded along the lines of its resistance to a hegemonic public. Reading #MeToo narratives and literature as a self-contained space—a market of and for itself—overlooks its negotiation with the places these texts claim for themselves. #MeToo narratives are inevitably always a defiance against a threat of exclusion and further disempowerment. It is along these lines that I situate the declarations of having emerged as “stronger,” “empowered,” or “powerful” that are numerous spread through #MeToo narratives: From Rose McGowan’s memoir *Brave* to Laurie Halse Anderson’s *SHOUT* to the victim impact statements in the Larry Nassar case, or Tarana Burke’s memoir that introduced this chapter, to just name a few examples.

In 2018, *Memoir Magazine* published an essay by writer Emily Finn titled “It Starts with Blood,” awarding it the “#MeToo Essay Award” of its special collection. The essay is structured with self-aware subheadings such as “Character Development,” “Sequencing,” “Plot Holes;” and didactic requests to the reader or (in italics) the prompts followed in the writing of the essay (“Writings Exercise 1,” “Discussion Questions”). The essay constructs a story in which the structuring is as interchangeable as the events and emotions narrated. Finn switches from first person to third person point-of-view (and points that out) and introduces salt as a “thematic [element],” also pointing out when it returns “but this time not at breakfast but of bodies” (Finn). This somewhat clichéd writing renders its roundabout rhetoric ultimately redundant, constructing a social critique of the interchangeability of

sexualized violence narratives and the insignificance with which these may be received. Toward the end, Finn states this point-blank, “I cannot write on sexual assault in a traditional format because I refuse to accept what has happened and what continues to happen to every woman I know as tradition.”

Most notably, however, is the essay’s subsection titled “Catharsis,” which is, unsurprisingly, the last one. In it, Finn concludes, “I learn to speak without shame and I watch as another and another and another woman in front of me nods in understanding. *Me too.*” While ‘shame’ was previously one of “a list of words to avoid,” the dissolution of it—in a collective with other victims of sexual violence—marks the story’s ‘catharsis.’ It is no longer a story about social failings and collective discomfort about the realities of sexualized violence but a ‘heroic story’ about perseverance in which the initial discomfort serves not as a critique but as a set-up to the narrative’s catharsis. Finally, Finn declares, “I no longer feel powerless but a responsibility: to speak out until I have done my part to shatter a structure that silences.” So, the change she desires is not only within her power but her responsibility. As explored throughout this chapter, Finn’s essay exemplifies principal themes in #MeToo narratives. The feeling of intense shame is connected to being silent or, rather, feeling silenced, and the act of coming forward, which is the act of placing oneself in public and among a collective, is narrated as part of a changed relationship to one’s shame and, ultimately oneself. This process is part of the empowerment narratives that are centered in #MeToo stories.

The paratext to Lucia Osborne-Crowley’s *My Body Keeps Your Secrets: Dispatches on Shame and Reclamation* includes a quote from writer Jessica Andrews that describes the book as “a burning manifesto for the revolutionary act of articulating shame and trauma. It is a testament to the feminist praxis of listening to each other’s stories in collective solidarity as a refusal of erasure and a way to claim presence and power in the world” (1). This reading of shame expressions exemplifies a continuously re-iterated approach in #MeToo narratives: the (self-)affirmation that the places created and claimed through shame expression and solidarity are expressions and productions of a certain (feminist) power. Here, Andrews also contends that the practice of writing about the “praxis of listening to each other’s stories” further facilitates the “revolutionary” properties that “articulating shame and trauma” entails.

Next to this assessment stands the author’s admission, in the very beginning, that, “I thought I had mastered the art of anti-concealment. I thought that by writing that book, I had vanquished my need to be invulnerable. . . . But I hadn’t. I was still ashamed” (18). She continues,

It was the everyday, insidious shame that hurt me most. . . . The kind that has both nothing and everything to do with my rape. The kind that I share with women and non-binary people all over the world who have, and have not, had experiences like mine. Their everyday shame also has nothing and everything to do with my rape, and with theirs. (18)

Presenting shame as a profoundly gendered collective affect, Osborne-Crowley presumes shame to be a connecting factor. By stating that other's shame has "nothing and everything to do with my rape," Osborne-Crowley conceptualizes shame as both an internal affect, having nothing to do with her rape, and a regulatory, oppressive tool used against the disempowered (which she connects to gender dynamics), having everything to do with her rape.

It is the tension between Andrews' quote about the book that frames and introduces it and Osborne-Crowley's practice of expressing the debilitating effects of shame on her personally and, as she states, "women and non-binary people" collectively that is characteristic for #MeToo narratives' take on shame. The expression of empowerment through a liberating declaration of the non-expressible—shame—stands vis-à-vis the expression of shame that cannot circumvent its disempowering, overarching, overwhelming properties. Yet, Finn, at the end of her essay, declares a sense of power. Similarly, Osborne-Crowley narrates a replacing of shame in a performance of agency:

We internalize the shame of a shameless act. It is the predator who has done the shameful thing, but they never see it that way. Shame demands to be recognized, to be held. So because the predator refuses to hold it, we are forced to in his place. (26)

Although initially describing the internalization of shame that ensues, Osborne-Crowley ultimately concludes that "I became ashamed, for him, but it was not my shame" (27). Writing about shame along the lines of the irresistible force paradox, Osborne-Crowley makes it clear that the victim does not merely internalize the shame but is forced in a certain place: the place of shame that should be occupied by the perpetrator. This places the agency and blame outside of the victim of sexualized violence. Osborne-Crowley solidifies this image by sorting the question of belonging and establishing that the shame that feels like hers is not hers after all but, rather, is misplaced and has been misplaced all along.

However, Osborne-Crowley writes about a shame that affectively belongs to her throughout her book. She writes that ". . . shame leads us to keep secrets, and secrets lead to suffering and illness and pain" (23). That suffering, illness, and pain, as she narrates, is very much hers—anchored bodily, "transferred into our bones" (25). Or, as the book's title reads: "my body keeps your secrets." Most intensively, Osborne-Crowley paraphrases artist and activist Alok Vaid-Menon stating, "It's not just that you internalize shame; rather, it becomes you" (72). Contrasting the rejection of misplaced shame, Osborne-Crowley, here, outlines the merging of self and shame.

While Osborne-Crowley returns to this assessment throughout her book, she also frequently returns to the notion that speaking about shame dismantles the entanglement between shame and self:

One of the most important gatekeepers of shame is our determination not to give people the words they need to speak freely about themselves. This was certainly true of my rape and my trauma. . . . Shame lives and breathes in silence. When we make people ashamed, we both create and recreate that prison by ensuring that it cannot be spoken about. (72)

So, Osborne-Crowley writes about (her) expression of shame as a way to “crawl out from underneath shame” (73), narrating moments of empowerment. But unlike Finn’s concluding declaration of empowerment, this is neither final nor comprehensive. Rather, the declarations of empowerment through the practice of writing give way to moments of intellectualization of shame as debilitating, silencing, oppressive—and vice versa.

Osborne-Crowley’s text constructs a struggle for agency as it balances between extensive descriptions of the violence of shame while also expressing a sense of empowerment in resisting its effects. Nevertheless, the theme of catharsis that Finn’s essay poses bluntly is clearly present as Osborne-Crowley writes about the practice of writing about shame within the frame of shame inciting silence and retraction. While she makes clear that writing about shame did not dissolve it, she does position her quest to understand it as the end to what she constructs as a linear progression “to come back into ourselves” (271).

The perhaps most notable moment of narrative empowerment can be found in Jessica Mann’s victim impact statement. Referencing to a heavily reported event, Mann states in her first sentence, “[t]he day my uncontrollable screams were heard from the witness room was the day my full voice came back into my power” (Maddaus). While expressing that her screams were “uncontrollable,” Mann narrates the moment as one of regained agency. In the courtroom, facing the judge, Mann performs and claims that her “full voice came back into [her] power” not only because she screamed uncontrollably but because these screams “were heard.” So, Mann concludes her statements by declaring that “Today I have no shame” (Maddaus). This is embedded in a statement about the detrimental effects having been raped and shamed for it have had on her. Surely, this is something to be expected in a victim impact statement. Mann’s declaration of empowerment—which draws on the powerful image of her screaming, audible to the courtroom after those present in court witnessed her having a panic attack during cross-examination—relies on the narration of the properties of shame. The declaration is ultimately a statement of empowerment because Mann establishes throughout her victim impact statement that the shame that has been placed on her was almost impossible to overcome. I will return to Jessica Mann’s victim impact statement to assess

the meaning of the tension between her expressions and performance of empowerment and her narrativization of profound powerlessness (Chapter 4.2.).

These examples all address the power of shame and the working of power (relations) to establish shame. Osborne-Crowley writes, “. . . it strikes me that perhaps that’s what true power is: the structural and systemic privilege of being allowed to define what is normal and what is abnormal, what is acceptable and what is shameful, what is allowed to be flaunted and what is to be kept secret” (72). Throughout, the prominence of power has made itself felt. On the one hand, power constructs self and shame, interfering in how one thinks, feels, and acts. Thus, shame emerges as a profoundly cultural regulatory concept that is a mechanism of power dynamics. On the other hand, #MeToo displays the utilization of shame to disrupt the power dynamics that are at the root of it. Thus, ‘power,’ as it is inextricable from shame, demands its own theorization.

3. (Being) In and Out of Place: A Feminist Theorization of Power

Foucault has (in)famously claimed that “[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (*The History of Sexuality* 95). He also, rather (in)famously, forgoes a convincing theorization of said resistance, a criticism frequently picked up in feminist literature (Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory* 54; Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* 108; Deveaux 235). Indeed, the project of deriving a feminist theory of power from Foucault has a quite rich body of literature or, dare I say, tradition by now (Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*; Deveaux; Fraser, *Unruly Practices*; Hartsock; Ramazanoglu; Sawicki).

Nancy Fraser critiques Foucault for forgoing a discussion about the normative acceptability of different forms of power and laying out his theorization as too broad, ignoring the Weberian literature that distinguishes “authority, force, violence, domination, and legitimation” (“Foucault on Modern Power” 286). Indeed, Foucault’s notion of power is quite distinct—and far broader—than theory that follows in the footsteps of Max Weber’s definition of power (*Macht*): “. . . [T]he probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests” (*The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* 152).¹⁰ What Weber calls power, Hannah Arendt writes about as ‘force.’ Evidently, the theorization of power seems to first evoke a discussion about seemingly similar, surely connected, and, for some, interchangeable conceptualities.

A mere quibble about terminology is, however, not a productive critique to get closer to a meaningful theorization of power. More constructive, rather, is Fraser’s acknowledgment that “Foucault calls too many different sorts of things power and simply leaves it at that” (“Foucault on Modern Power” 286). Indeed, Foucault insists that “[p]ower is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (*The History of Sexuality* 93). It is specifically this ubiquity that makes a neat differentiation between, for instance, power, domination, or violence, not only arduous but hardly useful. What is crucial to take from Foucault’s argument here is the notion that although power appears somewhat stable because it continuously reproduces itself through itself, it is inseparable from a certain mobility that leaves the possibility of resistance permeating through this supposed stability open.

¹⁰ There is a discussion about the translation of Weber’s definition (Wallimann et al.). In Weber’s own words, “Macht bedeutet jede Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eignen Willen auch gegen Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel worauf diese Chance beruht” (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* 28).

While arguing that power relations may be established through the use of violence, Foucault's notion of power necessitates that "'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised)" ("The Subject and Power" 340) can resist the domination exercised. For Foucault, where there is power, there has to be agency. Where force comes into play, Foucault writes about a "relationship of violence" (340). His conceptualization is not quite consistent here as he does permit the possibility of the one exercising power over another to also utilize violence while situating the use of violence outside the realms of power dynamics. It is analytically incongruous to position violence as a mechanism with which power may be exercised (341) but, at the same time, outside of the realm of power relations. While Foucault's inconclusion in distinguishing between power and violence is futile, his assertion about the necessity for power to require agency is what renders a theorization of power worthwhile. The absence of any possibility for resistance otherwise marks, at the very least, a feminist project of conceptualizing power useless. So, when power is exercised through violence, these dynamics have not left the realm of power to conceptually negate resistance.

Monique Deveaux argues that with this conceptualization Foucault "disregard[s] the ways in which this power is frequently transformed into violence" (235). Like Fraser's missing of normative criteria in Foucault's notion of power, Deveaux here also points to an important addendum to Foucault: there is no clear divorcing of domination, force, and power from a feminist standpoint when they all feed on each other to uphold the patriarchal dynamics that are part of every story of sexualized violence. In a 1977 roundtable discussion, Foucault argued:

. . . [W]hen one punishes rape one should be punishing physical violence and nothing but that. And to say that it is nothing more than an act of aggression: that there is no difference, in principle, between sticking one's fist into someone's face or one's penis into their sex . . . [T]here are problems [in suggesting that rape is more serious than punching someone in the face] because what we're saying amounts to this: 'sexuality as such, in the body, has a preponderant place, the sexual organ isn't like a hand, hair, or a nose.' (Foucault et al. 200–02)

Monique Plaza points to Foucault's obvious dismissal of rape as a form of gendered violence when he calls into question the difference between "sticking one's fist into someone's face or one's penis into their sex." She explains the difference:

Whether one punches his fist in someone's face, or his penis in the sexual organ does make a difference—the difference between the sexes. For men rape women insofar as they belong to the class of men which has appropriated the bodies of women. They rape that which they have learned to consider as their property, that is to say, individuals of the other sex class than theirs, the class of women (which, I repeat, can also contain biological men). (29)

Following Plaza, rape is always gendered. Yet, it is not gendered merely in the way that Foucault's parenthetical implication that it necessarily requires both a penis (undoubtedly

and oftentimes uncritically a symbol of masculinity) and penetration (here, the law in many countries would agree) would suggest. Instead, rape or, more broadly, sexualized violence, is a gendered degradation and humiliation. The level of devastation between being sexually, physically assaulted and being physically assaulted in a way that leaves any sex-associated components out of it is surely subjective. The difference in social and historical shaming, however, is undeniable.

This discussion runs parallel to considerations of language around sex and violence in the #MeToo movement. So far, I have used the term ‘sexualized violence’ instead of ‘sexual violence.’ This change in terminology calls into question the ‘sexuality’ in sexual violence, arguing that rape has little to do with sexuality while also pointing to the fact that practices oftentimes referred to as sexual violence sexualize the victim through a specific use of violence (von Joeden-Forgey 125). I use sexualized violence to indicate that the practices that inflict a type of violence on a victim that use, abuse, harm, and demand a part of their sexuality is a type of violence that is both very distinct from sexual acts and most, importantly, the victim’s sexuality, and also a specific violence and humiliation that cannot be divorced from the cultural meanings of sex. After all, rape, as the most severe example of sexualized violence, does have something to do with sexuality. As Catharine MacKinnon argues, “[v]iolence is sex when it is practiced as sex. If violation of the powerless is part of what is sexy about sex . . . , the place of sexuality in gender and the place of gender in sexuality need to be looked at together” (*Feminism Unmodified* 115). So, the shaming of victims of sexualized violence entails a specificity. Victims are shamed for having been sexually violated, not (merely) for having been physically overpowered or manipulated in some way. The act of sexualized violence connects the perpetrator’s sexual pleasure with an act of violence.

To not get lost in tedious attempts to neatly define each of these terms—power, violence—I rather recognize their interconnectedness with its specificity in the case of sexual abuse and think of power as a practice. As Foucault argues, “. . . there is no such entity as power, with or without a capital letter; . . . Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action . . .” (“The Subject and Power” 340). In other words: power is practiced. And when it is practiced as sexualized violence, it stands in connection to this sexuality and, with that, gendered degradation. The notion of power as exercised leaves, at this point, the question of who gets to exercise power and on whom it is exercised entirely open. Critical of a ‘distributive model’ of power, which views power as a resource—something to be possessed rather than relational—Iris Marion Young argues that domination

and oppression can only be conceptualized when power is understood as productive because then, “. . . widely dispersed persons are agents of power without ‘having’ it, or even being privileged” (33). This allows for a consideration of relations to produce domination, oppression, or, as I would add, exploitation, as complex social processes rather than moments of ‘rule’ by those having claimed power. Further, it indicates possibilities of mobility beyond the distribution of power that would bring along new dynamics of domination, oppression, and exploitation.

Young here responds to a school of thought in feminism that, particularly in the notion of ‘popular feminism’ (Banet-Weiser) remains persistent: the notion that power is an important, positive resource that has so far been unfairly distributed. In this line of thinking, it is feminism’s objective to redistribute power more equally among men and women (Cooper; Donner; Frazer and Hutchings; Mill). Noting women’s exclusion from spheres in which power is supposedly held, this would render the inclusion of women in these spheres as feminism’s goal (Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory* 8). Analyzing popular culture discourses on feminism, Sarah Banet-Weiser positions this notion along the lines of what Joan Scott referred to as “add women and stir” (12).

Susan Moller Okin has applied this thinking to the family domain, arguing that power is not only unequally distributed regarding women’s relationship to the state but also (and because of) inequality in the family realm. Centering the distribution of unpaid labor in the household, Okin reprimands the “ignoring of the family, its division of labor, and the related economic dependency and restricted opportunities of most women” in political theory (9). For Okin, this neat distinction between the “public” and “private” life along with the assumption that the latter is somehow “nonpolitical” is untenable. A lot has happened since Okin’s text in 1989; not only in political theory. While the categories of “private” and “public” seem quite resilient, they have lost a lot of their assumed stability in today’s (feminist) theory. A comprehensive defense of a clear distinction would be hard to find.

Yet, as Amy Allen points out, Okin writes about power as a resource, obstructing an analysis of its relational grounding. I do not mean to suggest a ‘power as resource’ vs. ‘power as relational’ dichotomy here. In fact, this is one notion to firmly criticize in Amy Allen’s analysis. Instead, I propose to consider power as an exercised resource, a practice,¹¹ that is

¹¹ Although Foucault writes about power being “exercised,” I propose to rather consider power (and resistance) as practiced, drawing a distinction to emphasize the discursive, ritualized quality of practices. This consideration stands against the backdrop of Matt Watson’s contribution to practice theory as well as Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey’s work on practices of resistance. Matt Watson contends that although power remains underexplored in practice theory, it is nevertheless omnipresent because, in his understanding, practices shape performances through which power relations are constructed. Emphasizing that power relations emerged not

discursively constructed and thus always relational. Surely the way power is exercised as domination makes it seem akin to a resource used and abused. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that it is only that through its continuous discursive construction. Only this acknowledgment allows the consideration of power's instability. Foucault considers this instability, firmly arguing that

[p]ower must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising their power. ("Two Lectures" 214)

What Foucault makes clear here is that while power is not simply a resource to obtain (once) and then utilize to dominate and sustain the structures that uphold this distribution of power, but, at the same time, its dynamic properties as something exercised do not render power entirely fluid. Rather, the exercising of power is embedded in the structures in and through which power discursively sustains itself, masked as stable. It is thus conceptually dynamic and not always necessarily in the ways it is practiced.

Any theorization of power that is interested in possible resistance to it needs to hold space for the complexity of power being practiced instead of drawing a tempting, simplified notion of a dichotomous society divided between those who 'have' power to use and abuse and those who do not. Also highlighting the relevance of considering power as relational, Iris Marion Young contends that it is only when considering the myriad of ways in which power may be practiced that "then it is possible to say that many widely dispersed persons are agents of power without 'having' it, or even being privileged" (33).

through isolated practices "but are effects of the ordering and the churn of innumerable moments of practices" (181), Watson carves out the immanent cohesion between theories of power as relation and (much of) practice theory. He concludes that, ". . . power relations and their consequences only exist through connections between moments of the performance of practices" (180). Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey develop a concept of 'resistance practice' premised on an understanding of power as upheld by "the symbols, practices, statuses, and privileges that have become habitual in social structures" (1334). In these frames, meaningful practices of resistance are constituted through the process of narrativization, which renders them engaged in a process of meaning-making. For Ewick and Silbey, practices of resistance are embedded in the construction of power, a process itself constituted by practices.

Power as "exercised" evokes, I argue, a notion in which power is something possessed and then, in and through certain activities, utilized (which, as outlined, contradicts Foucault's notion although he—imprecisely, I argue—writes about power being exercised). This would suggest that the distribution of power is not perceptible or relevant outside of it being exercised. Rather, however, I follow the understanding that power is relational; constructed through practices (a notion that implies relationality and repetition). This means that power is dynamic, dependent on the practices that construct it. However, it also means that the practices that construct power relations are embedded in hegemonic social orders that structure them (which are constructed by practices), recognizing that practices of resistance respond to continuously upheld powerful frames of organization. Because power is something instable enough to require constant repetition to uphold itself; but stable enough to appear stable because the practices that structure it discursively masked themselves as 'natural' or, at least, self-evident, it is best described as something practiced.

With the presumption of a certain power in expressing one's story or, more precisely, one's experience of shame or even declaring a shame resistance to an experience of being disempowered, then those contributing their story to the #MeToo movement practice it. The practice of writing an autobiographical narrative requires a performance of agency; it is a construction of self. But does that also grant the conclusion that these practices of power lead to a shift in power? Declaring having been sexually violated disrupts the social shaming practices that would lead to retraction and de-place victims from presumably empowering spheres. Does this, however, constitute not a performance of agency but rather a (re-)gaining of it?

It is not the practice of claiming a story in which the element of disempowerment is clear or the practice of either embracing or rejecting the shame that this disempowerment incited alone but rather the recognition of it that grants a certain power. An expression or confession of shame that remains isolated, unread, and unheard does not generate the same power—or, presumably, sense of empowerment—as collective, shared declarations. This is most evident in the public #MeToo cases in which several victims construct a narrative that appears almost interchangeable because they all experienced sexualized violence at the hands of the same perpetrator.

Scenes from the remarkably similar documentaries *Athlete A* and *At the Heart of Gold: Inside the USA Gymnastics Scandal* about the female gymnasts who were abused by their team doctor Larry Nassar illustrate this strikingly. Earlier, I described the scene in which Rachael Denhollander talks about the power of victims speaking in court and deciding to be publicly identified. Her statement “Every time Angela stood up and said, ‘Survivor XYZ is coming forward, and she has decided to speak publicly,’ that was just an incredibly powerful statement every single time. Because it meant . . . that they were able to put the shame not on themselves, but on their abuser” begins in voice-over before she is shown in a close shot in an interview situation for the documentary. During the voice-over part, brief scenes from the courtroom, in which different victims are standing in front of a microphone, facing the out-of-frame judge and Nassar are cut back to back. The camera perspective remains the same. This is preceded by other scenes from victim impact statements in which we see and hear parts of their statements. Brief sequences of the prosecutor introducing the speakers are shown and then turn to voice-over. These introductions that name the victim and their intent to be publicly identified are cut to slightly overlap each other (B. Cohen and Shenk 01:25:27-01:27:16).

At the Heart of Gold shows a collage in which we see the camera slightly pan over in the same motion, sharpening the image from a slight blur to a clear picture multiple times while different victims of Nassar's abuse sit in front of it, looking directly in the lens. These images are underlaid with audio from Rachael Denhollander's victim impact statement in court. The visual of this situation then returns as well. Again, a close shot from the site shows Denhollander facing the judge and Nassar in front of her. A brief shot of two hands holding each other and then another brief shot of the audience in the courtroom in which several people are hugging each other follows upon which the documentary returns to the collage of victims looking at the camera before it cuts to another victim in the same image composition (Carr 01:13:35-01:14:40). Towards the end, we hear Rachael Denhollander stating that these are "women and girls who have made the choice to place the guilt and shame on the only person to whom it belongs, the abuser" (Carr 01:14:09).

So, both documentaries clearly stage these victims as a collective. The cross-cutting between their statements suggests that their experiences are not only similar but, to some extent, interchangeable. While this decenters their individual trauma, it signals that there is a crucial potential in this interchangeability: the formation of a solidary collective that enables a more powerful performance of shame resistance, resilience, and, ultimately, a judicial and, following the documentaries' narration, an affective triumph over previously isolated shame and, vitally, the perpetrator.

In my theorization of shame, I have pointed to its interconnectedness with power. Shame, I argue, is a profound mechanism of power as it only functions through the ostracization it threatens people with. More precisely, shaming is a practice of power as it constructs what is deemed shameful. Sexualized violence illustrates that this practice needs repetition to uphold itself. Therefore, there is room for resistance. I have also read shame along the lines of Bourdieu's symbolic violence to argue, against Bourdieu, that the recognition of (shame as) symbolic violence profoundly destabilizes it, utilizing that room for resistance. Now, having opened the discussion to power, aiming to explore power at the root of the immobility that shame incites as well as empowerment as the root of movement, I have turned to violence once again.

Violence, Power, and Placelessness

Theorizing power against the backdrop of the #MeToo movement points to the interconnectedness of power and violence that introduced this chapter. #MeToo tells stories both about sexualized violence and abuses of power. Further, the shame that victims narrate

as a case of immobility and placelessness is a result of the very same power dynamics that enable the abuses of power that create the space for the sexualized violence that is collected in the stories of the #MeToo movement. Violence is an instrument of power relations and thus not outside the domain of power relations. Going one step further, I contend that these practices of violence, specifically the inescapability of gendered violence that is sexualized violence, construct, shape, and stabilize power relations.

The (im)possibility of movement illustrates this point. Ann J. Cahill describes how,

women's limitation of space within which her body can move seems to gesture not towards self-inflicted harm, but rather towards harm inflicted by other bodies. . . . [The] limited, individual safety zone which determines the smallness of a woman's step, the gathering in of her sitting body, and the daintiness of her gestures mirrors in fact the larger hampering of her mobility. For a woman, the travelling world is a small place. ("Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body" 55)

As Cahill delineates, a threat of violence (an expectation of unsafety) demobilizes certain bodies. Those culturally, socially, and historically rendered vulnerable are less present in spaces where their safety is expected to be threatened. This is as much a result of power relations as it is violence. Violence, here, is an instrument and stabilizer because with the lack of possible movement for seemingly more vulnerable bodies—in a conversation about sexualized violence that means bodies gendered/rendered female—comes a reduced claim to certain places. This placelessness hinders change in power dynamics as they are constructed through places and their altercations. Sexualized violence emphasizes the gendered aspect of this placelessness, which is, crucially, not a displacement but a placelessness, as the #MeToo movement, in its collectivity, positions that places in which safety can be expected or experienced are untenable or merely imaginary. Cahill argues the threat of violence that discourages or restricts women from moving in certain places is “not to the body *in general*. That danger is almost always specifically sexualized” (55). Centering placelessness in a discussion on power relations illustrates the interplay of violence and power as a mechanism with which the stability of a place is discursively upheld. If movement and, specifically, altercation in movement through places is minimized, so is the potential to change both the makeup of a place; how it is connotated in terms of gender, class, or race and the power relations at play within the practices that construct a place, specifically, its symbolism.

In stories of sexual abuse, violence underscores the power relation as it is constructed not merely in the interaction but also in the context in which it is embedded. Through violence, the subject becomes the victim. As an exploration into shame has revealed, this state of victimhood does not end with the interaction, as the violence (of shame) continues after the abuse. This does not mean, however, that there was a sovereign subject in an

interaction prior to sexualized violence. Rather, the power relations at play through and after the dynamics of sexualized violence reveal the false promise of agency.

The process of being shamed de-places victims through the retraction that shame incites. This makes evident a dynamic already present prior to, for instance, sexualized violence that results in shame, as the dynamics of power relations construct the perimeter with which certain bodies move through places; a dynamic perhaps most evident in the (constant) threat of (sexualized) violence that presents places differently to different (gendered) bodies. Being disempowered necessarily results in placelessness, perpetuating the placelessness in turn. This includes the dynamics that render physical movement particularly unsafe for some, restricting their ability to resist this placelessness but also the discursive power available, as placelessness constraints, metaphorically speaking, not only bodies but also voices.

In the Panopticon metaphor I have briefly drawn on earlier, being in power is the difference between being the one seemingly surveilled, leading to self-surveilling, or the metaphorical guard, placed above, tasked with disciplining through the mere idea of their presence and threat, consequently implicitly in power, at least in the micro-relation guard vis-à-vis prisoner. The metaphor illustrates how the power of shame functions through a ubiquitous ‘public,’ meaning the internalized awareness of public judgment. Even in isolation or in the absence of direct scrutiny, the threat of scrutiny and exclusion governs behavior. Like the threat of surveillance that promotes self-discipline to conformity, the metaphorical surveillance that the threat of shame can instill incites a self-constraint and self-beratement that stabilizes the cultural script around ‘acceptable’ behavior.

Although Sandra Bartky discerns that Foucault “is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine” (“Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” 132), she nevertheless utilizes Foucault’s conceptualization of the docile body to outline that not only is femininity socially constructed but the disciplinary practices that enable the construction of femininity are evident of a “modernization of patriarchal domination” (132). One example Bartky draws on are strict diet and exercise regimes women put themselves through to conform to a certain gendered expectation of beauty. Through these, the production of the feminine subject renders women restricted in their own movement (132). In this process, women internalize these ideals and ultimately police themselves, following Bartky. Here, she also draws on Foucault’s Panopticon: “The woman who checks her makeup half a dozen times a day . . . , who worries that the wind or the rain may spoil her hairdo, . . . has become, just as surely as

the inmate of the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance” (149). Barky’s theorization here has brought along some criticism about her dismissal of women’s agency. As Monique Deveaux states, “[w]omen’s choices and differences are lost altogether in Bartky’s description of the feminine body and its attendant practices” (226). While the omission of any possibility of resistance is uncomfortable and short-sighted, Bartky’s description of a gendered politics of the Panopticon can remain useful nonetheless.

What this illustrates in regards to shame is that the dismantling of shame as a ‘private’ emotion as opposed to a cultural affect and symbolic violence hinges on understanding the power dynamics at its roots. With a perpetually surveilling public that discursively establishes its normative ideals, there is no self to evaluate oneself with. Staying with the metaphor, the self-surveillance rendered possible by the constant threat of surveillance incites the self-silencing of shame. The threat of ostracization and public shaming is learned and has reached the sense of self, indicating that this seemingly most private of spheres is 1) not private at all and 2) threatened and unsafe. So, the self-silencing that shame incites is not a self-silencing after all. It is a result of cultural silencing dynamics. The dynamics by which it is masked as a ‘self-silencing’ render it so powerful, (almost) negating public intervention and participation. These dynamics are subject of Katie Rose Guest Pryal’s essay “Nightmare Rooms,” included in her book *Even If You’re Broken: Essays on Sexual Assault and #MeToo*

Sexualized Violence, Threat, and De-Placing

The book *Even If You’re Broken: Essays on Sexual Assault and #MeToo* by Katie Rose Guest Pryal includes an autobiographical essay titled “Nightmare Rooms” that focuses on the effects of sexualized violence on a victim’s spatial awareness, (limitations on) movement, and ability to belong in public places. The essay begins with the author learning about being included in an art installation without her knowledge or consent. Most crucially for the story, the art installation (titled “Dream Rooms”) features, “[v]ideo footage of my face, captured by a stranger at a coffee shop at some point in the past, enlarged to the size of a picture window” and is “projected on the wall just inside the main entrance of the North Carolina Museum of Art” (Guest Pryal 81). Guest Pryal describes hearing about this from an acquaintance and narrates what quickly is identifiable as a trauma response to being involuntarily and without her awareness filmed and projected and, with that, turned into an observable, consumable object, used to make a point about “our wired world” in which people are “wholly absorbed, their trancelike states brought on primarily through an intense

engagement with the alternate reality presented by laptops and smart phones” (85), as Guest Pryal quotes from the artist’s statement about the installation. Throughout the narration of learning about this, Guest Pryal first details her emotional response by stating, “My first thought . . . is that the artist’s statement is so pretentious that it reads like a satire of an artist’s statement. My second thought is that I can never go to a coffee shop again” (85). This response encapsulates the restriction of movement upon being confronted with a specific vulnerability to exposure in certain places; it is a restriction that only appears self-inflicted but already implies a context of previous experiences that have altered the author’s relation to safety. The theme of this emotional response continues in the essay’s second part, in which Guest Pryal reveals,

In my life, men have done horrible things to my body, things that have made me feel that my body was not my own. They have made me question where the world ends and my body begins, as though I do not have the same rights to my skin, my hands, my hair, my face, as other humans have to theirs. As *men* have to theirs. No, as *white men* have to theirs. (86)

Here, Guest Pryal narrates her body as rendered entirely exposed to a harmful vulnerability, in which men determine her sense of (possible) placement. Establishing that she lacks a sense of ownership over her body through the “horrible things” done to it—writing that constructs a notable separation between herself and her body, underlining the described enforced alienation—the experience of being filmed and projected as part of an art installation becomes a repeated occurrence of and metaphor for being confronted with being forcefully (re-)placed and, with that, a trigger for the trauma she alludes to. Guest Pryal then describes these traumata in further detail:

When I was in eighth grade, a man raped me in a forest. When I was a freshman in college, an older student stalked me. . . . Later, when I was still in school, a married professor tried to start a sexual relationship with me, and I rejected him. . . . When I was still in school, a friend raped me after we went out to a bar together. (87)

This short narration, which almost reads like an enumeration, suggests the imminent threat of sexualized violence that has shaped Guest Pryal’s experience and spatial awareness. As she concludes, “All I could think, for days and weeks after, was, *How can we tell when we are in danger? How can we ever tell when we are safe?*” (87). Already implying a specific collectivity in these experiences—the “we” she writes of here is already a gendered one—Guest Pryal further narrates,

My stories are awful, but they are not unique. I was talking to my friend recently about being raped in graduate school, about the martinis and the bar on Franklin Street. She said, *Me too*. And then she said, *Which bar on Franklin Street is your bar?* When I read the description of [the art installation] Dream Rooms I wondered, *Which coffee shop?* (87)

The places of sexualized violence or the coffee shop that becomes a symbol for the forced de-placing this incites—the art installation’s invasion of privacy is rather metaphorical—

become crucial elements relating to the victims (sense of) a lack of safety and belonging. It is the places that are now rendered (permanently) unsafe not only due to the memories they symbolize but also due to their function as a reminder of the ubiquity of possible repeated occurrences. As Guest Pryal's enumeration has already made clear at this point: the places of sexualized violence that incite the lack of possibility to differentiate between one's body and "the world" that may abuse it are as varied as they are unpredictable and mundane.

Yet, when Guest Pryal writes about her friend asking, "*Which bar on Franklin Street is your bar?*" (87), a notion of possession of one's place of abuse is suggested. "Your bar" in this story, however, rather connotes the place that self-evidently remains a site of trauma and, with that, restricted movement. It also further underlines the commonality of the now interchangeable experiences shared between the author and her friend as it becomes clear that any bar (on Franklin Street) may be unsafe. So, the lingering question "*Which coffee shop?*" (87) also constructs a sense of unease. There is a clearly established self-evidence to the notion that the place of abuse—or the place metaphoric for abuse—is, through the (permanent) powerless experienced there, threatening. This knowledge is—as Pryal's second thought ". . . I can never go to a coffee shop again" (85) has already suggested—a further restriction of one's movement. So, the coffee shop symbolizes the de-placement and displacement of being (ab)used. Further, the powerlessness experienced is not only identity-threatening but, in Guest Pryal's narrative, the catalyst for a total lack of embodiment.

This narrated restriction does not merely occur on the level of an increasing and perhaps never-ending list of affectively unsafe places to avoid. Rather, Guest Pryal writes about her trauma-informed spatial experience that underlines sexualized violence as a form of (gendered) violence that renders victims not only without a sense of their own body but also consistently de-placed.

Here's what it takes for me to immerse myself in my work in a coffee shop.

First, I have to leave the house. Some days, leaving the house is hard. Those days, fortunately, have become rare.

Next, I have to find a public place that feels familiar enough that I trust I will be safe there. For years, even in these safe places, I couldn't sit with my back to the room, only to the wall. In the past few years, I've grown able to sit with my back to the room.

Finally, I can only allow myself to grow immersed in my work once I've grown to trust the people around me. I can't, for example, immerse myself in my work on an airplane seated next to a stranger. I can when I'm seated next to my husband. I can't when I'm in a strange city seated alone in a restaurant or coffee shop, but I can if a good friend is there. The people matter, too. I can be in a familiar place, but if there is a stranger who makes me uncomfortable, I will leave.

I can no longer immerse myself in my work in the coffee shop where Dream Rooms was filmed. (92)

This autobiographical account of moving through the world as a victim of sexualized violence details that said experience accompanies every step or lack thereof. This includes

places in which some practices suggest a certain level of belonging and/or privacy, like a coffee shop or an assigned seat on a plane in which one might temporarily create a place of one's or, at least, a sense of this ownership and supposed safety. Crucially, Guest Pryal narrates that it is both the place and the other people with which these places are (somewhat) shared that dictate her affective placial experience. It is not only the acute experience in these places that dictates Guest Pryal's sense of (safely) belonging in the world. Rather, she describes that an unsettling experience like the one she connects to a specific coffee shop permanently alters her ability to have certain experiences (ones that require a sense of safety) in these places. So, while there is a fluidity to feeling safe, which may be taken away by the presence of strangers or the practices of these strangers, there is also a permanence to an affective lack of safety.

In this narrative, the home is a fixed place outside the realms of otherwise omnipresent threats of sexualized violence. As Guest Pryal describes, it is once she leaves her home that the complex web of possible movements in certain places begins. Finding out about having been filmed without her knowledge underlines that "the world"—something that excludes her home, as it remains only mentioned as the place to be left both to participate and experience but also be subjected to trauma, retraumatization, and danger—does not hold space for her to simultaneously be in it and be a subject.

I am bare. I have been surveilled, intimately. My privacy is no more. I have been experienced, gazed upon. One man's impulse to intimately examine me has taken precedence over my bodily autonomy, my privacy. I'm no longer a person, merely a character, recorded. *Where does my body end and his gaze begin?* (89)

With this constant exposure to a (man's impulsive) gaze that renders her an object to be "experienced, gazed upon" or, in the other experiences she includes in her narrative, sexually abused, she is displaced.

The end of the chapter adds further symbolic significance to the coffee shop as one of the sites of abuse in Guest Pryal's narrative: "When I knew I had to write this chapter, I considered writing it at Caffè Driade, the coffee shop where Noland filmed me for Dream Rooms. After seeing the installation years ago, I've never returned there" (108). Guest Pryal positions the writing of her chapter in the coffee shop that signified an emotional retraction akin to the ones sexualized violence incited in her as a possible extradiegetic (and then made intradiegetic) symbolic practice of resistance. Albeit unactualized, this possibility remains captured in the narrative. This thought further introduces the other possible connotation the sites of abuse in her narrative may carry. About the coffee shop, Guest Pryal writes,

When I was an undergraduate, my friends and I used to go there because it felt exotic. We were driving to Chapel Hill from Durham where I went to college, and we parked in the gravel lot deep among the trees, and we'd enter the small, low-ceilinged building,

with its Italian name, tucked back from Franklin Street, and we'd order Italian coffees.
 We'd read books and write in our notebooks.
 I have good memories of those times. (108–09)

However, because this narration is followed by a brief story about the affective necessity to avoid the coffee shop—"But every time I slow my car, climbing the hill up Franklin Street, I can't make myself pull off the road onto the gravel drive. . . . I press down on the accelerator and pass by the turnoff, past the small building tucked into the treets, and climb the hill too fast, perhaps. Or perhaps just fast enough" (109)—the short immersion into the idyllic past memories about the place that would later become (a metaphor for) a site of abuse rather functions as an emphasis of the emotional devastation about what was permanently taken away through a transgression (of limits) that underscored Guest Pryal's lack of safety in (public) places. With that, the possibility of fluidity to the various memories places may hold does not remain open.

It becomes evident that abuse not only restricted her sense of safety and her movement but also inescapably altered the meaning of places for her. Here, the trauma is about the place because the practice that results in trauma entirely constitutes the written place. Within the writing, the description of the place ultimately describes the trauma, from its location to its specific intimacy: "The tables so small, so intimate. Knowing Noland and Dream Rooms as well as I do now, I know that's why he picked the spot—the closeness, the intimacy" (108). This practice further solidifies the narration of sexualized violence as an identity-shattering trauma. The coffee shop narrated is now a crucial part of Guest Pryal's story and, with that, inevitability stands in a possessive relation to her, as with "her" bar on Franklin Street that remains unspecified other than the vital narration that she was raped there. Yet, she is and, at the end of her story, remains unable to visit it. So, the author's ability to gauge a sense of belonging in the world and, with that, place herself is, intradiagetically, constructed as unattainable.

Ultimately, Guest Pryal's essay underlines that the affective placelessness a lack of safety incites structures. Namely, it structures the sites of power negotiation and leaves some bodies de-placed and, with that, powerless. The surveillance that precedes the lack of belonging and incites a seemingly self-imposed but crucially heteronomous retraction is, in this story, literal. However, it may as well be metaphorical regarding the constant threat of (sexualized) violence. This brings us back to Foucault.

Punitive Society and Mechanisms of Power

The power of surveillance and discipline that guards ought to exercise is evidently more resourceful when a place and understanding of that place is developed and upheld that requires merely the realistic threat of a guard, along with the affects this entails, and not actual personnel. Or, at least, fewer personnel. The difference between being/feeling ‘in’ and ‘out of’ place carries along into the Panopticon metaphor and the concept of panopticism. While the prisoners face the constant (possible) surveillance of the security guards, the guards themselves—as long as they are in the surveilling position—are not subject(ed) to the same surveillance. Further, each prisoner becomes their own guard within the frame of the rules of surveillance. In the language of shame, everybody is their own ‘guard’ within the frame of what is deemed shameful by hegemonic culture.

Foucault develops a similar approach in his notion of a ‘punitive society.’ Employing his concept of disciplinary power, Foucault uses his take on the evolution and acceptance of prisons to lay out the development of a punitive society. Foucault asks about the emergence of this acceptance and provides the answer: coercion. Specifically,

[w]e are dealing with a form of coercion that differs from the penal sanction, an everyday coercion that focuses on ways of being and seeks to bring about a certain correction of individuals. The coercive is what establishes a connection between morality and penalty. Its target is not just the infractions of individuals, but their nature, their character. It must have permanent and fundamental supervision (surveillance) as its instrument. (Foucault, *The Punitive Society* 110)

Resistance to that coercion is, for Foucault, possible. For coercion, he argues, that “[t]o practice transgression is for a person, in a place, for a moment, to render the law unreal and powerless; to engage in dissidence is to attack this connection, this coercion” (112). More than “breaking the taboo” (112), the practice of resistance to coercion is characterized as a discursive practice in which a new understanding of framing of the law is possible.

Embedded in a critique of what Foucault frames as a false popular notion of how prisons came to be, he makes the larger point that

[i]n the nineteenth century, power is no longer effectuated through that solemn, visible, ritual form of sovereignty, but through the habit imposed on some, or on all, but in order that, first of all, fundamentally, some are obliged to yield to it. . . . [Power] will take the insidious, quotidian, habitual form of the norm, and in this way it is hidden as power and passes for society. (239–40)

This notion permits the consideration of shame as a mechanism for the production of ‘the norm.’ Indeed, shame precisely is “a play of coercion and punishment” that is grounded in the practices, ideologies, or bodies that are marked as ‘shameful’ to be self-evidently understood as such. Shame is also a mechanism of power, furthering the notion of a threat of punishment—that is, a disciplinary measure—producing and stabilizing social

hierarchies. Thinking of shame along the lines of an effect of a punitive society also explains the self-evidence with which shame is treated even in feminist literature that takes issue with having experienced sexualized violence as being framed as shameful. In this case, Foucault rightly predicted that

[i]f in fact power now no longer manifests itself through the violence of its ceremony, but is exercised through normalization, habit, and discipline, we will see the formation of a new type of discourse. . . . It is a discourse that will describe, analyze, and found the norm and make it prescriptible, persuasive. (240)

With this persuasive and pervasive norm, resistance to it ought to lay bare the dynamics of normalization that construct and sustain power.

More than the Panopticon metaphor, reading shame in the light of a ‘punitive society’ highlights shame as the pinnacle of the mechanisms of punishment utilized around self-discipline masked as a seemingly personal struggle outside of (gendered) power relations. This also entails, however, that disruptive narratives such as “#MeToo,” public expressions or rejections of shame or counter-narratives that aim to expose and dismantle the de-placing, silencing effects of it are points of intervention/resistance.

These points of intervention might not aim to dismantle the dynamics of shame but might also aim to redirect them. In other words, resistance to shame as a mechanism of a punitive society might also look like an acceptance of the way in which a punitive society produces a norm but aims to challenge what that norm is. Especially in the context of prisons (although I read the history of prisons in Foucault’s text primarily as a teaser or, as he writes, “a symbol” [239]), it is important to acknowledge that victims of sexualized violence might either voice their disillusionment with the state’s mechanisms of ‘protection’ and ‘justice’—a response to the way in which being (a)shamed leads to a retraction from these mechanisms, rendering oneself powerless in a particular way—or embrace the judicial idea of justice and, with that, the system that, in some cases, shifts the (affective) power dynamics between the victim and the perpetrator as he enters confinement.

There are three crucial points about power to gain from a reading of shame along the lines of Foucault’s panopticism and punitive society: 1) it is a form of power that requires little resources to sustain itself; 2) it works through (a sense of) being ‘in’ and ‘out of’ place; 3) its dominance works through cultural hegemony, meaning, first and foremost, the underlying socio-cultural dynamics of what is deemed shameful.

Hegemony and Domains of Power

Cultural hegemony describes how the culturally dominant perception of normative/universal/acceptable beliefs, ideologies, and behavior is not the product of negotiations of (equal) people in public spheres but, rather, the result of the ruling class' influence on and manipulation of broader society. I use the term 'ruling class' here to stay true to the Marxist origins of the concept of 'cultural hegemony.' Antonio Gramsci differentiates between 'political society' ("the State") and 'civil society,' arguing that while the State exercises "direct domination" (12), hegemony happens at the level of the civil society. As the dominant group exercises its hegemony, it functions to produce

[t]he 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (13)

The distinction between direct domination and hegemony seems short-sighted, not only in the light of Foucault's work. Yet, cultural hegemony goes a long way to explain the dynamics of domination (undoubtedly specifically in the context of labor exploitation). It complicates the notion of 'consent,' and points to the impossibility of a democratic cultural majority outside of the power dynamics that have already produced it. In this context too, narratives about what is deemed shameful are a product of power relations—of a dominant group—and, although certainly internalized, in no way a matter of the private realm.

What cultural hegemony misses is an analytical tool with which to understand the way power functions in different realms and in different ways to produce and sustain domination but also, potentially, to produce empowerment. Patricia Hill Collins differentiates between the hegemonic domain of power, the structural domain of power, the disciplinary domain of power, and the interpersonal domain of power while also noting their intersections. She illustrates this pointedly, focusing on the oppression of Black women:

To focus on the structural domain of power whose social institutions deny Black women education, jobs, and income, without attending to how ideas about Black womanhood advanced within the hegemonic domain of power justify this treatment misses the complexity of U.S. power relations. To emphasize keeping Black women under surveillance and similar techniques of control associated with the disciplinary domain of power without recognizing their effect on Black women's everyday interpersonal relationships also limits our understanding of power. (203)

An analysis of power, therefore, requires an understanding of the (intersecting) realms of power, highlighting their different effects in and through different places. Following Hill Collins' line of thinking: to think about shame only along the lines of its effects on an affective dimension, i.e. the 'sense of self,' is to miss the sociocultural structures that leave victims of sexualized violence anticipating a public shaming, a narrative already perceptible

even prior to publicly talking about their experience or naming their perpetrators. These structures also produce the disciplinary domain of shame as a mechanism of power, but, similarly to Hill Collins' example, profoundly impact someone's interpersonal relationships. Hill Collins' focus on the oppression of Black women also highlights that the dynamics of shame, as they are deeply connected to power, work differently along the lines of not only gender but also race and class.

How Hill Collins points to the effect that the disciplinary domain of power has on interpersonal relationships—to which I would include the notion of self-perception—also allows for a consideration of the politics of power in different spheres without falling into a short-sighted dichotomy between 'public' and 'private.' Instead, power has its specific functions in different domains that intersect with one another, ultimately strengthening its oppressive relations throughout. As Hill Collins outlines,

[e]ach domain serves a particular purpose. The structural domain organizes oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experiences and the individual consciousness that ensues. (276)

Yet, it is crucial to Hill Collins' theorization to leave room for agency and empowerment. For this, Hill Collins views Black Feminist Thought to be particularly conducive. Agency is most clearly practiced, for instance, "in our creation of safe spaces that enable us to resist oppression" (274). This is possible because power, for Hill Collins, circulates within the matrix of domination. With that, power is a practice within the matrix of domination; and so is resistance and empowerment a practice. To further conceptualize the agency that Black women have within the matrix of domination, Hill Collins advocates for combining dialectical approaches and subjectivity approaches. Here, dialectical approaches focus on constructions of solidarity while subjectivity approaches center individual agency and its role in the emergence of power and, crucially, resistance. Then,

[i]ssues of consciousness link the two. In the former, group-based consciousness emerges through developing oppositional knowledges such as Black feminist thought. In the latter, individual self-definitions and behaviors shift in tandem with a changed consciousness concerning everyday lived experience. (275)

While acknowledging the profound impact that the disciplinary, structural, and hegemonic domains of power have on the interpersonal domain, Hill Collins positions the tension between oppression and the everyday, lived, material resistance as expressions of the individual agency and a sort of 'power-with' (solidarity) that is possible within this matrix. Yet, Hill Collins' theorization of agency and empowerment remains within this matrix, as she writes herself, aiming to "explain both the U.S. matrix of domination and Black women's individual and collective agency within it" (229). Therefore, it appears unclear how to

conceive of this agency or practices of empowerment rather than practices of survival to oppression. After all, the creation of safe spaces is rather a practice of survival than true agentic empowerment as it does not change the dynamics of displacement—or, precisely, placelessness—but rather makes the placelessness more bearable by fostering alternatives.

The question of agency has plagued feminism. It is continuously faced with the challenge of how to conceptualize gendered oppressions that have dominated power relations without rendering anyone other than powerful (white) men without agency. What fundamentally creates this struggle to conceptualize agency vis-à-vis a lack of agency is the undeniable history of women or anyone other than particular men who were and are promised but effectively denied their status as an (equal) sovereign subject. For that reason alone, Foucault's conceptualization as the subject constructed by power seems tempting for feminist theory. Yet, appropriating Foucault also remains contested for the same reason.

It is this specific issue that leads Monique Deveaux to conclude that a feminist utilization of Foucault's work on power cannot be done without working against or beyond Foucault regarding his theorization of the subject as constructed by power (233–34). Put simply, Foucault's "lack of a rounded theory of subjectivity or agency conflicts with a fundamental aim of the feminist project to rediscover and reevaluate the experiences of women" (McNay qtd. in Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* 232).

Sandra Bartky, for instance, argues that

[f]eminist consciousness is consciousness of victimization. To apprehend oneself as victim is to be aware of an alien and hostile force outside of oneself which is responsible for the blatantly unjust treatment of women and which enforces a stifling and oppressive system of sex-role differentiation. For some feminists, this hostile power is 'society' or 'the system'; for others, it is simply men. (*Femininity and Domination* 15)

The obvious tension between conceptualizing the disempowerment of women while not rendering them permanently powerless comes to a head in this discussion of victimization. Evidently, Bartky here runs the risk of denying the force exercised upon women in an effort to oppose the similarly unproductive analytical deadlock that stops at the description of women's seemingly permanent victimhood. Similarly to Bartky, bell hooks criticizes that the "sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim" is embraced by some "women's liberationists . . . making shared victimization the basis for woman bonding" (128). hooks looks specifically at violence against women to outline the criticism that the theorization of women without power or agency overlooks real-life, material conditions that women experiencing violence may face:

Women who are exploited and oppressed daily cannot afford to relinquish the belief that they exercise some measure of control, however relative, over their lives. They cannot afford to see themselves solely as 'victims' because their survival depends on the continued exercise of whatever personal powers they possess. (128)

The term ‘personal power’ is curious here and serves as a reminder that what remains overlooked is the inability to participate, which the denial of agency utilizes and incites (exemplified not only by the dynamics of shame), provoking a profound displacing/de-placing. While hooks is right in pointing out that precarious situations in terms of (sexualized) violence and abuse provoke the practice of whatever power one has left, the use of the term ‘personal power’ suggests that, individually, this may only enable survival but not resistance. It is questionable if the sort of ‘power’ hooks addressed here—having enough possibilities of action to strive for survival—is a true testament of agency. In addition to pointing to a notion of ‘personal power’ merely to illustrate the groundlessness of feminist theory stuck in a consciousness of victimhood, hooks makes an argument for the importance of political solidarity. She bases this not on short-sighted ideas of shared oppression but on shared goals and appreciation of differences.

There have been countless expressions of such solidarity within the frame of the #MeToo movement. *The United Nations Chronicle*, for instance, headlined “The #TimeIsNow for Solidarity and Sisterhood” and makes the bold claim that “[w]e need to see the #MeToo movement as a case study proving that all are equal before the law” (Mlambo-Ngcuka). Yet, it has also sparked perhaps as many conversations about reproducing a ‘perfect victim’ narrative, blurring differences, overlooking privileges (Hsu), and lacking any meaningful political goal (*The Atlantic*). Greta Olson, for instance, calls #MeToo simply “too white, too straight, too rich, and too able bodied” (59), capturing the core aspects of the critique the movement faces. Next to the numerous critiques of the #MeToo movement sidelining people of color (Onwuachi-Willig), queer people (Ison), poor people (Semuels), disabled people (Ingimarsdóttir), sex workers have also voiced their frustration of being left out in the now broad, public conversation about sexual harassment and abuse in the workforce specifically (Cooney). Natalie West and Tina Horn published a collection of essays about “Sex Work and Survival” with the title *We Too*, already situating it within the #MeToo conversation.

Viewing the #MeToo movement—or any social movement—as an opportunity for resistance to (certain) power dynamics does not, however, suggest that the movement itself is then outside of internal power struggles of its own. Since its viral moment in 2017, the #MeToo movement has met criticism that it privileges the voices and experiences of (rich) white women and, consequently, marginalizes poor women, women of color, men and non-binary victims, and the more complex stories of sexual violence.

Tarana Burke emphasizes this criticism time and time again. Notably, she starts her memoir with a description of feeling displaced and overshadowed upon seeing the hashtag “metoo,” something she views as her work in activism, spread around online, in a (white) Hollywood context without being credited. She writes, “Y’all know if these white women start using this hashtag, and it gets popular, they will never believe that a Black woman in her forties from the Bronx has been building a movement for the same purposes, using those exact words, for years now” (Burke 13). Ultimately, Burke concludes that the disclosure and open discussion about sexual violence is a good thing and tries to find her place in the movement: “Here was a woman feeling less alone because she had found a place to be seen” (16). Yet, the bitterness of having founded something that, following Burke, was taken away from her, is noticeable throughout her memoir and many public appearances. Burke makes it known that she founded “me too” and remains a central figure of the movement. In that role, Burke emphasizes the necessity for the movement to include and highlight the sexualized violence against poor women, non-white women, and, specifically, trans women.

Throughout much of this particular criticism of the #MeToo movement, a particular origin story of the movement is constructed: an approach to activism—the narrative practice “me too”—that was initiated by a Black woman, specifically in spaces for Black survivors of sexualized violence, was now taken away to highlight the experience of rich (white) women in Hollywood vis-à-vis a powerful man who is easily narrated and positioned as an individual, cinematically monstrous villain. Even more so, only when the story of wealthy, respectable, acclaimed (white) women who fell prey to a movie-like villain was the story of #MeToo, did it find a wide audience willing to listen.

Bronwyn Davies provides an important argument for this discussion:

While I would not want to argue that power is in any sense possessed by or essential to individual persons who take up powerful subject positions and are positioned by others as legitimately doing so, I would want to recognize that some have privileged access to practicing, and so coming to embody, powerful ways of speaking and moving and interacting. (19)

Not denying the disruptive qualities of those who have experienced sexualized violence pushing back on being labeled “a victim,” it is important to acknowledge that this practice, perhaps a signal or performance of (individual) empowerment, practices a certain power granted to some and (almost) inaccessible to others. This is not the result of power being consistently in the hands of some and not others but, rather, of how, through its structural mechanisms, “. . . power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and

everyday lives” (qtd. in Davies 19; Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77* 39).

It is also in these dynamics where power relations reveal themselves. With respect to the intersectional dimension regarding sexualized violence—it is well-documented that particularly poor women of color and trans women of color are especially vulnerable to (sexualized) violence (Barlow; A. Jackson et al.)—the performances of resistance that are observable within a #MeToo paradigm reveal their limits in the re-producing of oppressive power dynamics. With its affective resistance to the silencing of shame, the #MeToo movement principally depends not only on claiming and creating the spaces to express shame but also on claiming and creating those in which it is heard. In this dynamic and against the backdrop of the additional barriers for marginalized people even within the movement, the notion of the agentic victim, stepping out into the public, ridding themselves of their shame, crumbles. Rather, tension around agency remains.

Agency, Collectivity, and Publicness

Turning again to Foucault’s work, Amy Allen points out a paradox of agency:

. . . On the one hand, if we are always subjects in the sense of being subjected to myriad power relations, then what seems to be implied is a rather deterministic account of human action that denies the possibility of human agency; on the other hand, if we are always subjects in the sense of having the capacity to act, then the implication seems to be a rather voluntaristic account of human action that denies the grip that power relations have on us. (*The Power of Feminist Theory* 55)

Much of the tension of feminist power is traceable along the lines of Allen’s reading of Foucault’s agency paradox. Specifically, the central question in feminist theorizations of power comes down to: Should the pervasive, historical, social, economic, political, and violent domination of men over women be centered? Or does that come at the detriment of conceptualizing (women’s) agency, leaving an acknowledgment of the power that women do have impossible?

Judith Butler has posed this question with regard to vulnerability. Acknowledging the concern for feminism to be associated with vulnerability, Butler challenges the notion “that vulnerability is disjoined from resistance, mobilization, and other forms of deliberate and agentic politics” (“Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance” 22). As for power, it appears quite difficult to consider powerlessness—connected to vulnerability—as a mechanism of empowerment like Butler argues for vulnerability to be a mobilizing force for resistance. For Butler, “. . . vulnerability can be a way of being exposed and agentic at the same time” (24) because they consider vulnerability as an instrument for collectivity, rather than something

to be overcome in the name of agency and resistance. Vulnerability—specifically, vulnerability as “a socially induced condition which accounts for the disproportionate exposure to suffering” (25)—is relational. In Butler’s account, vulnerability reads very close to a (relational) lack of power. ‘Relational’ here implies a lack of stability or permanence in the ‘condition’ of vulnerability. Vulnerability—a certain kind of powerlessness—read as a ‘socially induced’ condition, still leaves the question of agency (and, with that, resistance) open.

Butler asks to consider vulnerability as a mobilizing force. Implicitly, they argue for solidarity among groups of people being subjected to vulnerability and precarity. If shared vulnerability contributes to the formation of social movements, then we have to consider it as a mobilizing force and, with that, also a part of resistance. For performances of resistance, agency is also required. So, Butler outlines a conceptual rethinking of vulnerability as something to not merely overcome. Surely, the collectivizing quality of shared experiences through being exposed to vulnerable and precarious positions is well-researched and inarguably complex (Misztal; Scholz). ‘Shared experiences’ here means first and foremost a similar narrativization of experiences, risks, and affects.

Butler points to the role of publicness in resistance to power:

In many of the public assemblies that draw people who understand themselves to be in precarious positions, the demand to end precarity is enacted publically by those who expose their vulnerability to failing infrastructural conditions . . . But these bodies, in showing this precarity, are also resisting these very powers; they enact a form of resistance that presupposes vulnerability of a specific kind, and opposes precarity. (“Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance” 15)

I read the narrative practices of the #MeToo movement along the same lines. People can and do not only assemble in public protests in the form of marches, demanding to be heard in the places evoking a Habermas-esque nostalgia for the ancient Greek agora. It has long been argued that publicness extends beyond these spheres and is rather practiced than a fact *a priori* (Karimnia and Haas 39). Butler also considers this in their theory on assembly. Pointing towards modes of resistance and solidarity in prisons, Butler rightly notes that, the streets are merely one space for protests, meaning that a denial to these spaces still allows resistance (*Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* 136). People may assemble through writing and, in the process, construct specific spheres—in the case of #MeToo: in autobiographical narratives or digital spaces, for example—with which they perform a resistance and voice grievances. Those disempowered through being shamed depend on and practice power in a (performative) resistance of (being) shame(d). This, then, constructs a placement; a demand to take place, countering the de-placing that being shamed and disempowered signifies. Put simply, being in power/being empowered means being in place.

The spheres constructed for instance in the collectivization of #MeToo narratives are only meaningful sites of protest with a certain notion of publicness, that is to say, with the possibility to construct a collective in the first place.

While pointing out a few shortcomings in Hannah Arendt's conceptualization of power from a feminist perspective (like the neat differentiating between power and violence), Amy Allen highlights that Arendt's work enables a theorization of the collective properties of power. Defined as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (*On Violence* 49), Arendt offers an approach missing normative criteria but nevertheless opens the fruitful approach to focus power as necessarily collectively practiced (and experienced). It is also collective action that, for Arendt, constitutes public space. While the distinction Arendt draws elsewhere between public and private realms appears outdated and short-sighted (Benhabib), the notion that publicness is constituted collectively and in connection to power holds up.

Arendt writes about this in her notion of 'the space of appearance':

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and . . . the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being . . . Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever. (*The Human Condition* 199)

The fragile space of appearance is, for Arendt, the space in which power can emerge, as she defines power as "generated when people gather together and 'act in concert,' which disappears the moment they depart," (204). Consequently, evoking Arendt also underlines power as relational: "When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name" (*On Violence* 44). This is exemplified in the narrativized 'me too stories.' These are stories of a powerful man abusing his power through sexualized violence for his twisted pleasure, humiliating the already power-less/powerless women beneath him. What makes him, this narrative figure, powerful—not metaphorically in a way Arendt calls "strength"—is the specific and broad sphere in which relational practices allow and distribute a certain 'power-over.' Seyla Benhabib has famously outlined the "puzzling, challenging and, at times, infuriating" (97) implications of Arendt's work from a feminist perspective. Nevertheless, Arendt opens up the possibility to think about, first, the instability of power—insofar as we consider the relative flexibility of relationality—and, secondly, power as collectively practiced, moving away from regarding power in relation to sexualized violence as only occurring between the person(s) rendered 'perpetrator' and the person(s) rendered 'victim.'

Power, as collectively generated and exercised, necessitates a performance of commonality. In feminist theory, the breakdown of its second-wave saw the critique of notions of women's shared identity as a basis for their solidarity in feminist efforts (Mann and D. J. Huffman). Having established 'women' as a construct continuously reproduced in its everyday performances which reproduce exclusionary, patriarchal frames around what it is supposed to be, the upholding of second-wave solidarity seems unfeasible. Further, an intersectional view on 'women' solidifies the complexity of a notion of solidarity as the material oppression facing women is not only variable along the lines of the femininity ideals long recognized and disputed in feminist theory (O'Brien Hallstein) but also along raced and classed dynamics.

Yet, this does not make feminist solidarity impossible nor render the theorization of power as unstable and collectively generated obsolete. Instead, Allen contends that the choice "between (exclusionary) identity and (fragmented) non-identity [is not] a tenable option" ("Solidarity after Identity Politics" 99). Further, I argue that solidarity—meaning collectively generated moments of (em)power(ment)—does not necessitate a shared identity or negate profound differences. Rather, I employ Hemmings' notion of affective solidarity, for which "... affective dissonance is central to feminism and can be theorised as the basis of a connection to others and a desire for transformation not rooted in identity, yet thoroughly cognisant of power and privilege" (154).

Surely, a notion of solidarity that rests on shared identity is bound to be hollow. About the notion of an 'identity politics,' Bonnie Honig argues for an

unmasking [of] the would-be irresistible, homogeneous, constative and univocal identity in question as a performative production, fractured, fragmented, ill-fitting, and incomplete ... product of a multitude of performances and behaviors, the naturalized product of innumerable repetitions and enforcements. (154)

She finds this strategy in Hannah Arendt's work. Constructing a notion of 'agnostic feminism,' Honig contextualizes her reading of Arendt amid "our recent focus on difference and plurality in response to the deployment by some feminisms of the homogenizing and disciplinary category of 'women' ... (160). It is this new focus that, argues Honig, has evoked some uncertainty about the processes and possibilities of a shared identity in feminism. Because Arendt theorizes "an agonistic action in concert that postulates difference and plurality, not identity, at its base" (160), Arendt, for Honig, provides an approach for feminism that aims specifically to not rely on (a blind acceptance of) the category of 'woman'. Amy Allen ("Solidarity after Identity Politics" 105) criticizes this reading, calling out an overemphasis on Arendt's focus on difference. Tuija Pulkkinen asserts that Honig overlooks Arendt's conceptualizing of 'self-identity' in a way that hardly allows for a

reading of it along the lines of performativity. I argue that the most notable takeaway from Honig's reading reveals that any, even Arendt's, theorization of identity, and, with that, sameness and difference, provides an opening with which to point to its performativity.

It is also in this reading, however, where Allen finds another case of constructing 'non-identity' and 'exclusionary identity' as mutually exclusive—"the basic terms of the identity politics debate" ("Solidarity after Identity Politics" 106). Rejecting these terms, Allen questions the constructiveness of this dichotomy. The solution for Allen also lies in Arendt's texts, specifically, Arendt's notion of power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" and the fragility of it. Because of this, Allen argues that Arendt allows a theorization of collectiveness/collectively exercised power in which ". . . the promises and shared commitments that bind us together as political actors have to be open to contestation, reinterpretation and revision, otherwise the promises will cease to bind and the power will disappear" (113). From that, Allen concludes that Arendt offers an opportunity to not juxtapose non-identity and exclusionary identity but rather a fluidity with which to approach "[t]he power that arises out of such reciprocal commitments to act in concert" (113), in other words: solidarity.

Solidarity (or, simply, collectivity) both constructs a specific publicness and also depends on it. Similar to recognition being crucial to solidarity, collectivity can also only engage on a level of political protest based on a certain recognition. As Butler's example about prison indicates, this recognition can be manifold and also reach across places, depending neither on state approval nor local proximities. The #MeToo movement also constructs spheres of solidarity across localities, gaining broad traction through digital media. Further, its principal movement practices do not solely depend on public or state approval. If the public expression of shame is the core practice through which the #MeToo movement resists a pillar of the power dynamics that it denounces, then that allows for the consideration that these expressions alone construct this practice. Through forming collectives which, in the #MeToo movement, happens principally through its constant narrativization and affective solidarity, publicness is constructed. The movement practices that construct this publicness vis-à-vis a hegemonic public also depend on its publicness.

However, considering the shame expressions/performances of the #MeToo movement as independent of the state or broad public recognition so long as they gather and produce a collectivity that enables a publicness to form is only part of the story. The #MeToo movement does not only aim to resist the shame that, culturally, has become almost accepted as inevitable and ubiquitous for victims of sexualized violence and incites a retracting and

de-placing that renders public participation and, with that, political action, impossible without the breakdown of shaming dynamics. Instead, the #MeToo movement is not separable from the discussion about which institutional, structural, and also state protections, retributions, and justice(s) victims can or, mostly, cannot expect.

In these conversations and movement practices, (state) recognition is crucial. Here, the movement actors depend on the state and the public not only for recognition of their protest but for the dismantling of their grievances. This is connected to the function of the movement's shame declarations because only the resistance to the effects of silencing that shaming incites even allows for public discussion on the level of structural and legal changes. In this space, the movement is also confronted with the limits of the narrative practices that fulfill its purpose within the publicness it constructs. Put simply, the grievances of victims of sexualized violence play on enemy turf when they move toward the space of institutional and legal change.

This is not to suggest, however, that politics only happens in the public sphere. On the contrary, the (oppressive) politics that occur in what some have conceived of as the private sphere—the home, the family, interpersonal relationships, intimate relationships—are perhaps more threatening than the 'public' areas of inequality and injustice because resisting them also requires the fight to move these matters in the realm of public concern. Evidently, this is also a fight on enemy turf (metaphorically speaking, considering patriarchal legal structures as the enemy of feminism) as it lays bare the dependency on the state for protection and justice (Ferraro). Because of how the notion of 'the private' has functioned to conceal the politics already taking place there, and the instability of the dichotomy, I suggest abandoning it and rather thinking about the sphere and places in which safety has neither been promised nor fulfilled for marginalized people and those in which safety has been simply falsely promised.

For instance, the judicial system is founded on the promise to ensure safety and, most prominently, justice. For victims of sexualized violence, this has not come to fruition. For this reason, the neatly narrativized stories of a powerful, rich, larger-than-life perpetrator standing powerlessly before, ironically, *Lady Justice* and being imprisoned for his sexual crimes against women, are so heavily consumed with catharsis. Yet, stories about victims' powerlessness in court, being entirely subjected to (their own capability of withstanding) the process, the possibility of gathering qualified evidence, a politics of believability, reminded of having been falsely promised to be granted the status of a sovereign agent are as much part of the #MeToo movement as the victories against Harvey Weinstein or Larry Nassar.

Chanel Miller constructs an exemplary narrative of this in her memoir. Throughout, she focuses mainly on the “harmful” (*Know My Name* 7) legal process that, as she describes, made her feel “helpless, terrified, humiliated” (328), and at the end of which Brock Allen Turner was found guilty and sentenced to six months incarceration. Perhaps a conceptual victory but, in Miller’s storytelling, the dehumanization of the process—and the lenient sentencing—take center stage, framing her experience through the legal system as another traumatic taking/refusal of her agency. For example, Miller writes about her first day in court, being cross-examined:

The little movie in my head stopped, the music fell away, the crowd in the glow of the porch light disappeared. Black, just black. I looked at her; a silent panic, a blinking, I have no answer. She had held me by the belly, letting me paddle around the water, and now she released her grip, watching me slip beneath. *I woke up in the hospital*. As the words left me, my head dropped forward, my thoughts scattered. She asked something, but I did not respond; in the transcript, the court reporter had only typed (*shakes head*).

I heard a sound, a long wail, a high cooing, that sailed and fell. It was growing louder, I could not stop. I wanted someone to hold my shoulders, but I realized nobody was coming. A room of strangers, sitting unmoved, as I cried into nothing. I had kept loved ones outside these doors, had made a grave mistake. I put two hands over my face, clenched my eyes. If I couldn’t see anyone they could no longer see me. (113)

Later, again in the courtroom, Miller describes,

I scanned the rows of padded seats, like a sad, small movie theater. Soon, they’d be filled by my rapist’s family. The court reporter who winked was not there. When I asked where she went, Alaleh responded that someone else was on my duty, and I nodded to say of course, but swallowed the sadness that I’d lost one of my few supporters.

So much had changed in the last fifteen months, but in court, everything remained stagnant. Strange the way time did not move, but deepened. We had revisited that same night over and over again. Questions branched out into more questions, a root splitting. (149)

In Miller’s narrative, she is in a position to adapt and adhere to the expectations of the system in power, rendering her entirely without agency throughout the process. As she questions every detail about how to behave, it is clear that she does not and cannot enter the courtroom as ‘herself.’ As a continuation of the sexual violence she experienced, the happenings around the legal process are happening to her, not with her. The narrative itself then is a partial disruption of the process of Miller’s powerlessness. Or, in other words, the affective expressions and declarations in her memoir serve as a break with the process of justification the legal process entails.

Yet, it appears difficult to argue here that Miller claims the place. She constructs it, narrating it in explicit detail and making it a part of her narrative. Nevertheless, she makes it a part of her narrative in a way that creates a setting for her powerlessness and, ultimately, placelessness. This stands in notable contrast to the way in which the courtroom functions in narratives authored by victims connected to Nassar’s case. Both in parts of Denhollander’s memoir as well as through the narrative that the televised and digitally shared deliverance of

victim impact statement construct, the courtroom here is the place where these victims performatively regain agency. With Nassar now powerless—having pleaded guilty and throughout, ahead of sentencing, looking at a de facto life sentence—the space that the victims have to face him and ‘the public’ through the public broadcast in a place legitimized by the symbolic power of the court enables performances of collective empowerment, constructing cultural catharsis. With the judges’ announcement to Nassar that “I just signed your death warrant” (Cacciola and Mather), this dynamic is strongly symbolically underlined. I will return to a more detailed discussion of the construction and function of the courtroom in #MeToo narratives (Chapter 4.2.).

This contrast between Miller and Nassar’s victims in the construction of the court is an illustration “that bodies in their plurality lay claim to the public, find and produce the public” (Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* 71). Miller was and describes herself as isolated whereas the isolation has ended for Nassar’s victim with the public reporting on his abuse that enabled the victims to assemble, recognizing the commonalities in their stories and, in some cases, recognizing their experiences as abuse only through the collectivizing. This indicates why I consider the #MeToo movement’s resistances as they pertain to ‘the public’ on a systemic, legal, as opposed to cultural, level as taking place on enemy turf: in most cases, sexual abuse or harassment appears to occur between private persons as isolated incidents or, at the very least, inciting isolation. Even as sexual abuse or harassment are recognized as all too common and a matter of structural issues—something surely an objective of the #MeToo movement along the lines of ‘awareness raising’—seeking justice in the legal sense means, for most victims, to be alone.

At this point, it is important to recognize the power dynamics already at play even in having or not having the possibility to consider legal action. This is true also outside of matters of credibility or provability which itself are products of gendered, raced, classed power structures that, for instance, render some victims more believable than others. In addition,

when we think about the embodied subject who exercises speech or moves through public space . . . it is usually presumed to be one who is already free to speak and move without threat of imprisonment or deportation or loss of life. Either that subject is endowed with that freedom as in inherent power, or that subject is presumed to live in a public space where open and supported movement is possible. The very term “mobilization” depends on an operative sense of mobility, itself a right, one that many people cannot take for granted. (Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* 128)

Perhaps simply a question of (financial) resources or an interplay of the complex components in someone’s life that do not grant them the mobility required here, possible actions for victims of sexual abuse or harassment vary greatly. Yet, Butler challenges the notion that

the “embodied subject who exercises speech or moves through public space” (“Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance” 14) is already free and powerful. Indeed, the fact that any mobilization depends on a certain infrastructure to allow for movement illustrates that the notion of free, sovereign subjects mobilizing through public spheres to, collectively, perform resistance, in the process constructing another public through their collectivity, is incomplete.

Instead, movement is only possible through the environmental and technological infrastructures granting that possibility of movement to certain groups of people. Yet, the dependency on other people in movement that makes it difficult “to conceive of individual bodies as completely distinct from one another” (16) also holds the possibility of various movements through the varied possible practices of power that collectives may construct. If a collective mobilizes and, in the process, constructs a specific publicness—the #MeToo movement in digital and non-digital spaces—then a different movement is possible through that publicness than prior to the mobilization. Further, within the publicness as it continuously constructs itself, other negotiations of agency and power relations come into view. Here, the #MeToo movement finds itself re-negotiating the terms on which its publicness—in capitalist terms: #MeToo as a market—emerged. While different movement is possible through the mobilization that #MeToo produces, it is nevertheless embedded in a frame that continuously has to challenge its own hierarchies and power relations.

The tension around agency finds new ground through #MeToo’s publicness—always a publicness that stands vis-à-vis a (narrativized) hegemonic public it aims to resist in core dynamics. As the narrativization of a #MeToo collective depends on a construction of a notion of agency, presenting a certain notion of (newly found) power in solidarity, #MeToo also emphasizes how agency is denied to victims of sexualized violence. This emphasis is what sustains the relevance of #MeToo claims and thus a core part of the movement’s claim to its place. Yet, a certain construction and celebration of an idea of collective power beyond the simple notion of #MeToo as ‘awareness-raising’ is also part of what sustains the mobilization of #MeToo. If the narrative practice “me too” is not framed as a worthwhile, empowering act (of resistance), then it loses its potency. Since the “me too” speech act that is ‘ $n - 1$ ’ (Deleuze and Guattari), any subsequent narrative—be it as long as a memoir or as short as the hashtag—is both a claim to a place in public enabled through the #MeToo mobilization but also sustaining that mobilization’s claim to a place in a notion of publicness and, additionally, a practice of participation in the movement. Therefore, there is a clear tension between engendering a rhetoric of empowerment while also underlining the

domination that establishes the movement's audacity in claiming a place and publicness, giving it political meaning in the first place.

The complex potential in the struggle for agency in #MeToo narratives is also exemplified by scholar and #MeToo activist Seo-Young Chu's particular autobiographical practice. In June 2022, Chu shared an addendum she had added to her academic CV under "Sections Taught at Stanford University." In the brief text, Chu explains that she had been "sexually harassed and raped" by Professor Jay Fliegelman, who, at the time, was a renowned and tenured professor at Stanford University. According to Chu, Fliegelman took advantage of his professional dominance while she was his "advisee, teaching assistant, and teaching observee." So, she explains, "there are gaps here because trauma is nonlinear" and that she is "experimenting with incorporating anger into this CV." What is implicit in her practice of including being sexually violated in the workspace in her CV, she also explicitly writes: "My career has been shaped by rape. My sense of who I am as an academic: shaped by rape" (@seoyoung_chu).

Before publishing this addendum to her CV, Seo-Young Chu had already been vocal about the abuse. In May 2019, she published an essay titled "Free Indirect Suicide: An Unfinished Fugue in H Minor." In the experimental essay, comprised of a collection of genre-bending short stories, Seo-Young Chu captures her suicidality as well as her struggles with her identity as a Korean-American. Briefly, Chu also mentions her "struggle to forget the devastating fact that my first dissertation adviser sexually harassed and raped my twenty-two-year-old self, years of denial and trauma."

Especially in the autobiographical narrative practice that the addendum to her (professional) CV—and the additional practice of sharing this practice and writing on social media, so more broadly and publicly than a CV is typically shared—Seo-Young Chu performs a (re-)claiming of authorship and agency. Instead of leaving gaps in her CV that appear open to interpretation, the addendum establishes an agentic authorship in this particular writing practice. Chu fills in these gaps, providing an explanation and justification for them. She interrupts the linearity of her CV in her response to the expectation of linearity. With it, Chu also performs a resistance to the lack of control over her professional life that the sexual trauma has left. Particular here is not only the addendum to her CV but also her further publicization of it.

Yet, Chu clearly writes about not being agentic. Her career and, more importantly, part of her sense of self "has been shaped by rape." The writing, the practice of the writing, ultimately constructs a struggle for and with (a sense of) agency. The abuse she experienced

was a result of powerlessness and continues to render her powerless, as both her essay and the addendum to her CV express. Nevertheless, Chu frames the practice of writing about it as agentic. Her moving this practice and writing through spheres—publishing it *again* on Twitter—construct it as a performance of agency. Yet, this remains embedded in the context of being “shaped by rape,” framing the agentic autobiographical practice as making one of the few choices she has left to perform and, possibly, regain a sense of control. This tension around agency mirrors feminist theory’s struggle to grapple with how to conceptualize power in a way that offers a theoretical grip on the way it plays out to the detriment of marginalized groups while also allowing a possibility for true resistance, not rendering anyone other than white men as entirely passive objects in society, unable to engender any sort of meaningful mobilization/movement, permanently ‘out of place.’

Feminist Dis/Empowerment

Discussing this unease extensively, Amy Allen differentiates between “power-over” (domination), “power-to” (empowerment), and “power-with” (solidarity), expressing the need for a theory of power that recognizes all three (*The Power of Feminist Theory*; “Rethinking Power”). She delineates the inadequacies in theories that focus merely on power as domination as well as those that focus merely or too much on (women’s) empowerment. Solely conceptualizing power as “power-over” frames those who have power exercises upon them (in Allen’s text that is simply “women”) as victims without the ability to respond/resist. In this vein, Allen (*The Power of Feminist Theory* 10) criticizes the likes of Catharine MacKinnon (*Feminism Unmodified*), Andrea Dworkin, and Carole Pateman for their incomplete theorization of power that does little to further a feminist cause.

Surely, the ‘power as power-over’ notion could not be summarized more clearly than in Catharine MacKinnon’s text *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*: “Our social treatment certainly is different—the difference between power and powerlessness. Woman’s commonality, which includes our diversity, comes from our shared social position” (25). Not only does MacKinnon position women’s shared experience to be based on the grounds of disempowerment but she also argues that this experience is what defines ‘women’ in the first place—a take reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir’s classic text *The Second Sex*. MacKinnon herself provides a pointed summary, “Anyone who is the least bit attentive to gender since reading Simone de Beauvoir knows that it is men socially who are subjects, women socially who are other, objects” (*Feminism Unmodified* 55). Further,

MacKinnon often addresses the powerlessness of women concerning the (sexual) violence they experience or are threatened with constantly. She then comes to conclude that,

[l]ooking at the facts of the abuses of women all at once, you see that a woman is socially defined as a person who, whether or not she is or has been, can be treated in these ways by men at any time, and little, if anything, will be done about it. This is what it means when feminists say that maleness is a form of power and femaleness is a form of powerlessness. (170–71)

It is this conceptual deadlock that Allen—among others (Butler, “Against Proper Objects”; W. Brown; M. Nussbaum, “Objectification”)—criticizes. If women are socially defined by the power (and violence; a distinction here is untenable) exercised upon them, then their suffering is a foregone conclusion. Indeed, in this case, “[female power] . . . is a contradiction in terms, socially speaking . . .” (MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified* 53).

About the critique that her work renders women as victims, MacKinnon writes:

To those who think ‘it isn’t good for women to think of themselves as victims,’ and thus seek to deny the reality of their victimization. . . . From their vantage point, my purpose on that platform is not to capture and confront the truth, but to invent a desirable vision of the world for the audience to crawl into for a few hours. (220–21)

Here, MacKinnon presents somewhat of a circular argument: because it is true that ‘women’ are, per definitionem, powerless, it is both impossible and false to theorize power as something that ‘women’ can possess or practice. What underscores this line of reasoning as a circular argument is MacKinnon’s own conceptualization of ‘women’ as defined in opposition to men, who are synonymous with ‘power.’ Conceptualizing power beyond the power that is exercised upon women—for instance in the form of violence—is not merely to “invent a desirable vision of the world for the audience to crawl into for a few hours” but to more adequately address the complex way in which power moves, incapsulating the incidents and structures in which those that MacKinnon renders categorically powerless do exercise power, particularly collectively.

What MacKinnon and other feminists that Allen groups as “domination theorists” (*The Power of Feminist Theory* 12) miss entirely is a sufficient analysis of the interplay of race, class, sexuality, and ableism and power. Carole Pateman, for instance, makes clear that in her conceptualization of power, all men hold power over all women—specifically, all men hold power over *their* woman “even if, in any individual case, it is not used” (Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory* 13; Pateman 207). Or, more pointedly argued by Andrea Dworkin “Some men do not have all these kinds of power over all women; but all men have some kinds of power over all women; and most men have controlling power over what they call their women—the women they fuck” (qtd. in Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory* 13–14).

Persistent in these notions is the idea that power is something possessed by a certain group, wielded over another to their detriment. If that is true, there is no way to conceptualize

the power that those who are (historically) socially disempowered do practice. In this vein, Catharine MacKinnon constructs an unfalsifiable argument here when she states, “A woman can also take the male point of view or exercise male power, although she remains always a woman. Our access to male power is not automatic as men’s is; we’re not born and raised to it. We can aspire to it” (*Feminism Unmodified* 52). Surely, when any exercise of power is male power, it is an entirely stable notion in which the relational practices that construct or disrupt it are completely nullified.

The simple conceptualization of ‘male power’ has been criticized extensively from various angles (J. B. Miller, “Women and Power”; Munro; Parpart; Sommers). Indeed, in these conversations, ‘intersectionality’ has arguably become somewhat of a buzzword or the “most important contribution that women’s studies has made so far” (McCall 1771). It is an important analytical framework, especially in the conceptualization of gendered power dynamics. Highlighting the differences in how gendered subjects can exercise power in relation to their construction as also raced and classed subjects further foregrounds the understanding of power as a relational practice. Understanding power as something possessed by a certain group of people simply does not suffice to explain the material difference between groups and individuals of different gender identities, sexualities, races, classes, (dis)abilities.

Discussing “domination theorists” vis-à-vis “empowerment theorists”—those focusing on the progress of feminist movements regarding the power women (can) hold in social spaces—Amy Allen argues that, “[n]either of these one-sided feminist conceptions of power can do justice to the complex ways in which women can be both dominated and empowered at the same time and in the context of one and the same practice, institution, or norm” (“Rethinking Power” 22). Focusing on the issue of sexual abuse, a clear example of a both potentially empowering and disempowering practice is the process of a legal complaint. While now (albeit not in every country) victims of sexual abuse technically have the option of seeking judicial punishment (in the chance of a sense of ‘justice’), the process of reporting, testifying, justification, and being subject to the evaluation under a historically patriarchal system is also notably disempowering. The framing of the legal process positions not only the social punishment as subject to the evidence presented—the framework of which also finds its roots in patriarchal structures (Shelden and Vasiliev; Websdale)—but also the personal and collective relief.

Yet, so-called “empowerment theorists” (Allen, “Rethinking Power” 22) focus too much on incidents that have seemingly challenged patriarchal power dynamics. Mary Caputi explains the evolution of what she refers to as “power feminists” who were

eager to recapture the excitement of progressive politics and enthusiastic embrace of power that had been lost within feminist circles by the 1980s. . . . There was too much discussion of rape and sexual abuse, power feminists argued; too much worrying about pornography and sexual harassment rather than focusing on women’s newfound status, wealth, and influence . . . (2)

Leaving the simplified picture that Caputi paints here aside, the tension between feminist theories of power as domination—theories of the ways and spheres in which ‘women’ (a category deserving its own scrutiny) are perpetually, devastatingly, and constantly dominated—and a desire to write about unique feminist (sometimes ‘female’) empowerment is striking. Neither approach appears useful. There are two significant ways in which ‘power feminism’ fails to further a feminist cause.

First, power feminism argues “not just that . . . maternal and care perspectives are more or less unique to women, but that they provide the basis for a new way to think about power” (Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory* 19). Many feminist theorists have outlined extensively why it is not only untenable to write about the category of women in a way that fails to acknowledge it as a discursive construct stabilizing patriarchal power relations but also constructs a homogeneity among the category of ‘women’ (Fraser and L. Nicholson 101).¹² Further, the analytical acceptance of certain qualities historically devalued as intrinsically female—female in any other way than discursive ‘gendered’—is downright anti-feminist. It accepts and strengthens the patriarchal framework that has rendered gendered categories in which women are positioned to be ‘the Other’ and aims to put a positive twist on the detrimental discursive practices that ascribe a naturalistic notion to gendered differences.

Secondly, power feminism à la Luce Irigaray, Jean Baker Miller (“Women and Power”), or Karen and Sonja Foss (K. A. Foss et al.) stands in the way of an analysis of the dynamic between oppression and empowerment; some go as far as simply signaling monumental (legal) changes that have occurred (Wolf) as indications that a theorizing of oppressed groups as agentic does the trick (Showden). With that, conversations about remaining oppression, the complexities of so-called ‘victories’ in terms of gender conformity, class, or race; plainly lived experiences as they are affected by both moments,

¹² Feminist debates around motherhood/mothering are a telling example here. Sara Ruddick, for example, argues for mothering as an empowering, feminist practice, while Simone de Beauvoir, among others, has framed motherhood—an extension of womanhood—as a patriarchal tool of oppression (Patterson; de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*). Feminists following Butler’s notion of performativity have pointed to the binary oppositions along which motherhood is conceptualized in Western thought, rather writing about “maternal subjectivities” (Jeremiah 25; Åhäll).

practices of empowerment *and* oppression are sidelined. Power feminism does not allow “knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives” to be where “we must draw strength to live and our reasons for acting” (de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* 9).

The #MeToo movement has, certainly not coincidentally, sparked discussions that are reminiscent of the simplified ‘power as domination’ vs ‘power as empowerment’ debate. The #MeToo movement is celebrated for expressions of empowerment in the face of systemic domination. After all, #MeToo points to precisely not isolated, individual incidents of sexualized violence but the larger, systemic issue at the root of it, framing it as a matter of public concern. However, others have re-emphasized the importance of thinking and writing about women—or rather, those having experienced sexualized violence—not (merely) as victims (Grabowska and Rawłuszko 294–295). In this discussion and in the movement itself, ‘survivor’ has replaced the term ‘victim,’ aiming to reframe having experienced—and survived—sexualized violence as an indication of ‘strength.’

Victims and Survivors

In the act of actively and purposely naming oneself a survivor under the assumption that one will be not only considered but named a victim otherwise, is a performance of agency.

Whereas ‘victim’ is perceived as indicating a passiveness that implies that the person is less of a person (that is, ‘just a victim’), the idea of the ‘survivor’ gestures towards a more active, agential, role played by the person to whom violence has been done . . . Yet, there are women who cannot see the point in pretending that they had any agency whatsoever in the violence that was done to them, and claim that, regardless of what they have done since, they were and are victims of sexual violence. (Chandra 104)

Implicit here but overlooked by Giti Chandra is the fundamental issue that renders the move from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’ ultimately hollow: in the experience of having violence exercised upon oneself, that person is without agency. This dynamic is, I argue, what defines violence. As a particular exercise of domination that may occur individually or structurally but is always embedded in certain cultural structures that negotiate the subject’s position in micro- and macrospheres, violence is specifically as harmful, devastating, and humiliating as it is because it reveals the fragility of one’s perceived agency. While this does not negate collective resistance to the cultural dynamics through which this occurs, simply swapping ‘victim’ for ‘survivor,’ arguing that the latter escapes the trap of rendering those disempowered permanently de-placed, is not a step closer to that resistance but rather an individual performance of agency without meaningful consequences for political collective action. Instead, it rather obscures the material effects and affective consequences of the loss of agency that having violence done to oneself reveals.

In the collection of essays *Pretty Bitches: On Being Called Crazy, Angry, Bossy, Frumpy, Feisty, and All the Other Words That Are Used to Undermine Women* (Skurnick), Kate Harding writes:

After the rape, I didn't blame myself. It was 1992, and feminism had gotten through to me enough that when I said something like, 'I just had sex on the lawn with a guy I don't know and he wouldn't stop' and heard 'That's called rape' in response, I thought, *Yes, I suppose it is.*

This made it weird when well-meaning people—my RA, an ER doctor, a counselor—reminded me, again and again, that it wasn't my fault. These people were beautiful, compassionate angels who only wanted to help, as long as helping meant giving the same canned speeches to every victim who came along. . . .

The angels told me with the same earnest vehemence that the preferred alternative to *victim* was *survivor*.

I get the 'survivor' thing, in theory. Rape is fundamentally a crime of power, and whether the mechanism is gunpoint or incapacitation by alcohol, the very essence of it is to remind the [victim] [survivor] [person being raped] [check all that apply] that they are not in control of what happens to their own body. . . .

However, in practice, I did not feel I had survived anything in particular. . . .

I had been violated without being in fear for my life, ergo I was far more accurately termed a 'victim' than a 'survivor.' (88–90)

In this vignette, the rape experienced by the author is narrated as symbolic of their lack of agency. For Harding, the affective processing of the rape is as much out of her control as the rape itself, leading her to conclude that the agency supposedly implied in the term 'survivor' is neither present nor meaningful. With this narration, the acceptance of having been rendered a victim by a "crime of power" itself constructs a performance of agency. Harding counteracts a cultural script in which she should feel shame, self-blame, and responsibility for the sexualized violence done to her. Instead, Harding presents her assertion that she is not to blame for having been victimized with pointed self-evidence. While pointing out that no wording alters her experience of having a lack of control over her own body demonstrated to her, she performs control over the narrative of this disempowerment.

The debate in feminist theory about the terms 'victim' or 'survivor' (Boyle 15; Kelly et al.) mirrors the unease with which feminist theory has struggled to conceptualize power and, with it, agency. Some (Jordan; Ross) see in the terminology debate a forced sidelining of victimization. Others (Barry 46; Kelly; Pollino, "Turning Points from Victim to Survivor"), however, insist on an empowerment that 'survivor' signifies, disregarding the fact that 'surviving' is not necessarily a particular agentic or even comfortable process or even allows one to actually take place in the world. The reoccurring discomfort with vulnerability in these discussions points to the stigmatization of victimhood that remains also within #MeToo conversations. While writing a contribution to a collection *Streaming #MeToo: Rape Culture in American Television* (Funnell and Beliveau, forthcoming), the sequel to *Screening #MeToo* (Funnell and Beliveau), I was made aware of the collection's

style guide that specified to refer to people who experience sexualized violence as survivors rather than victims. Implicit, clearly, is the notion that describing someone as a ‘victim’ (of sexualized violence) is somehow a negative moral assessment. Further, this practice also frames those who have not survived sexualized violence—non-survivors, if one insists on foregoing the term ‘victim’—as less capable, strong, brave, or lacking other noble attributions ‘survivor’ seemingly connotes.

I read this discussion in the context of the now decade-long tension between ‘domination’ and ‘empowerment’ in feminism(s). Because it feels wrong to ‘accept’ women as victims (of sexualized violence)—after all, the conversations about men or non-binary people who are subjected to sexualized violence remain entirely sidelined—a change of terminology might do the trick in ridding oneself of the uncomfortable tension theorizations of power in feminism bring along. However, I argue that this discomfort rests on a misunderstanding or misreading. Butler points out that understanding certain bodies as particularly vulnerable does not need to function to reiterate or uphold a politics that conceptually frames men as agents and women as passive objects but, rather means that “. . . we are only saying that under certain regimes of power, some groups are targeted more readily than others . . . We are making a sociological observation that would have to be backed up in one way or another” (*Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* 139). Most importantly, they caution against the possibility that this “sociological claim can very easily become a new norm of description, at which point women become defined by their vulnerability” (139). It is only at this point that the description of women’s powerlessness serves merely to sustain it.

So, if ‘victim’ is merely conceptualized as the inverse of ‘having agency,’ then it surely does not serve a purpose in writing about sexualized violence. But the assumption that ‘victim’ negates any kind of agency instead of functioning to describe the real, harmful, relational powerlessness that is rendered in the dynamics of sexualized violence is both incomplete and telling. Further, the victim/survivor discussion also solidifies the often criticized focus on individuals rather than systems, structures, relations, and collective practices of/around violence, power, and resistance. Perhaps, a spotlight on collectivity will prove to be a worthwhile approach to conceptualizing a feminist notion of power against the backdrop of sexualized violence.

The #MeToo movement shows how timely these debates remain. Narrativized as a (feminist) movement fundamentally grounded on affective solidarity—shared experiences, shared oppressions, and ultimately, shared identities as ‘survivors’—the movement has also

drawn criticism regarding its lack of space for the differences in these seemingly shared experiences, oppressions, and identities as I have already pointed out. Clearly, there are many points of difference and division that fracture the image and narrative of unified solidarity among people who have experienced sexualized violence. Narrativized as fragmenting are the identities victims of sexualized violence hold prior and/or in addition to their experience(s) of oppression, shame and, with that, de-placing. This seems to be in tension with the commonality of an affective dimension that the narrative practice “me too” carries. As an expression that constructs sameness, “me too” brings into question the basis of that sameness. My discussion on shame in the #MeToo movement leads me to argue that the foundation is affective more than anything else. Consequently, understanding the plurality of identities—the performative construction of which requires its constant reconstruction—and affective commonalities—as they are narratively constructed and practiced—as simultaneous processes provide an opportunity to move beyond the ineffective, short-sighted juxtaposition of non-identity vs. exclusion.

Judith Butler sees exclusion as a foregone conclusion to ‘unity.’ They ask, “Does ‘unity’ set up an exclusionary norm of solidarity at the level of identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concepts, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim?” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 15). Assuming a presumption or goal of ‘unity’ as the basis for solidarity would, following Butler, negate meaningful political action that is not exclusionary within the identity terms already set. It is only in collective actions that do not presuppose or strive to achieve a notion of ‘unity’ that a political action for which a goal other than an exclusionary re/construction of identity is contrivable (15). “Me, too” as a solidarity expression could be read along the lines of a political action seeking meaningful change outside of the realms of a reaffirmation of a stable, unified identity. Also, the affective ‘sameness’ quickly comes up against the identity categories that prevail and have material effects on the ultimate differences of experiences, explaining the recurring complaints about the #MeToo movement being (too) exclusionary, blurring (affective) differences through and within the same gendered power dynamics that enable sexualized violence and shame.

Reading “me too” as a solidarity expression that aims to not suggest or construct a unity but rather collectivizes under shared affectivity does not preclude the construction of a seemingly stable, unified identity narratively following the affective solidarity. The notion of ‘survivors’ illustrates this. In the almost interchangeable stories of sexual abuse, those sharing their narrative construct an identity as ‘survivor,’ not defined by their victimhood

but, with that identity construction, defined by their experience(s) of sexualized violence after all. Rose McGowan, for instance, writes in the preface to her memoir *Brave*, “Since I and so many brave survivors have come forward, titans of every industry have toppled. We survivors have gained our power. We survivors are using our voices in record numbers” (x), which follows after the dedication, “Dedicated to all of us survivors” (7).

Toward the end, she returns to that category, writing specifically “to those who are Survivors: You need to know it is YOU who is awesomely strong” (244). Here, ‘survivor’ is a term itself not clearly definable or categorizable, pointing to its function as a tool for identity construction. In McGowan’s text, it also comes with affirmative characteristics. Victims—survivors—of sexualized violence are “awesomely strong” by virtue of having lived through that experience. It is both a testament to how traumatic sexual abuse is as well as a construction of a combative, resistant notion of strength. With the capitalization of ‘Survivor’ only at the end of the text, McGowan constructs the identity formation as complete as her story is now told and read. A story about sexual abuse and perseverance frames an evolution from survivor (rejecting victimhood) to Survivor (rejecting victimhood in a public claim to identity) once the story has been recognized because it is fully read through.

Within a broader #MeToo discourse, similar dynamics also occur outside of the victims’ own construction of their narrative. The perhaps most pointed example of this is the description of the women and girls who have been abused by Larry Nassar as “sister survivors” at the ESPY Award show I have briefly mentioned earlier. This marks a turn to an identity construction moving beyond the affective solidarity of “me too.” In the case of Nassar, the term also points to the collectivity of victims now in public who have previously been isolated and powerless in private, so the narrative, as well as the sheer amount of victims that a televised program simply does not provide enough time to name these victims individually. An effect of the disturbing effect of his crimes gains what is positioned as an empowering twist when his victims are rendered an anonymous crowd when termed “sister survivors.”

However, when the term comes up in Rachael Denhollander’s memoir, it provokes a different reading. Denhollander writes her victim impact statement that, at the time of her memoir’s publication, was already part of the court documents and had been televised, but interrupts it after each paragraph, adding further commentary:

I felt every tear that had been cried over the past week, by every sister survivor. Every broken parent. Every bit of anger and despair. And every bit of strength.

It looks like a courtroom full of survivors who carry deep wounds. Women and girls who have banded together to fight for themselves because no one else would do it. Women and girls who carry scars that will never fully heal, but who have made the choice to place the guilt and the shame on the only person to whom it belongs—the abuser.

With each word, the survivors and their families had picked themselves up and done what no one else wanted to do. And with each word, they reclaimed who they were. (410–11)

Denhollander embraces the term ‘sister survivor,’ collectivizing the experience, particularly on its affective dimension, throughout the trial. In this narrative, it is through her words, that she places in between the narration, that these survivors regain their agency. An image emerges in which a collective of ‘sister survivors’ find retribution and certain healing through being a witness and part of Denhollander’s declaration. Despite being a victim of Nassar herself, in this passage, Denhollander writes about the ‘sister survivors’ as separate from herself. With that, Denhollander constructs ‘sister survivors’ as a collective in which she does not place herself entirely. Throughout her memoir, Denhollander writes more of survivors in general than of herself as a survivor. She does, however, position and identify herself as one in the text, writing, for instance, “I wished people understood the realities of what life was like for a survivor. What it was like to try to bring justice” (304) or about “we as survivors” (305).

The exclusionary epistemology that Butler criticizes in the construction of unity and solidarity is particularly messy in this context. Through a specific narrative practice—the sharing of experiences of sexual abuse—emerges a construction of a collective and an identity construction or, in the case of the ‘sister survivors,’ an image of an assumed kinship, in which its exclusionary dynamics do not harm the (political) purpose it strives for. The construction of this collective and its consequential identity construction starts and ends with a shared affective dynamic on the basis of having lived through similar, traumatic experiences and the desire for retribution through the legal system these survivors sought. Within this, there is a conceptual possibility to recognize and mobilize based on certain affective similarities and new shared identities while neither overlooking nor negating other conflicting identities that relativize the sameness of the experience on a material level but perhaps not on an affective level.

In the recognition of certain commonalities that enable a complex affective solidarity lies the potential for moments of disruptions to hegemonic power structures that enable and exercise symbolic violence—the shaming and silencing of victims of (gendered sexualized) violence. This is only collectively realizable because any performance depends on its recognition, which, inarguably, is also true for the case of performances of resistance to the shame of being victimized. By focusing on collectivity, which is the basis for any potential

solidarity, we also find an approach to placing agency in the theorization of power and empowerment without negating the material oppressions of the patriarchal power structures that prevail.

The dynamics by which some groups seemingly find more recognition than others—as exemplified by the tension in the #MeToo movement around its lack of intersectionality—however, remains. Discussions of identity (constructions) and their material effects seem hard, if not impossible, to shake. Arendt acknowledges that the same people, deprived of their personhood, cannot generate the power to ‘act in concert’ and thus participate in a space of appearance. She writes of

the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly. This space does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them—like the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the laborer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world—do not live in it. To be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance. (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 198–99)

Conceptualizing the space of appearance as the space to exercise political agency, Arendt conceptually denies the participation of disempowered groups. She is right in pointing out that this way of ‘non-being’ negates personhood and in implying that there is a hierarchy in political agency. Nevertheless, Arendt’s space of appearance and theorization of power offers little room to think through the coming together—‘acting in concert’—of disempowered, oppressed groups in a way that does permeate ‘the public’—the space generated by those powerful enough to evoke it in collective action—in terms of recognition. The changed public, cultural, and legal processing of domestic violence is, again, a fitting example here. Just like there is movement in what is culturally framed as ‘of public concern,’ there is also movement in the constructions of power generated by those who historically “do not live in [the space of appearance].”

A fruitful approach to theorizing power without positioning those oppressed as entirely without agency nor silencing or negating oppression by theorizing power only along the lines of empowerment might be by focusing on that movement. Jean Baker Miller defines power as “the capacity to produce a change—that is, to move anything from point A or state A to point B or state B” (“Women and Power” 241). Miller also argues that domination is ‘masculine,’ suggesting that ‘women’ use it differently, making the daring argument that “[r]ather, women may want to be powerful in ways that simultaneously enhance, rather than diminish, the power of others” (247–248). This claim lacks any theoretical backing and rather renders ‘power as domination’ as ‘male’ per se and the only power women can exercise as a sort of gentle, non-threatening empowerment that cannot engage with the

structural disempowerment and domination that a feminist approach necessitates in order to not gloss over the material effects of patriarchal dominance. Yet, the argument that it is power that produces (the capacity for) movement remains intriguing.

While power relations also (re-)produce stagnation insofar as they function to uphold themselves, Miller points out that power is also required to create movement. Here, the notion of collectivity returns/remains. However, if only the move from state A to point B is power, then the power in the practices of the movement is lost. Instead, I argue that the construction of collectivity is negotiated in performances of resistance to seemingly stable power dynamics. These performances of resistance, which principally are performances of agency, aim to resist the placelessness of victims of sexualized violence through a collectivized claim to narrative power, thus performing a demand to take place. It is this claim that generates movement and, with it, the possibility of destabilizing hegemonic power relations.

The #MeToo movement, as a collectivization of autobiographical narratives about sexualized violence, responds to the placelessness of victims. This placelessness is constructed through the (threat of) sexualized violence that structures (presumably safe) movement and the (threat of) shame that structures narrative agency. So, #MeToo, as embedded in these contexts, engages in processes of placing and, with the possibility of (performances of) resistance, processes of replacing. In this, the narratives' negotiation of potential sites for the struggle for narrative power and the construction of the sites in which agency is lost, unveiled to be impossible, or performed to be (re)gained, is central.

4. (Re-) Placing #MeToo

The tension between conceptualizing feminist power as well as the dynamics through which it is exercised upon certain bodies and in the gendered dynamics of sexualized violence tenaciously persists. It is, I argue, in the narration of and through the places that encompass a lack of agency and powerlessness that this tension can be viewed as productive. The process of writing constructs and performs not only a subject but also a literary 'here.' In short: it places. Yet, in the autobiographical narratives of the #MeToo movement, these writings are, as already indicated and to now be thoroughly explored, about placelessness, the inability to agentially exist, and a lack of narrative power. To understand this tension in the context of a resistant social movement, this chapter delves into the places crucial in the

#MeToo movement and its tensions. These are, as I contend, digital spheres—as a specific arena for public performances in which the contestation for narrative power outlines the inadequacy of current conceptualization of counterpublics; the courtroom, the placing in which suggests a quest for justice while victims’ placelessness in it signals their continued desubjectification; and the site of abuse, the ubiquity of which speaks further speaks to this placelessness while its reclaiming in narration destabilizes it. For this analysis, I center exemplary readings of an emerging #MeToo literary canon.

Karen Boyle describes the edited collection *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture* (Gay) as a “post-#MeToo collection of victim/survivor testimony,” that focuses on experiences of sexualized violence in a context “which creates hierarchies of victimisation . . . which encourage victim/survivors to minimise what happened to them” (76), a context reflective in the collection’s title. The book was published not precisely post #MeToo but rather in the midst of it, encapsulating and contributing to the ongoing public negotiations about the movements’ grievances through the #MeToo mode: collectivized autobiographical narratives. Crucially, it positions writing as a pivotal practice in dealing with (being a victim of) sexualized violence and the politics of ‘rape culture’ (a culture that, put simply, perpetuates ubiquitous sexualized violence).

This theme and the collection’s title find themselves prominently in the essay “Floccinaucinihilipilification” by So Mayer. In this fragmented essay about child abuse—fragmented to underline a performance of memory in which “. . . stories are incoherent, flashes” (S. Mayer 130) and a fragmented sense of identity—“As any medic would find, there are parts of me missing” (130)—, Mayer writes about the (enforced) difficulty of writing about this abuse. Despite this difficulty, they ultimately attribute their survival to writing (and reading): “I survived. I took the language of knives I’d been given and tore down the walls of my home and my body. There are other places where the skin barely meets, places I don’t show” (138); “Teach me the word for my own abjection and erasure and you teach me to survive” (139). It is a sentiment emblematic of the movement practices of the #MeToo movement: that it is both a political tool to (autobiographically) write about experiences of sexualized violence and a personal necessity.

Mayer addresses this writing as a political tool in their analysis of rape as

a cultural and political act: it attempts to remove a person with agency, autonomy, and belonging from their community, to secrete them and separate them, to depoliticize their body by rendering it detachable, violable, nothing. (140)

Mayer positions their essay to respond to a cultural context in which “[r]endering something worthless—tearing something down—is powerful. It’s a weapon of power” (141). This, they

write, is something particularly known to victims of sexualized violence: “We know it in our bodies” (141). So, responding to this cultural framework, and ultimately calling to “pull out the scalpel and turn it around” (142), Mayer’s essay positions the participation in the discursive negotiation of what is “not that bad” (140) and what deserves and demands public attention and reprocessing as a crucial resistance as importantly achievable through the practice of autobiographical writing.

The collectivization of these writings through the #MeToo movement situates this as a movement practice. What thematically returns in these stories is the renegotiation of shame—in Mayer’s essay, for instance, a cause of death (130)—and, imperatively, placelessness. The powerlessness lamented by the stories of the #MeToo movement hinges on this placelessness, which ensures the inaccessibility to the public negotiations that construct, to stay with the language of Roxane Gay’s collection, rape culture. This chapter explores the resistance to this de-placing/placelessness: a (re-)placing, which is possible, I argue, through (the construction of) the realms most crucial in the #MeToo movement practices: digital spheres, the courtroom, and the site of abuse.

4.1. Digital Spheres

The prominence of digital media in the broad emergence of the #MeToo movement does not precisely signal a tension between private and public spheres but rather reiterates the untenability of a neat dichotomy between the two. Instead, digital communication renders notions of private and public abstract. While it may be tempting to position social media platforms as a digital public sphere à la Habermas' utopia, such a conceptualization is both insufficient and misleading. The changed barriers of entry to digital communication platforms do not simply foster a (utopian) democratization of participation, of speaking and being heard. The (gendered) dynamics of shame and power that shape narrative practices about sexualized violence do not stop at the virtual door of digital media.

Habermas writes about the advent of digitalization and, primarily, social media platforms as a “further structural transformation of the public sphere” (“Reflections and Hypotheses on a Further Structural Transformation of the Political Public Sphere” 157). This further transformation is primarily characterized by increased access to authorship. It is the principal promise of the digital landscape that (almost) anyone can become an author. With that comes the optimistic view of unregulated, equal discussion in the (political) public sphere. However, as Habermas observes, “. . . this great emancipatory promise is being drowned out by the desolate cacophony in fragmented, self-enclosed echo chambers” (159). This observation addresses the phenomenon of an assumedly increasingly fragmented (political) conversation. While not exclusively digital, it is, as by Habermas in this example, often attributed to the practice facilitated by digitalization and, first and foremost, social media. When presented as solely a social media phenomenon, this consideration is quite ahistorical. The perception of increasing “semi-publics” in the absence of one hegemonic public without consideration of pre-digital networks to be conceptualized as counterpublics points to more complex negotiations and distribution of power as an ancillary effect of increased ability for people to become authors and find an audience as well as their ability to collectivize their experience and mobilize. Attributing a diminishment of a public sphere to the “echo-chamber” phenomenon fostered by social media algorithms does not properly consider the source of hegemonic power of this seemingly diminishing, singular public sphere (that is, the inability for other publics to emerge).

So-called “cyber-optimists” (Schäfer 324) argue, for instance,

[t]he communities that are organized in cyberspace are just as real to the participants as face-to-face relationships. Here, people can gain or provide information as well as debate and negotiate interpretations of reality and/or critiques of the social. Such interactions foster and/or recognize new forms of identity whose performative expressions include organizing actions and using the Internet to coordinate with other groups. Cyberspace has

been easily adapted and embraced as an essential aspect of resistance struggles. (Langman 55)

Yet, this cyber-optimism is rightly confronted with the reality of digital (social) media platforms' main subjective: increase of capital. Following Habermas' objective in the first iteration of outlining the structural transformation of the public sphere, Zizi Papacharissi ("The Virtual Sphere") and Darin Barney, for instance, point to the economic factors influencing the way access, information, and authorship function in what is considered the 'digital public sphere.' This is not to suggest that there is a distinction between a (or even *the*) "real" public sphere and the digital public sphere, as there is no substantial conceptual ground to base such a dichotomy on. Rather, contemporary considerations of (changing) public spheres cannot omit the importance of digital communication practices and the commercial interests of the platforms through which these communication practices are conducted.

So, Habermas rightly points out that "[t]he rise of the new media is taking place in the shadow of a commercial exploitation of the currently almost unregulated internet communication" ("Reflections and Hypotheses on a Further Structural Transformation of the Political Public Sphere" 146). In social media practices, the potential access to authorship comes second to the desired and inescapable function of citizens—users—to be consumers. The capitalist use of personal data (an unavoidable trace of which is left in every digital communication) is subject of one big part of social media scholarship. Most notably, Shoshana Zuboff explores this in her conceptualization of surveillance capitalism, describing the possibility of targeted advertisement through the exploitation of personal data. It is in digital media platform's commercial interest to analyze and/or sell large sets of its consumers' data as well as increase the potential for more (personal) data collection. Zuboff views this development as pioneered by Google and sophisticated by Facebook, embodying "a new logic of accumulation" (13). It is within this context that the "high affectivity of digital communication" (Staab and Thiel 134) is situated. As social media platforms' currency is both data and advertising space (and, because of that, users' engagement and attention), they foster, encourage, and algorithmically construct emotionally charged communication.

This focus stands vis-à-vis the scholarship that, at least in parts, foregrounds the digital sphere's potential to broaden authorship, connect networks, and, through that, mobilize on the grounds of shared experience, grievances, and/or political goals (Bowen; Gerbaudo; Mendes and Ringrose). Clearly, these phenomena are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the digital campaigns that grew into substantial political movements—such as #MeToo or,

to name an example that has received notable scholarly attention and praise, Occupy Wall Street¹³—utilized social media for the purposes of their movement framing and organizing activities, while, at the same time, also leaving traces of personal data used by these social media sites to, ultimately, generate capital.

The “unregulated internet communication” Habermas writes about is only unregulated insofar as its regulation remains outside of the public, democratic sphere. In this case, communication and the possibility for mobilization that #MeToo has seemingly demonstrated remain the subject of private regulations. Private, in this case, refers to “private enterprise and industry, market values, and an array of capitalist powers that undermine public goods and public obligations” (Butler et al. 69). Rather recent attempts to publicly regulate social media platforms or, at least, render their regulations more transparent to the public have come up against the seemingly insurmountable opacity of social media algorithms. The reason for this opacity is, of course, not found in some inherent law of digital technology but in the (un)willingness of digital media companies to increase transparency (Krass).

Nevertheless, there is a degree of autonomous performance that any subject can practice through social media platforms. Andreas Reckwitz points out that as new technologies are embedded in social practices, it is the way these technologies are used that determines their meaning (168). He argues that social media users are not merely subjects produced by the technology used to generate profit through their data traces but, on top of that, the digitalization of media also owes much of its growth to “a pursuit of uniqueness and exceptionality, which has not only become a subjective desire but also a paradoxical social *expectation*” (3). This staging of uniqueness is, clearly, not confined to the digital sphere. Yet, as Reckwitz reasons,

It is a peculiar feature of the internet that potentially everyone can be present there *themselves*—not as mere types or averages but as individuals with their own names, faces, and personal characteristics. Unrestricted by the confines of class and status, all late-modern subjects have the historically unprecedented privilege (though this has increasingly become more of a necessity) of representing themselves in the culture machine and constantly working on their self-presentation. Social media can be regarded as the most significant locus of such self-presentation . . . (178)

¹³ While the performance of the occupation of Zuccotti Park undoubtedly plays a central role in the (media) evaluation of the movement, Occupy Wall Street emerged, in its communication and organizational principles, as a digital upheaval (see, for instance, J. L. Hammond; Juris; Tremayne). Surely, the preceding movements of the so-called Arab Spring—that Occupy Wall Street oftentimes paid homage to, including in its first call to action on *Adbuster*’s website, asking “Are you ready for a Tahrir moment?”—are also important examples in this context (Howard and Hussain; Wolfson and Funke).

This is premised on Reckwitz's analysis of the structural transformation toward what he terms and titles his book, *The Society of Singularities*. Here, Reckwitz places affectivity at the center of this society.

With its logic of the general and its drive toward rationalization, industrial modernity systemically reduced the role of affect in society. When people, things, events, places, or collectives are singularized and culturalized, however, they then operate by *attracting* (or repulsing) others. Indeed, it is only by affecting others that they can be regarded as singular at all. Late-modern society is a society of affect in a way that classical modernity never could have been. (9)

Underlining the reciprocity of a performativity of uniqueness and an increasingly potent affective dimension cannot avoid an examination of social media. Indeed, social media platforms promise a space to promote both singularity as well as connection based on particular uniqueness and profit off of the potency of affectivity. The #MeToo movement also ties in here. While the testimonial hashtag itself both performs and rejects singularities, instead constructing an autobiographical collective, the movement occupies attention in the digital realm not least because its topic of concern is inextricable from affect. Through social media, the testimonials of the #MeToo movement illustrate the sheer ubiquity of sexualized violence while not de-personifying the issue. Instead, expressions and confessions of the #MeToo movement are attached to—in the language of social media platforms—‘personal profiles.’ The term ‘personal’ here is misleading as the authors presented on social media may write from an entirely anonymous platform, as a largely public figure, or somewhere in between. Although the tension within this notion of an autobiographically formed collective shows its productivity in the #MeToo movement, the movement's functionality on a potent affective dimension is also grounds for criticism of the exploitation of trauma narratives.¹⁴

Importantly, these considerations are not exclusive to digital spheres. More so, any dichotomy between social movements in digital and non-digital realms that attributes its

¹⁴ The concern about commercial exploitation of trauma narratives is, of course, not unique to the #MeToo movement although certainly amplified by the extension and immediacy of the digital communication so central to the movement. In a discussion about the transgressive potential of what they term “survivor speech,” which includes autobiographical narratives, Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray acknowledge that, in many instances, these texts “[become] a media commodity that has a use value based on its sensationalism and drama” (279). About scholarly interest in stories about trauma, Patricia Yaeger asks, “. . . aren't we also drawn to these stories from within an elite culture driven by its own economies . . .” (228). Leigh Gilmore, instead, considers the return of these concerns in a #MeToo context specifically a gatekeeping mechanism, arguing that, “U.S. literary culture consistently applies norms of decorum around speaking about domestic violence, women's bodies, and intergenerational trauma” (12). Principally, she contends that the conversation about sensationalization or (commercial) exploitation of these narratives suppresses a victim-focused perspective that centers the victim's healing in the process of writing and publishing their story. Indeed, the focus on potentials of commercial exploitation for autobiographical narratives that include or even center a traumatic experience necessarily implies a certain (moral) judgement on which types of (public) speech are acceptable for victims of trauma. It also points to the lingering, unanswered question about the victim's control over their narrative once it is published and consumed. Further, the assumed particular vulnerability authors of trauma narratives are (supposedly) exposed to confirms the underlying shame associated with these experiences.

movement dynamics and practices only to the functionality of fairly new technologies and social media sites is neither comprehensive nor useful. Yet, it appears unlikely that any meaningful political protest nowadays can entirely surpass the realm of digital communication, either in its organization or in its documentation, a process also inextricable from the ongoing processes of meaning-making in and around a social movement.

Judith Butler et al. write that they are, “not sure that the internet has become the only public sphere. If that were the case, then assemblies, demonstrations, encampments would only become ‘public’ once they were documented and circulated online” (69). What Butler et al. misinterpret here is the fact that an assembly, demonstration, or encampment also always takes place in digital realms does not warrant a conclusion of the internet as the only public. Instead, it—given the way it is currently practiced—has become, in large parts of the world an almost unavoidable part of public communication. While movements that, unlike the #MeToo movement, do not primarily mobilize online, are not granted a status of ‘publicness’ once they enter the digital realm and, with that, are placed in further circulation, discourse, and potentially global practices of meaning-making, the documentation of, for instance, encampments online has potential significant impacts on both its visibility and its temporality. The political message of an encampment is neither tied to the locality nor its duration, as exemplified by Occupy Wall Street. Rather, the practices of storytelling that an encampment enables solidify the grievances raised by the movement. The images and stories of an occupied Wall Street carry the movement not only in an imagined legacy but also throughout the process of its movement communication and framing activity. As such, while Butler et al.’s objection to the internet as the only public sphere is warranted, their argument about the publicness of, for instance, encampments in the absence of digital documentation is misleading.

As the technologies of social media underline the non-linear temporality of social movements as well as their renegotiation of narrative practices, it becomes clear that social movements also practice moving in and through the digital documentation of their movement activity. This digital documentation includes the new modes of communication granted by social media, as well as the lack of transparency in the way this communication may circulate and the potential capitalist exploitation in the form of an algorithmically inflamed debate generating profit to the platforms that movements may utilize for their own political purposes within the possibilities granted to them. Limits may be set, for instance, by the shadow-banning processes of social media platforms or by an authoritarian government.

Although the use of digital communication for organizing and mobilizing practices in social movements as well as the documentation of their various movement practices throughout both digital and non-digital places seemingly promise increased authorship and agency for those mobilizing on the basis of marginalization, the degree of public visibility or impact of any social media performance does not follow an entirely democratic process. Evidently, digital communication platforms have not solved (Khosravinik and Esposito)—and, according to some (Butler et al.)—bolstered “unequal access to discursive power” (Staab and Thiel 132). These dynamics lead Judith Butler et al. to conclude that, in the context of digital publics, “. . . a dynamic is currently in play in which various senses of the public are vying with one another for hegemonic power” (69). This implies that prior to the possibility of digital publics, there was no challenge to the hegemonic public. Rather, any practices of counterpublics were stuck on the margins of publicness without the perspective to puncture through to dominant political discourse. This puncture, however, is crucial to acquire meaningful political change. As such, Butler et al.’s implication that notions of ‘public’ are only challenged—or, rather, that hegemonic power in a public is only challengable—since and through the emergence of digital public does not account for the instances of counterpublics puncturing through to hegemonic dynamics that determine political movement. Yet, Butler et al. are right in pointing out that the formation of digital publics is contributing to the struggle for hegemonic power. As Lauren Langman argues about ‘Internetworked Social Movements,’ “Resistance networks of social movements based on the powers of flows (information, capital, or people) act as a defense against the placeless logic of the space of flows characterizing social domination in the information age” (54).

The #MeToo movement can easily be conceptualized as a resistance network “based on the powers of flows” that Langman describes here. As such, its creation of a map of autobiographical experiences opposes the “placeless logic” not of (gendered) sexualized violence but of the previous hegemonic (legal and cultural) discourse about it, isolating incidents from their broader cultural effects and roots. Aiming to connect these previously isolated narratives, the movement exposes these roots. Its specific collectivization of experiences of sexualized violence in and through digital means has rendered the topic undeniably of public concern. Ryan Gallagher et al. assess that “[s]exual violence is a near ubiquitous experience among women, but, despite its prevalence, women’s experiences of sexual violence are often relegated away from the public’s view into private conversations” (1). In the digital narrative practice of the #MeToo movement, the positioning of the expression of solidarity in “me too” remains unspecific. Uttered into an abstract place, it

may remain entirely unheard or witnessed by few and, if unarchived, be subject of an unclear temporality. However, it may also receive widespread attention, be reconstructed throughout different media and, with that, gain both an imagined notion of potency and permanence.

While the potential output of a “#MeToo” tweet, for instance, may be global, it remains unknowable to the person tweeting. Quite contrary to a utopian notion of a (virtual) agora, Twitter, Inc., in this example, is a for-profit, privately owned cooperation whose several controversies about public speech regulations have illustrated (hitherto unsolved) problems with public, legal regulations of a private (digital) platform that relies on advertisements and, also in the political sphere, is used as a news service (Cushion). A 2013 Twitter press release states,

We believe Twitter users have the right to express their opinions and ideas without fear of censorship. . . . These beliefs are the foundation of Freedom of Speech, not Freedom of Reach—our enforcement philosophy which means, where appropriate, restricting the reach of Tweets that violate our policies by making the content less discoverable. (*Twitter Safety*)

Unsurprisingly, the determination of these policies as well as transparency in this process have been controversially discussed (Broadwater and Conger).

While Twitter is not the only digital communication tool through which the #MeToo movement emerged, it is a central part of it. The “#” in the movement’s name is not only symbolic of the platform but refers to its specific use as an organizational tool. The symbol adds context to a tweet and allows for the collection of tweets with the same hashtag. Through that, Twitter is structured into subsections. For the movement, simply the number of tweets that contained “#MeToo” is often used to illustrate its public relevance and outreach, without any further contentual examination. As Gallagher et al. conclude from the almost one million tweets containing “#MeToo” within the first 48 hours of its Twitter inception, “[b]y connecting the relentless number of disclosures into a single network of solidarity and lived experiences, the hashtag surfaced the painfully commonplace nature of sexual violence against women in plain view” (2).

In this context, Gallagher et al. point to Nazanin Andalibi et al.’s concept of network-level reciprocal disclosure, which describes intimate disclosures on social media prompted by an increased sense of safety/lack of potential stigmatization upon witnessing (several) similar disclosures. Andalibi et al. consider a homophilic network and the possibility of remaining anonymous important aspects of network-level reciprocal disclosure. Regarding practices of self-disclosure on social media, Sabine Trepte and Leonard Reinecke importantly point out that,

. . . the use of SNS [social networking sites] and the psychological disposition for self-disclosure interact reciprocally: Individuals with a stronger disposition show a higher

tendency to use SNS (selection effect). At the same time, frequent SNS use increases the wish to self-disclose online, because self-disclosing behaviors are reinforced through social capital within the SNS environment (socialization effect). (1102)

Thus, the network-level reciprocal disclosures that Andalibi et al. describe also need to conceptualize both social media sites' incentives to disclose (as part of a business model and as a result of the collective dynamics in (micro-)networks that Trepte and Reinecke simply term "socialization effect") and users' previous engagement with social media that renders them continuously exposed to practices of self-disclosing.

Within the notion of network-level reciprocal disclosures, a quite optimistic reading of online sharing practice highlights the possibility of connecting over shared experiences, while sidelining the possible widespread disbelief or shaming that one may be faced with in a quantitatively much more severe manner than would be possible without digital means. Yet, the threat of shaming that those disclosing experience of sexualized violence may face is not simply intercepted by possible moments and networks of connection and affective solidarity, as the broad cultural discourse on the #MeToo movement has demonstrated (again). As culturally deep-rooted, implicit, and seemingly internalized threats of shame remain in digital narrative practices, so does the displacement of certain groups from these practices and in these spheres.

Considering the construction of a productive tension between disempowerment—shame—and (performances of) empowerment—rejections of shame—as the core of #MeToo movement practices, centers the narrative practice occurring through digital spheres rather than the creation of a supposed place that resists hegemonic power dynamics. It is not merely the speaking practices that place these narratives and, through their collectivization, the movement itself within the digital realm, but specifically the witnessing practices that construct the narratives in the first place. In the case of #MeToo, collective witnessing enables a meaningful collectivization of narratives. As Paul Dawson writes about the movement, "... what was essentially an informal call for data produced ambient responses in the form of stories of personal experience attached to the hashtag, stories ... which acquire political significance only when *narrativized* as a social movement" (969). With the emergence of collective witnessing practices that enable this narrativization, the placement of a seemingly personal story is now instantaneously part of this collective and, with that, not isolated.

Here, the specificity of the digital realm in which the #MeToo movement largely takes place is crucial. As Dawson assesses,

#MeToo ... is founded on storytelling, on the exhortation to share stories of personal experience, with a prototypical narrative encoded in the phrase itself. ... This indicates

the experiential basis of individual stories, their affective resonance scored in the body, but also that at the heart of #MeToo is the concept of sharing (with ambivalence registered over the fact that sharing is both empowering and potentially exploitative). The phrase is both an expression of solidarity and a narrative signifier, a shorthand reference to the shared experience of all individual stories. The particulars of narrative experience do not have to be detailed, as this tweet by @jvymee indicates: ‘my story doesn’t need to be told, just know it happened. #MeToo’ (17 October 2017). (970)

In the construction of a meaningful networked collective, the phrase and hashtag “me too” enables a seemingly simple participation that does not require detail about the sexualized violence experienced, the perpetrator, or the victim’s trauma. The construction of a meaningful “prototypical narrative” enables a specific ‘taking place’ of the movement through digital means. As Dawson also writes, the hashtag is a “placeholder.” First, this means that “#MeToo” stands in for a larger story. The functionality of this already signals the connectivity of stories of sexualized violence, as an expression of the shared experience suffices to construct a networked self-disclosure and solidarity. Secondly, the functionality of the hashtag as a “placeholder” signals that these expressions (of disclosure, shame rejection, and solidarity) require and, with #MeToo, claim a certain place in and beyond digital spheres. In this light, the reference to the quantity of the hashtag as it is shared and continuously upheld within the specific context that secures its meaning as standing in for “I, too, have experienced sexualized violence,” first and foremost views a certain (em)power(ment) in the space taken up.

This also responds to “the ways many victims have been unable to speak about their experiences, or had them invalidated during disclosures” (Mendes et al. 1291). While disbelief, invalidation, and shaming are certainly parts of the witnessing practices emerging in response to #MeToo, the ‘placeholder’ aims to offer an alternative to voicelessness and the placelessness that comes with it. Of course, #MeToo is not the first digital campaign in this realm. Kaitlynn Mendes et al., for instance, highlight the preceding campaign #BeenRapedNeverReported that first emerged in Canada in 2014 after two journalists who accused radio host Jian Ghomeshi of sexualized violence were faced with backlash and disbelief because they had previously not reported their allegations within a legal realm. Similar hashtag campaigns also include #WhyIStayed, focusing on increasing awareness and understanding of the complex dynamics of domestic violence, or the Everyday Sexism project, which digitally collects personal vignettes about instances of patriarchal oppression reaching from seemingly mundane moments to rape.

According to Mendes et al., the emerging discourses in digital space are creating “new *affective platform vernaculars*” (1293) referring to the specific styles of communication that digital (social media) platforms may foster and the construction of affective collectives

within these digital spheres. Put simply, they highlight that the narratives of sexualized violence that are constructed and consumed are always mediated through the particular platforms in which they emerge and that this mediatization is influential to the potential of (counter-)narratives about sexualized violence. They regard the affective platform vernaculars of Twitter, for instance, to suggest both a notable agency in the participation in digital campaigns as well as a certain mundaneness. While Twitter may be used for organizational purposes in activism, a politically meaningful participation does not depend on individual activist intentions (or lack thereof). Rather, the digital streams that the platform vernaculars of Twitter's functionality constructs—referring to both the users' contentual activity as well as the platform's set-up, structuring and regulating this activity—reveals a practice of “feminist cataloging” that communicates the structural dimension of sexualized violence, moving it out of the realm of individual occurrences or unconnected, random events.

#MeToo Places and Digital Visualization

One example of a digitally constructed connectivity, which, in turn, constructs the movement framing of sexualized violence as a pressing social and cultural issue, is a (commercial) project by Google Trends titled *Me Too Rising*. The project is presented as “a visualization of the movement” and hosted on the domain metoorising.withgoogle.com. Upon opening the site, a blank, black background appears. Slowly, the words

What would happen if one woman told the truth
About her life?

appear in small, white letters in the middle of the screen, leaving large parts of the black background blank. After a short pause, the quote continues, as small, white letters reading, “The world would split open” fade in. Another short pause then attributes the text to the poem “Käthe Kollwitz” written in 1968 by Muriel Rukeyser. Taken from the poem, the phrase “The World Split Open” is also (part of) the title of the 1974 collection *The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America, 1552-1950* (Bernikow) and the historian Ruth Rosen's examination of 20th-century feminism in *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. In Rukeyser, Käthe Kollwitz is used as a figure to represent feminism in the 1910s and early 1920s, positioning women's “speaking out” as a central feminist practice. In the poem, Rukeyser uses an invocation of (a fictional) Kollwitz's perspective on the tensions and struggles of

late 1960s feminism, 1968 specifically, indicating both a seriality to history as well as the perpetual, unfinished grievances of feminism.

After this introduction, the site's main page appears. Now added to the black background is a faint but visible animation of a slowly rotating globe. In the forefront, "Me Too Rising" is written in thin but large white letters. Underneath, in a smaller font, "A visualization of the movement from Google Trends" appears in faint yellow. A small button, centralized underneath the last line of text, invites the website's visitor to "Explore." Upon clicking the button, the globe remains the same, still slowly rotating. More small buttons appear on the corners of the site, referring to social media sites, sexual assault resources, and offering information about the project. Simultaneously, a timeline appears at the bottom of the screen in dark grey. It is faint but distinguishable from the black background. The timeline stretches from October 01, 2017, to "Today" (although the placement of the "today" point follows immediately after April 14, 2019, suggesting that the site has not been updated since early 2019). A cursor enables the user to select a point from the timeline, which also shows various peaks, making the points in time visible in which "me too" was searched particularly often via Google.

On the right side of the globe, "top searching cities" appear in large font and change depending on which point on the timeline is selected. A line underneath each city name makes clear that they have a clickable functionality. Upon clicking a city, an animation zooms into the globe. It stops with an image that shows a zoomed-in map in a faint background with small glowing points on the map, revealing where the selected city is. The right side of the screen shows three different search results—partially readable headlines from news stories—in large, faint yellow font. Each headline is underlined and serves as a hyperlink, leading directly to the story. Further small buttons also offer the ability to "see all research results," redirecting the user to the Google search results for "[City, Country,] #MeToo Movement" or to "Follow MeToo in [City]." This redirects the user to Google Alerts, where they are able to set an alert for any new upcoming Google results for the same search. A small button on the upper left side enables the user to go "Back to Globe," a click on which opens the previous page.

On this page, the globe in the background reveals several small glowing points that indicate the location in which "me too" was searched on Google particularly often during different points in time since October 2017. The user can manually rotate the globe and select one of the glowing points. Upon clicking one of the glowing points, the city positioned there on the globe is selected and another small animation, in which further smaller glowing,

hovering points are visible around the now-selected circle, appears. This will also then zoom in, revealing #MeToo-related search results from that area. The zoom-in is also accompanied by a change in background sound. On the main page, the background sounds are mainly hardly recognizable, looped wind chimes layered on top of static white noise. A click on a glowing dot, a city, is underlaid with a muffled sound effect. More notably, when zoomed-in on a city, the website looped wind chimes move further to the background and are now overlaid with indistinguishable, unintelligible, busy muttering, suggesting an auditory presence in a crowded place. There are several layers of this muttering, creating a busy atmosphere that counters the calm, light sounds of wind chimes.

As the website is programmed to show the first Google results for a particular search (“[City, Country,] #MeToo Movement), some of the headlines that are featured are not specific to the location selected. For instance, a click on Jackson, Mississippi, USA suggests two headlines relating to Michael Jackson. Other results, however, are connected to the locality selected. A click on Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA, for instance, features a 2017 news story about a local church. In it, *The Gazette* reports about Discovery Church’s efforts to encourage its members to safely share their trauma and, because of that, refers to it as a “me too place.” Anabel Quan-Haase et al. view *MeToo Rising* as a demonstration that “[w]hether it is the spread of #MeToo to different geographic locations, how #MeToo has sparked changes in sex education or legislation . . . it certainly has a significant legacy” (1701).

Although the project largely presents news coverage about the movement, its design promises to be a visualization of the far-reaching effects of the collective self-disclosures of the movement. Not least because of its opening quote, the project underlines that the practices of truth-telling—at this point, an individual practice—create movement. Here, Google constructs the practice of writing “me too” in digital spheres as immensely powerful, leading the world (symbolized by a globe) to—in the visualization literally and otherwise figuratively—light up. Karen Boyle views the *Me Too Rising* visualization as an example of Banet-Weiser’s concept of popular feminism. Equating online searches for the movement with activism, as the project is described as “a visualization of the movement from Google Trends,” Boyle argues that *Me Too rising* not only confines the movement to Google but to a digital trend:

This example demonstrates that Me Too is not only networked feminism: it is also a mainstream news story, involving many competing voices attempting to determine, assert and limit the meanings and significance of the outpouring of evidence of gendered violence and harassment associated with the hashtag. These stories may . . . do feminist work, but focusing simply on the most visible stories as representative of contemporary feminism is profoundly distorting. (4)

For Boyle, #MeToo is not entirely separable from the (mainstream) stories it generates. Rather, these dynamics unveil that the movement, through its mediatization, amplifies certain voices more than others.

While *Me Too Rising* demonstrates a ‘taking place’ of #MeToo, there is no contentual relevance to this place taking. Solely regarded through *Me Too Rising*, the movement is partially upheld through various news stories about sexualized violence. In this regard, “#MeToo” is primarily a supercategory under which to report about cases of sexualized violence and the necessary precursor for any reporting about it: a victim’s or several victims’ speaking out about it in some sort of public light. Evidently, this forgoes any affective dimension essential to the practices of #MeToo. More than positioning the movement practices that render #MeToo a specific and meaningful story, *Me Too Rising* positions the global reactions to it, which signal collective listening, in the center of assessing and visualizing the movement’s significance. As the mumbling sounds suggest when a city is selected, there is talk about #MeToo. The several, overlaid, unclear voices in busy surroundings do not indicate a personal or collective expression of having been sexually assaulted, of sharing shame, or of rejecting it but are rather reminiscent of sound effects symbolizing gossip. With that, *Me Too Rising* focuses on the aftermath of #MeToo testimonials, namely the public debates, evaluations, and contextualization of its stories that may pertain to seemingly prosaic journalistic coverage, expressions of belief and solidarity, or disbelief and repudiation. As the project indicates, these discussions, like the #MeToo expression itself, also partially take place in and through the digital realm.

However, in Google’s visualization project, the #MeToo movement mostly takes place in large cities. That is not based on the movement activity there or of an increased occurrence of network-level reciprocal disclosure practices centering around larger or more densely populated cities. Rather, it stems from the project’s design of basing its data on the “300 top cities,” thus only showing results from the 300 cities with the highest amount of search activity through Google. While this only ensures a visualization presenting results that focus more on highly publicized news stories rather than (the density of) autobiographical social movement practices, it favors more densely populated areas simply because these clearly tend to generate more Google search activity in general. As Kim Albrecht asks, “But why is this? Is a story about MeToo from a place with less search activity less significant? The superlatives—top cities, most-liked, most-frequent, most shared—filter and predefine the overview it tries to serve” (138). In this light, Albrecht also points to a bias in visualization projects to focus mainly or solely on a disclosure’s visibility (through, on Twitter, for

example, the markers of comments, likes, or retweets). Because this approach only achieves a demonstration of a broad visibility of a topic—the general “trend” of #MeToo—but does not map, visualize, or place the contentual or even affective dimension of autobiographical narratives within the #MeToo realm outside of a very specific network of visibility, Albrecht asks,

How can we visualise the non-quantified? The representation of data became a metaphorical question about alternatives to the network. The paradigm of the overview, the view from nowhere, and the presentation of superlatives highlight the network and neglect otherness. . . . The network as the symbol of the digital society is a mere illusion that only exists as a side note embedded in the unstructured and unobserved. (141)

Kim Albrecht describes the considerations of an alternative #MeToo visualization project in the light of the quantitative projects that, according to them, forego any contentual assessment of the #MeToo phenomenon.

In an attempt to visualize the “unstructured and unobserved,” Albrecht thus initiated the *#MeToo Anti-Network*. It is, at first sight, also a visualization of the virality of #MeToo. Yet, the project presents a linearity that leads to the conclusion that such a quantitative assessment of the movement is insufficient. An interactive digital visualization, the project is reachable on the metoo.mlml.io domain. The main page features a headline, “#MeToo Anti-Network,” and three subsites (About, Diagrams, Analysis). The headlines are placed on the left, right, and bottom of the screen, creating a frame for the middle. In the middle, there is a solid black background and, towards the left half of the screen, black text, written on white bars. The text first introduces the project and its basis for data collection, *The Schlesinger Library*, which began collecting and archiving #MeToo tweets in 2017. An animated white down arrow suggests scrolling further down the page. Upon scrolling, the black background is now almost entirely filled with very small, green circles. A new text appears on the left, informing the viewer about the project’s data collection. Scrolling further down, the circles in the background now change size, leaving some small and some overlaid by bigger bubbles. This introduces the main concept of the visualization: the circles represent tweets, the size of which is determined by the number of retweets it has. The text on the left highlights “. . . the vast discrepancy in the number of retweets, with only a handful of tweets highly shared.”

While the bubbles representing the tweets are already clickable—a click on them reveals the tweet—the website further guides through the visualized data by scrolling down. On the first page that further explains the data collected, the project points to the tweets that “violate the Twitter rules” and are thus not available anymore. On this page, some of the bubbles are highlighted in red. The next step highlights the tweets red that are “temporarily

unavailable” because, as the text informs the viewer, “Twitter closed the accounts.” Scrolling down, the project highlights, in blue, the notable number of tweets with the words “Trump,” “GOP,” or “Kavanaugh” in them. Another page also points towards finding tweets for which the responses are clearly influenced by bots. Further scrolling down, the project concludes that “[t]he more time one spends with the most popular #MeToo tweets, the more problematic the dataset becomes.” Finally, the project highlights tweets “about personal experiences of abuse or harm” in purple. Notably, these only make up nine tweets from the dataset analyzed. The visualization also shows that only a few small bubbles are painted purple, indicating that these tweets did not receive much (digital) attention in the form of retweets. The linearity with which the reader is guided through the data not only visualizes but demonstrates the misleading effect of a merely quantified data presentation of #MeToo tweets or news stories. Ultimately, the project presents a small number of highlighted tweets from its data pool that, visually, appear not connected. As written on the page’s “about site,” “If we insist on mapping #MeToo as a network—the all-encompassing symbol of digital society—we risk missing fundamental elements of the movement that don’t answer to the network analogy.”

Instead, the visualization enables further contentual analysis of the tweets, leaving the possibility for connection open. Among the most retweeted in the project’s randomly selected dataset from 2017 to 2020 revealing a personal account of sexualized violence is a tweet that reads,

I was Amish and I endured 6 months of sexual abuse before I went to the police. Conservative clothing/lifestyle does not prevent sexual assault. The only way to stop this horrifying cycle is to break the silence and report! National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-4673 #metoo.
(@Misty_E_Griffin)

The full tweet—reachable through a click on it—also features a picture of six young women dressed in clothing typically associated with present-day Amish people (solid-color dresses with long sleeves and a long skirt, their hair tied together and covered by white bonnets). Replies to the tweet appear to be largely positive, featuring an encouraging or empowering message to the author. These messages include expressions of affective solidarity—“sending you love and strength” (@SandVanRoy)—or of both solidarity and gratitude—“Thank you for sharing your story. It may serve to give others courage. I think you are brave. I am so glad you are out and safe” (@MsMerricat) or simply “Thank you! #MeToo” (@KnyLori). These tweets exemplify the #MeToo movement premise that any one testimonial may encourage further self-disclosing. Further, they engage with the author on a direct emotional level, validating her decision to publicly tweet her brief #MeToo narrative, explicitly expressing belief and the conviction that because such a self-disclosure must have required

an overcoming of a sense of shame—“. . . I applaud your strength and courage. #MeToo” (@VanessaGillieo); or “. . . Well done for being courageous and speaking out!” (@Owlsandtea).

Other replies also explicitly validate or support Griffin’s account about a particular style of clothing not preventing sexual assault. One reply, for instance, reads, “Kudos for going to the police. Wish I had. Silencing sexual abuse is a generational thing in the Amish and Mennonites. It will only be through women like you that things change” (@Skjaldmaer1). Within this temporarily insecure, unstable place that emerges as Griffin’s tweet is witnessed and acknowledged, there is—contrary to the *#MeToo Anti-Network’s* conclusion—a moment of networked solidarity. Although these tweets appear placeless in the void of digital spheres (after all, the way the tweets and replies are spread and to whom they are displayed is not transparent to Twitter users or researchers), they are (temporarily) archived as part of the online #MeToo exchange.

The hashtag at the end of Griffin’s tweet adds context to her briefly expressed grievance (that is, the notion that conservative clothing would protect against sexualized violence). Evidently, those responding engaged with the tweet within the realms of an establishing framework. A feeling of shame and/or fear in sharing this autobiographical account is presumed, thus inciting messages of gratitude and confirmations about the author’s courage. Sidelining the possibility of either the tweet or any reply being deleted by either the author or Twitter, these brief exchanges remain a place of affective solidarity that does not simply dissolve without the author’s participation but, instead, remains visitable for other users of the platform. Although primarily implicit, the message itself and the replies take a stance against hegemonic narratives around sexualized violence and, written within the small bubble the tweet creates, perform a resistance to a victim of sexualized violence not being met with understanding, support, and belief. Instead, the exchange remains a re-visitable moment (of disruption) in which the autobiographical narrative embedded in a political grievance faces solidarity. However, this is neither inherently permanent nor stable. Instead, bot activity, a committed single user, or a collective might, for instance, flood the replies with misogyny, disbelief, or hate speech, depending on the circulating of the tweet in particular subterrains of the digital sphere. While these dynamics are not entirely different from a similar self-disclosure in non-digital spheres, the specific type of communication occurring in this tweet depends on the technological abilities granted by social networking sites. As such, the #MeToo movement here functions as a frame for a visitable place of solidarity that remains profoundly unstable.

The *#MeToo Anti-Network* project that includes this tweet in its data set does not include its replies that form a small network. Rather, the project positions the non-networked tweets in the center of the *#MeToo* movement, presenting the limits of merely visualizing *#MeToo* tweets as connected based on their shared platform and symbol. This is primarily achieved through the contentual differentiation of the data set. A visualization project for the *#MeToo*-adjacent hashtag mostly used in Spanish-speaking regions (“*#Cuéntalo*”) also engages with contentual differentiation but nevertheless visualizes instances of connection (Fallarás et al.). The site shows a seemingly non-specific collection of countless dots in multilayered circles on a black background, similar to an artistic galaxy image. While the dots appear to be randomly assorted, they are differently colored to reveal a wide, fair red ring on the outside on a smaller ring on the inside, made up of darker colored red dots. Some very fairly colored dots spread out randomly across the background. Within the two rings, some dots are notably larger than others. Hovering over them with a mouse reveals a rectangle with a black background, delimited with a luminous fair red line around it. In the rectangle, a tweet is written in small white text. Underneath the text, the account’s name is shown as well as the country from which it was tweeted and the date. On the bottom right of the box, Twitter’s logo is visible in white. Further hovering over different points on the site reveals other tweets.

On the bottom right of the main page, a click on a small black “i” on a white background shows further information about the project. Here, it is indicated that the project visualizes 130.000 tweets that have used the hashtag *#Cuéntalo*. Upon collection, the data was coded into three categories: Testimonials (“*Testimonios*”), Support Messages (“*Mensajes de Apoyo*”) and Others (“*Otros*”). In the visualization, the inner circle (colored in bright red) represents the testimonial message while the ring further on the outside (colored in fair red) stands for messages of support. The small circles in even fairer red and white that are scattered toward the outside of the circle then represent the messages classified as neither testimonial nor support messages. With this, the project suggests that testimonials make up the core of the *#Cuéntalo* movement. These are then bound together by support messages. While non-supportive messages are included in the data set, they are merely sidelined among “others.” In the project’s visualization, testimonials are central not only because they form the center of the large ring—the dots of which it is made up increasingly diffuse more from the inside to the outside—but also because of their quantity and the bright red color with which they are presented. Although hovering over the dots makes the tweet it symbolizes visible and readable, the sheer number of dots spaced together so closely as to

form an almost seamless circle makes it impossible to purposely aim for any one particular dot/tweet. Through that, the tweets appear interchangeable. In this network visualization, the contentual differentiation is used to (re-)center testimonials in the digital #Cuéntalo landscape while not positioning further close reading of these particular autobiographical narratives as possible or necessary. Rather, just as each dot serves as a symbol, the visible and readable tweets one's mouse (almost) coincidentally catches also serve as symbols for the other brief stories.

Digital #MeToo Collections

The Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, part of Harvard's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, has made it its task to provide a large data collection of the #MeToo movement. In this effort, the library collects tweets under certain criteria as well as new articles, blog posts, and legislation to "comprehensively document the #metoo movement and the accompanying political, legal, and social battles" (*Harvard Library*). The project's data collection starts in 2017 and mainly focuses on the US. Each data set of tweets is a collection of tweets published using the #metoo and other, for the archivists, related and/or viral hashtags within the regarded time frame. These include, for instance, "#sciencetoo," "#metoolynchings," "#metoomilitary," or "#himtoo." The latest data collection at the time of writing consists of the use of 76 hashtags (Maiorana et al.).

The data sets are publicly available and contain the collection of tweet IDs. Analysis requires the 'hydration' of this data set (so a conversion from the tweet IDs to the tweets). For this, the library directs its users to third-party, open-source software. This process also ensures that although the project aims to archive tweets, they will no longer be included in any analysis of the data sets if they have been deleted by the author or Twitter since having been last retrieved in the (automated) data collection. Journalist Nora Caplan-Bricker notes ethical concerns about the project, indicating that, "many of the women and men who shared #MeToo stories may have thought of them as ephemeral." The digital archiving only alters this perceived evanescence in so far as to present another access point to the tweet. It remains ephemeral to the point that a tweet's deletion renders it gone/unsaid (a perception about utterances that is certainly questionable in and of itself but especially in the digital sphere). The project illustrates some of the challenges of archiving digital trends. ". . . #MeToo . . . can only be captured in what archivists call a 'constructed' or 'artificial' collection, an assemblage of objects of disparate provenance, with borders that are imposed, not absolute"

(Caplan-Bricker). However, this is certainly a dynamic applying to not only digital archiving initiatives.

Kim Albrecht demonstrates an analysis of a random data set collected by *The Schlesinger Library's* project titled *#MeToo Digital Media Collection*. For this, they first randomly subsampled one million tweets (from the hitherto collected 32 million tweets). The data set was then further filtered to only analyze “‘high-profile’ tweets with over 100 retweets”, narrowing it down to 892 (139). The large percentage of tweets that, using merely the metric of retweets, did not reach a sizeable audience is noteworthy. This further illustrates the aforementioned complexity beyond increased authorship through digital communication. While increased authorship is certainly available, this does not necessitate discursive power. Albrecht makes a similar observation and concludes,

[w]ith the idea of finding tweets where we can map rich, time-based networked structures of likes, re-tweets, and most importantly comments, we had originally thought to start our analysis with such high-profile, densely connected tweets. But reading the random selection very much changed our perspective of the networked social media structure, as we realised that much of what we were seeking about the experience of the #metoo hashtag was not captured through conventional metrics. (139)

Further analysis of the now-manageable data set rendered a meaningful conclusion about the #MeToo movement's digital communication (on Twitter) rather unlikely as many tweets were either unavailable based on local laws, had been deleted, or indicated bot activity. This result indicates the same problems as the visualization projects. It appears that the perception of the #MeToo movement as a collection of autobiographical narratives is not one supported by quantitative data analysis. Nevertheless, this practice remains at the core of the movement's meaning-making processes. While the networked movement discussion appears drowned out by randomness and uninterpretable results in large data sets, their presence is neither rendered imagined nor meaningless. Instead, the #MeToo's 'taking place' in the digital realm is not characterized by its quantitative presence on Twitter.

Next to quantitative analysis of archiving efforts and other visualization projects that map a digital #MeToo place largely from its movement activity on social media, there are also notable digital blog projects for the collection of #MeToo narratives. For instance, a project titled *Our Wave* presents a collection of anonymously submitted narratives about sexualized violence in a blog-style format. Upon opening the domain, the visitor is presented with a pop-up that advises caution because the collected stories “can be hard to read.” Because of this, “[a] grounding activity can help you feel calm and make it easier to read these stories.” The visitor then can choose between being guided through a “grounding activity” or closing the pop-up to “see the stories.” Should the visitor choose the grounding activity, the pop-up—in the background of which the site's stories are not yet visible, only

revealing the faintly orange background and a quote reading “Healing to me means that all these things that happened don’t have to define me”—then presents a short text with instructions to help facilitate a relaxed body and calm breathing. A click on the button “I feel grounded and ready” then makes the pop-up disappear and the blog-style positioned entries visible.

Already with this introduction into the website, the project positions itself as addressing people emotionally impacted by autobiographical stories of sexualized violence. The site also features “resources” that include links to organizations for mental health support as well as a “survivor Q&A” in which advice is listed to questions concerning the aftermath of sexualized violence. *Our Wave* is described as intending to “[build] a community where survivors of sexual assault are heard, believed, and supported” (*Our Wave*, “What We Do”). As such, the stories submitted are not subject to any legal scrutiny but rather collected together to present a digital platform in which, in the absence of a comments section, the story starts and stops with the author’s telling of it. This is reiterated in the emotive quotes placed between the stories presented on a page. One, for instance, reads “You are the author of your own story. Your story is yours and yours alone despite your experiences.” Here, the contradiction between a story in which a profound loss of agency is necessarily centered while the author reclaims it through the very practice of authorship is addressed. It is this reoccurring tension in the #MeToo movement that *Our Wave*, as a digital platform, also picks up on.

The site does not merely collectivize seemingly unconnected stories about sexualized violence through archiving them on a shared platform but also through specifically categorizing them. Visitors can “filter” stories based on their content regarding places, sexual orientation, gender identity, the victim’s relation to the perpetrator, whether or not the victim has a disability or is neurodivergent, and the victim’s age. Curiously, these filters are phrased and framed from a first-person perspective. So, for instance, the site presents its place-focused filters with the prompt “I was ...” and the potential options including, for example, “home,” “at someone else’s home,” “at work,” “in school / university.” This phrasing applies to all filters, prompting “my sexual orientation is ...,” “I identify as ...,” and so on. With that, the project presents stories that fit certain somewhat arbitrary criteria to foster specific solidarity with those readers who have not only also experienced sexualized violence but experienced it under the same or similar parameters. *Our Wave*’s structuring here suggests that the specificity of where a victim has experienced sexualized violence is determining for its potential to encourage or empower other victims of sexualized violence.

Or, *Our Wave* presents the presumption that victims of sexualized violence would not only benefit from reading similar stories but would particularly want to seek out stories by authors with whom they share a site of abuse, personal identity markers, and so on.

With this option to filter, *Our Wave* uses the particular possibility of digital archives to collectivize #MeToo stories. Its framing suggests the potential for not only broad solidarity but an affective connection in which the only necessary communication is taking place between the publishing of a story and the witnessing of it. As such, the site also positions which markers of sexualized violence narratives are of particular relevance. Notably, the first suggestion is “I was ... home,” breaking with the notion that ‘home’ is always necessarily a protected space and that rape is not a day-to-day occurrence, not part of the home life. So, the project has a digital specificity to it through which a certain degree of authorship is granted to the site’s visitors. Within the parameters given and the sorting mechanism *Our Wave* determines, the visitor has an opportunity to curate their own filtering through narratives of sexualized violence. Further, in the absence of a comments section and inability to contact the authors privately because the stories are authored and published anonymously, the site features the ability to show a reaction to the story by selecting between “Thank you for sharing,” “Your story made me feel hopeful,” “I can relate to this,” and “You are not alone.” This framing, again, premises the emergence of an affective solidarity in the witnessing/reading of (similar) narratives about sexualized violence. Difficulty in sharing these stories and/or a sense of shame and isolation are implied here.

While the site prompts visitors to “share your story”—indicating, at first glance, that the stories shared are a collection from the site’s visitors and, with that, blurring the lines between reading and authoring—it also includes a feature through which authors can “update story.” With this, the project uses another particularity of its digitality. As this option is visibly featured on the main page, any story read remains not only open-ended but also alterable from any point. This possibility contrasts the notion of linearity in narratives of sexualized violence. Instead, it suggests that the way one may remember or choose to tell their story can change over time as memories and, specifically, memories of trauma are fluid.¹⁵

¹⁵ Amidst a new wave in trauma studies—as a subset of memory studies—and literature (not least along with the rise of scholarly interests in autobiographical narratives), the firmly established consideration in memory studies that memory is “not so much a fixed product but [a] fluid and imaginative process in which memory is remade every time remembering happens” (Arnold-de Simine 140) finds new scholarly ground. Krista Speicher Saraff, for instance, views the MeToo hashtag as both “build[ing] a cultural memory that marks sexual violence as an insidious and ubiquitous pattern” as well as a practice of “individual memory construction” (3). Anthropologist Allan Young is particularly influential to considerations of fluid memory/practices of rewriting memory in its authoring, as he considered PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder; the official recognition of

Similarly, the stories submitted are in part seemingly unfinished and can be messy, contradictory, or not entirely cohesive. This ‘messiness’ is part of the otherwise curated, sorted digital collection. While the project itself presents a particular approach to narratives of sexualized violence—positioning the sharing and reading of it as empowering, aiming to connect readers to authors with similar parameters in their stories—the submitted stories do not necessarily follow a linear notion of empowerment. While some include messages about the aftermath of trauma along the lines of “this too shall pass,” others either leave prospective emotional well-being entirely unaddressed, an open-ended question or render it a non-possibility. One story submitted begins with a “message of healing” (something prompted by the project in the submission process, underlined before the narrative begins in a faint grey box with dark blue font) which simply reads “laughing.” The story, itself, however, does not address this vague notion of “healing.” Instead, the narrative briefly summarizes how the author was sexually harassed by their roommate but could not obtain a restraining order. Rather, they felt humiliated during the court process in which the judge “read the text messages between us containing sexual content out in front of the open courtroom . . .” So, the story ends with, “Why would a judge be so blind and not care about my safety?” (*Our Wave*, “Just last week.”). With this end, there appears to be no answer to the injustices expressed about this situation. At this point, the notion of ‘healing laughter’ briefly addressed between the story’s title and its beginning might appear sneering, rejecting even the notion of ‘healing’ in the face of an experience that leaves humiliation rather than a conclusion about justice or personal empowerment.

Notably, many stories of the *Our Wave* project share a similar sentiment, breaking with a common theme in the #MeToo movement in which a sense of (personal) empowerment concludes a story about humiliation, shame, and lack of agency. A story titled “Last Night” concludes, “I can’t help but think that if I just stayed home none of this would’ve happened. Why does bad stuff keep happening to me?” (*Our Wave*, “Last Night”). Another story titled “11:11” mainly focuses on the author’s struggle to issue a public, non-anonymous accusation of abuse. They conclude, “Everyday it still effects [sic!] me..seening [sic!] his name everywhere on social media. People singing him praises, if only they knew... would they believe me?? Do I risk going through the trauma all over again??” (*Our Wave*, “11:11”). Here, the author of this story did not follow the #MeToo trajectory that is in the process of establishing itself: publicly telling a story about an experience of sexualized

which sparked the emergence of trauma studies as a distinct field of study in the 1980s) not only culturally and historically specific but also in connection with a construct of ‘the self’—a notion itself culturally and historically contingent.

violence in which issues of power discrepancies are explicitly addressed and implicitly omnipresent in the shame described, followed by an ambiguous notion of powerlessness vis-à-vis a public that now also engages with and alters this story while also expressing moments of (collective) empowerment and shame resistance. Instead, they publish their story anonymously and remain anonymous with a continued albeit somewhat unsure expression of an affective powerlessness. A re-traumatization through a public declaration is premised but positioned as a possible anthesis to the continued trauma of not only being confronted with the abuser but also with public appraisal for them. Despite remaining anonymous, the publication nevertheless authors a narrative of sexualized violence that now is placed amidst the broad #MeToo exchange. As the anonymity and concerns about its lack signal the loss of agency the experience of sexualized violence incited, the authoring and sharing of this story on *Our Wave* performs a subtle alternative to mere silence.

“[A]nonymity Allowed Me to Tell That Tragic Story:” Digital Spheres, Anonymity, and Taking Place

This regard—the possibility of anonymity—is also a specific component of the digital places in which #MeToo operates. Laura Peja and Fausto Colombo argue that “[a]nonymity is exactly what #MeToo is seeking to dismantle today, encouraging women to declare their situation, but #MeToo has the internet and social media to protect bodies from exposure” (109). This argument is placed in the context of an analysis of *Lo stupro* (*The Rape*), a (autobiographical) monologue written and performed by Italian actress France Rame. During its first performances, the play was not explicitly performed or promoted as autobiographical. In 1987, Rame performed the monologue on the state television channel *Rai 1*, prompting significant public attention. After this performance and Rame’s increasing fame, it was revealed that the monologue’s core narrative points were autobiographical, referring to Rame’s experience of being kidnapped and raped in 1973. At this point, Rame was already known for her political activism through her activities in Italian theater. Rame stopped performing the monologue upon revelation of its connection to her experience¹⁶,

¹⁶ It should be noted that the case of *Lo stupro* also brings with it the blurriness of the autobiographical genre the monologue became attached to upon publicization of Rame’s experiences of sexualized violence. In its performance, it is not autobiographical. Rather, it was a fictional monologue. On stage, Rame—performing the monologue—embodied a non-specified ‘lyrical I,’ not the author of an autobiographical narrative. Instead, the artistic text and portrayal and the off-stage revelation are different texts. As, for *Lo stupro*, it is only through an extradiegetical revelation that the layer of the autobiographical even opens up, the performance itself is not per se autobiographical. Laura Peja and Fausto Colombo miss this point in their analysis of the play. It is not merely, as Peja and Colombo write, the “fiction of anonymity” that is “maintained . . . on stage,” (109) but rather the text itself is not intradiegetically autobiographical.

stating, “[o]nly anonymity allowed me to tell that tragic story” (qtd. in Peja and Colombo 109).

In Peja and Colombo’s reading of *Lo stupro*, the exposure of the stage—its lack of protection—ultimately put Rame in a particularly vulnerable position. This position, however, was dependent on the public recognition of Rame’s performance as autobiographical in some way. Without it, there is protection behind anonymity. Curiously, in this reading, Peja and Colombo understand the stage as “a non-mediated place” (109). The notion of the absence of digitality, on which Peja and Colombo base their (incidental) conceptualization of the theater stage as a non-mediated place, is both insufficient and short-sighted. Surely, the work of, for example, Henri Lefebvre brings to question the very notion of non-mediated places in general. Lefebvre, of course, argues that space—a notion in which he includes theater, as something made up of “text or pretext, . . . gestures, masks, costumes, a stage, a *mise-en-scène* (62)—is a social construction. The specific properties Lefebvre uses here to conceptualize theater indicate its spatial practices, rendering ‘presence on stage’ as already mediated. More so in this context, the rituality of theater performances—something broadly discussed in theater studies and its relation to places/the stage particularly, for instance by Erika Fischer-Lichte¹⁷ and Richard Schechner¹⁸—solidifies the notion that albeit the theater fosters a particular relationship between actors and spectators, the communication situated within this realm is surely not unmediated.

It is not least Jacques Derrida’s work on the notion of presence that agitates the notion of the present—non-mediated—theater stage that Peja and Colombo casually postulate. As Derrida writes in his discussion of Antonin Artaud’s ‘Theater of Cruelty,’ “Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated” (314). With Derrida’s deconstruction of ‘presence,’ the notion of non-mediality also falls apart. This rejection of the notion of a non-mediated place is not to suggest a lack of specificity in the communication in and through places. On the contrary, it rather recenters not only a medium’s properties of communication—evident in the complex notion of anonymity that *Lo stupro* brings up—but also, to further return to anonymity, the construction of places through the (possible) communications practiced there.

¹⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte contends that ritualistic performances, like artistic ones, “construct realities” (176).

¹⁸ Having coined the advent of performance studies (and its role in cultural studies specifically), Schechner has, for instance, outlined that not only do the rituals of theater plays construct the place of theater but these and its surrounding rituals also delineate the theater as a particular place, contributing to the continuous process of collectively making sense of the specificities of its rituals. As he writes, “[w]hen people ‘go to the theater’ they are acknowledging that theater takes place at special times in special places. Surrounding a show are special observances, practices, and rituals that lead into the performance and away from it” (161).

The #MeToo movement is not simply “seeking to dismantle” anonymity. Rather, the domino reaction of non-anonymous disclosures collectively reframes the shamefulness of having experienced sexualized violence. Within these fluid developments, the affective necessity for anonymity might also fluctuate or sustainably change. However, unlike Peja and Colombo suggest, a lack of anonymity in the #MeToo movement is not merely enabled by a supposed bodily projection efforted by social media and the internet. Such a conceptualization suggests an ill-conceived separation between a real/physical (non-mediated) sphere and a non-real/digital (mediated) sphere. A simple example illustrates the level of (physical) harm non-anonymous disclosures that spread through social media and the internet may have, as well as the arbitrariness of the implied distinction: When, in July 2018, Christine Blasey Ford contacted Congresswoman Anna Eshoo upon seeing Brett Kavanaugh (who Blasey Ford accuses of having sexually assaulted her at a party in 1982) on the shortlist for nominees for the Supreme Court of the United States, she was reportedly scared of her identity inevitability becoming public along with the accusation, fearing an “annihilation” (E. Brown). In her opening statement before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Ford also addresses this fear, stating, “I am here today not because I want to be. I am terrified” (Blasey Ford, “Opening Statement For Senate Hearing”). Before that, Blasey Ford had issued a non-anonymous letter to Senator Dianna Feldstein, who was part of the Senate Judiciary Committee at the time, reporting her accusation and the expectation that the matter (most crucially her identity) remains confidential. With Blasey Ford’s name redacted, the letter was eventually sent to the entire Senate Judiciary Committee and media reporting circulated around the accusation and a supposedly anonymous accuser. *New York Times* reported that Blasey Ford “decided to reveal herself only because journalists began contacting her, and inaccurate stories about her began circulating” (Stolberg). Blasey Ford’s testimony in Kavanaugh’s hearing caught significant media attention, prompting both social media campaigns in support of her as well as campaigns discrediting, disbelieving, or defaming her. As Blasey Ford’s attorney graphically phrased it, Blasey Ford was “injected into a life-altering blood bath” (qtd. in Stolberg). This included death threats, leading Blasey Ford to report moving multiple times—which she describes as having been “displaced”—hiring private security, and not being able to resume her job (Blasey Ford, “Message from Dr. Christine Blasey Ford”; Mak).

While Blasey Ford did not raise her accusation against Kavanaugh nor publicly attach her name to the accusations through digital channels, much of the public response to her claims was carried out online. Then-President Donald Trump tweeted

I have no doubt that, if the attack on Dr. Ford was as bad as she says, charges would have been immediately filed with local Law Enforcement Authorities by either her or her loving parents. I ask that she bring those filings forward so that we can learn date, time, and place! (Bonos)

suggesting that not having reported the alleged sexualized violence at the time unveils Blasey Ford's accusations as undoubtedly false (a sentiment that, as I have briefly mentioned earlier, sparked "#WhyIDidntReport"). It appears unlikely to suggest that Blasey Ford would have been spared the harm she reports suffering from the accusation had she initially voiced them solely through digital media—something Peja and Colombo's conceptualization of social media and the internet (in the context of the #MeToo movement) as protecting "bodies from exposure" suggests. Rather, anonymity would have protected Blasey Ford's physical safety. However, the #MeToo movement has certainly revealed that anonymity in the case of sexualized violence accusations proves to be a fertile ground for disbelief. Indeed, anonymous victims raising accusations of sexualized violence have also been the subject of waves of online hate speech. Chanel Miller, for instance, describes reading comments about the assault she experienced while her identity was not publicly known, narrating,

. . . I, Chanel, was sitting at the office, and the body being publicly taken apart did not belong to me. I suppose this was when Emily Doe was born, me but not me at all, and suddenly I hated her, I did not want this, her nakedness, her pain. It was Emily, all of this was Emily. (*Know My Name* 37)

In Miller's story, her initial anonymity is connected to a loss or split of identity. With the pseudonym 'Emily Doe,' she assumes a publicly known identity that is entirely reduced to her victimhood and subjected to unlimited public evaluations about her credibility, liability, and motifs. In short, the non-person 'Emily Doe' is, as Miller experiences in reading the comments, a surface on which speculations about her character are projected. Constructing this dynamic in her narration, Miller also points to her affective rejection of both the assault and the public consumption of its details.

Later, she further narrates,

The next day, I stood in a coffee shop. I saw a stack of newspapers, a bright blue rectangle on the front page. It was pool water. I saw the pale slivers of Brock's arms, dark goggled eyes, capped head. There were blue rectangles littered on the tables around me, Brock swimming across the café. One man in a polo with a wide neck sat and spread the paper open in his hands. I looked around wondering if these people were the ones commenting, if I should resent them, fear them, question them. (45)

Clearly, there is no distinction between the online vitriol and the now-altered way in which Miller moves through non-digital spheres in this narrative (a distinction that, as I have indicated, would have been bound to be artificial and incomplete anyway). Rather, Miller's narration here underscores that her movement through the world is dictated by the affective experiences incited by both the assault and the process of being objected to a broad public assessment of her believability inside and outside the judicial realm. A separation between

the harmful comments made anonymously online and the strangers Miller sees in physical spaces is, in Miller's narrative, irrelevant. While she questions if "these people were the ones commenting," the restriction to her movement she lays out (and the insecurity with which to navigate her emotions toward them) makes clear that this is entirely rhetorical in that these people might as well be the ones commenting.

Anonymity did not serve as an impermeable shield against (psychological) harm. Rather, it may serve as an enabler for both impulsive or organized hate speech, as the internet allows for a specific anonymity that lowers legal accountability and inhibition thresholds to defamatory, threatening language (Dickel and Evolvi 3). It is partly for this reason that Sarah Banet-Weiser reads the concept she terms "popular feminism" alongside what she refers to as "popular misogyny," as the same means of digital communication that facilitate networking for (seemingly) feminist causes are available for misogynistic pushback (2; 67). This also goes back to the aforementioned economic incentive for social media platforms to foster affective dichotomies, thus being rooted in a specificity of digital communication practices. As Dickel and Evolvi also point out, "Internet connections can create antagonistic and emotional relations and facilitate group polarization, due to algorithmic logic and lack of regulations on several platforms" (3).

It is crucial to regard who makes use of the (presumed) possibility of anonymity. Giti Chandra observes about the #MeToo movement that (online) support seemed to be dominant in non-anonymous or anonymous disclosures of having been sexually assaulted when the perpetrator is not named (99). This changes, however, once an accusation is voiced anonymously against a named perpetrator. For Chandra, ". . . the general public . . . sees anonymity as a sign of unreliability, outside the designated and approved systems of legality and propriety" (101–102). Here, anonymity is presumed to increase a person's possible actions, which include false accusations, as (legal) repercussions are intercepted by the perceived safety net of anonymity. In this light, the risk of voicing a non-anonymous accusation—a risk about being disbelieved, shamed, and, in the case of Blasey-Ford for example, ultimately displaced—functions as an assurance.

There is, however, also a risk of de-placing in anonymity, as indicated by Miller's storytelling. Further, Jessica Oldfield and Dave McDonald, for instance, assess the media coverage of a case of sexualized violence in Australia to argue that anonymity de-places the victim from the narrative, a process only disrupted by the victim's public declaration. In their article, Oldfield and McDonald focus on a 2013 incident that received another wave of media attention in the wake of the #MeToo movement in Australia in 2018. At the time, a legal

process that included two trials and two successful appeals came to an end after the New South Wales Court of Appeals decided against a third trial. The alleged victim, Saxon Mullins, who had previously remained anonymous, publicly spoke out in response to the unresolved legal process in the television program *Four Corners*. Reviewing the initial reporting about the incident—in which Mullins was allegedly raped by Luke Lazarus upon meeting at a nightclub and being led into a dark alley close to Kings Cross in Sydney—Oldfield and McDonald conclude that due to Mullins’ anonymity,

the bulk of the media coverage of the case was . . . dominated by Lazarus. Prior to her coming forward, Mullins is little more than an anonymous figure who visited Kings Cross on her first night out in Sydney—she is an absent victim, in the sense that she lacks realisation as a person. (232)

This follows a similar sentiment present in Chanel Miller’s narrative, in which she describes observing the media coverage as constructing a dichotomy between Turner as a successful swimmer while she was merely the victim:

I scrolled to the end of an article and saw, *the woman is recovering at a hospital. Turner, a freshman, was a three-time All-American high school swimmer and state record-holder in two freestyle events* . . . I saw hospital run seamlessly into record-holder. The final line: *If convicted Turner, who raced in the London 2012 U.S. Olympic trials, could face up to 10 years in prison. If my name came out, what would they even say? Chanel, who works a nine-to-five entry-level job, has never been to London.* (*Know My Name* 36)

Not unlike Miller’s memoir titled *Know My Name*, Mullins’ televised public declaration aired under the title *I Am That Girl*. Oldfield and McDonald assess this appearance as both a media-driven construction of a hero narrative, in which “. . . the source of her symbolic annihilation is also the source of her apparent self-discovery,” (235) but also “a reclaiming of Mullins’ identity, a ‘coming out’ in defiance of the manner she had thus far been sidelined in media coverage of her own assault” (233). Crucially, they acknowledge that the “media’s transformation of Mullins from victim to hero” (235) as well as her being granted the public platform to perform a reclaimed identity depend on “her status as a white middle-class cisgendered woman allowed for her to be portrayed as an innocent virgin, rather than a blameworthy ‘vamp’ from the outset” (234). In *I Am That Girl*, Mullins is granted a public platform in which she is believed, greatly celebrated for ‘her bravery,’ and seemingly given control over the narrative, reversing previous media coverage in which she was absent from the narrative as a subject. In Mullins’ case, the practice of lifting her anonymity, framed and performed as agentic in the light of a lack of judicial justice, indicates that the media “[has] the power to achieve justice for victims of sexual violence that the law has thus far been incapable of providing” (234).

In this reading, it is not the anonymous declaration of having experienced sexualized violence that permits a performance of empowerment. Instead, the transcendence of

anonymity, something that hinges on a certain cultural capital within the politics of believability, enables a narrative of empowerment. This sentiment is also present in the dominant mediatization of the #MeToo movement. For instance, Evgeniya Chernyshova, who was previously anonymized as Jane Doe #1 in the criminal case *The People of the State of California v. Harvey Weinstein*, described her anonymity as “a life with no identity. Being a Jane Doe is hell” (Wagmeister). Upon Weinstein being found guilty and sentenced to an additional 16 years in February 2023 (to be served separately from the 23 years he was sentenced to in New York in March 2020), Chernyshova publicly disclosed her identity, an act then framed as the conclusion to her empowerment and Weinstein’s downfall.

This points to a dynamic also raised by Oldfield and McDonald: The tendency to individualize systemic problems is facilitated with (voyeuristic) media reporting focusing on individual hero/justice narratives. With the cultural impact achieved through public disclosure, a story is constructed that results in a sense of catharsis for the, in actuality, unresolved issue of (gendered) sexualized violence. In this light, the anonymity influential to the #MeToo movement is crucial to the framing of sexualized violence as precisely not an individual story but a social problem. This anonymity is both a prerequisite for many individuals to participate due to concerns for their safety or psychological well-being and an ancillary effect of the movement’s digital virality.

Giti Chandra also presents an alternative reading to anonymity in the context of the perceived lack of self associated with anonymity. She argues that those declaring their experiences of sexualized violence anonymously enact a specific practice of agency in which they,

gave permission to hang one and only one descriptor on the peg of their names: that of the person to whom violence had been done. Their names functioned as nothing more. Naming themselves was not an invitation to the general public to inquire into their characters or the specifics of the plot/incident, and, such is the power and inherent understanding of public discourse that, in response to the hashtag, no such inquiries were made. Importantly, for our purposes, to be thus faceless or anonymous when foregrounding your Self as only victim/recipient of violence, is not to erase your Selfhood. Rather, it is to separate that part of your Self from the rest, so that the two are not elided. (102)

Instead of reading (the necessity of) anonymity as a demonstration of the lack of agency incited and utilized by the violence inflicted, Chandra positions anonymity as a choice that renders only the victimhood declared and, with that, details or judgments of the experience outside the realm of (public) discussion. Here, Chandra also counters conceptualizations that suggest victimhood as “a state without agency, a passive condition in which the victim becomes object-like, less of a person, through the loss of the ability to act in her own defense, survival, or cause” (103). Instead, utilizing anonymity and participating in a collective effort

becomes a practice of one's "own defense, survival, or cause," despite claiming victimhood. So, Chandra concludes anonymity to be a productive force in feminist efforts against the shaming of having been a victim of sexualized violence. As she pointedly writes, "[i]ndeed, if Cathy Caruth's dictum—'Silence marks the site of trauma'—is accurate, then anonymity is one of the few safe ways of breaking that silence" (104).

However, anonymity does signal a tension between the claiming of experience and an inability to publicly, fully claim it. In the case of sexualized violence specifically, the shield of anonymity is emblematic of the power of shame. Further, the silence broken through anonymity and in digital spheres alone does not dissolve the site of trauma as Caruth's dictum would suggest. Instead, #MeToo as a narrative practice in digital spheres may construct, through being witnessed in particular ways, alternative places in which crucial concepts about victimhood and sexualized violence are negotiated, including anonymity and the lack of agency; the threat of shame and de-placing; and shared experience, solidarity, and moments of affective empowerment.

The digital sphere, for the #MeToo movement, is a crucial arena in which, with the specific communication practices enabled through digitality, autobiographical narratives of sexualized violence engage with a contestation about narrative power. So, the dynamics of these contestations are not unique to digital spheres. Rather, the communication tools utilized correspond to the site of these contestations. In the tension that emerges—between performances of empowerment in expressions of a lack of agency or between performances of solidarity and the (threat of) being publicly shamed—digital places of protest are constructed. These hinge on both the writing practices of the #MeToo movement as well as the witnessing of these stories. Katrinka Somdahl-Sands and Paul Adams suggest that "[t]he rich dynamics of technologically mediated place . . . form networks of connections across space and time bound by persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisibility" (351). However, it is not merely or even principally the location-independent aspect of digital places (such as the ones emerging through the narrative practices of the #MeToo movement) that allows for them to "form networks of connections" but rather the engagement taking place. For the #MeToo movement specifically, stories about sexualized violence are reframed because they are written and read in connection with one another. It is this process of collectivization that enables the construction of digital places engaged in the contestation for narrative control, aiming to offer counternarratives about sexualized violence.

As I position the construction and (symbolic) utilization of places in the #MeToo movement as principal to its negotiation of tension around powerlessness and

disempowerment as well as agency and a lack thereof, it is essential to consider that these narratives move in and out of digital spheres. The varied placement of these narratives, then, also entails different potentials for its witnessing and its specific practices of resistance. With this in mind, the subsequent subchapters regard the role of the (narrated) courtroom and the site of abuse—which will also prove to be connected as the courtroom is, in many #MeToo narratives, another site of abuse—in #MeToo's resistance, specifically regarding their collectivity (for which its movement in digital spheres is decisive). For this, the symbolism of these places as well as their seemingly agency construction in the process of authoring and witnessing, generating a tension between the intradiegetic narrative of disempowerment and the extradiegetic performance of a reclaimed sovereignty, is essential.

4.2. The Courtroom

The #MeToo movement has produced a particular, (seemingly) powerful iconography of victims being granted justice and (re-)claiming control or even dominance in court. Most notable for the highly mediatized images and imaginaries of this kind of (arguably short-sighted) catharsis are, of course, the cases of Harvey Weinstein and Larry Nassar. Yet, the movement has also fostered a discourse on the shortcomings of the legal system in serving victims of sexualized violence specifically. Overall, the court—as a symbol for not only the judiciary but the broad, hardly definable, affective notion of justice—is prominent in many, if not all, #MeToo narratives, through either its presence, its absence, or its inaccessibility. The courtroom, as a place, clearly holds important potential for the struggle over narrative control that autobiographical narratives about sexualized violence ultimately perform. It is the place that promises a fair, public negotiation of believability and thus holds (and depends on) the power to validate or dismiss a (potential) victim's account. With these already tense dynamics, it is perhaps unsurprisingly that the #MeToo movement, along with previous (feminist) anti-rape movements, has, as I contend, quite a complex relationship to the legal system, notions of justice, and the courtroom. While having witnessed a perpetrator get sentenced may be framed as a 'victory' or a cathartic demonstration of justice, victims of sexualized violence cannot rely and have not relied on the legal system to incite conversations about empowerment (R. Corrigan). Additionally, the well-studied histories of classed, gendered, and raced politics of 'believability' for potential victims and potential perpetrators in court cases (Gabbidon and Greene) contribute to manifold notions around the meaning (and possibility) of 'justice.' Yet, anti-rape movements have always also brought

forth possible legal changes to better protect (potential) victims or deter and punish (potential) perpetrators (R. Corrigan 21). This is also true for the #MeToo movement.

Discussions about the morality and legality of non-disclosure agreements and their function in sexual harassment/abuse structures were most prominent through the reporting on Weinstein's abuse and other similar high-profile cases (Mendonca-Richards; Tippet). Since the #MeToo movement, a few states have changed the legality of non-disclosure agreements in cases involving sexual assault, harassment, or sex discrimination. Further, TIMES UP, a non-profit organization founded in response to the #MeToo movement mostly by Hollywood celebrities, celebrates New York's extending of the statute of limitations for rape victims on their website.

More than specific legal grievances, however, #MeToo narratives have placed the affective experience of victims in the courtroom and throughout the legal process at the center of narratives in which it came to a report or trial. While it certainly depends on many factors whether or not rape or sexual abuse is reported or, eventually, trialed, the same power dynamics that make public disclosures of being a victim of sexualized violence more accessible to some than others are also at play in the legal realm. "Survivors . . . who are able to access discourses other than feminism to validate their stories and legitimise their speaking authority, are more likely to be heard and granted the cultural authority to speak about their experiences of rape" (Serisier, *Speaking Out* 42). Since a court may, legally, determine a story's believability and validity, those with (more) access to this space, clearly, have more potential power in the struggle to (re-)gain narrative control.

Indeed, there is no separating the public realm from the legal. Quite the contrary: simply the ubiquity of phrasings in court that aim to ritually establish it as a 'representation' of 'the public,' underscores that it is another sphere in which cultural power dynamics are at play and foundational for the arrangements of that sphere, which includes its spatial arrangements. In the context of courtrooms, Kim Dovey argues that ". . . authority becomes stabilized and legitimated through both spatial rituals and the architectural framing of them" (125). Dovey also contends that although authority is a form of power that renders resistance almost impossible, it nevertheless, "needs both the trappings of legitimating imagery and the coercive threat of force—the 'right' of authority is underwritten by the 'might' of force" (125). There is a circular legitimization here: while spatial rituals stabilize the authority of the court, their function in the court also renders these specific spatial rituals emblematic of authority.

Overall, the court's dynamics are a performance of an idealized notion of a (just) public, perhaps most evident in the titling of criminal cases as "The People v. The Defendant." The courtroom is not merely a public stage of the stories that construct the judiciary (or justice). Rather, the courtroom, firstly, is a result of the judiciary's authority to speak (and judge) on behalf of 'the people,' a process that constructs (the illusion) of a notion of a public to begin with. Secondly, the courtroom upholds this legitimacy; a collective belief in it is foundational to its ability to retain meaning and power

The notion of the court as an unshakeable power is certainly present in the #MeToo narratives that focus on affective experiences of victims in court. In many cases, these are narratives about a profoundly humiliating, disempowering, devastating process. Yet, the practice of narrating these stories hints at possible tensions in this power dynamic, leaving a retrospective influence—claims to agency—an open question. I argue that the courtroom in #MeToo narratives (symbolically) functions as a particularly public arena in which the struggle for agency that victims of sexualized violence face is negotiated. Further, I argue that the collective, literary processing of this tension (re)constructs 'the courtroom,' rendering it a site of struggle and, with that, resistance to not merely the threat of sexualized violence but the continuous lack and loss of agency uncovered by sexualized violence.

For that, I focus on two core ways in which the courtroom is a fundamental (and overlooked)¹⁹ part of #MeToo's narrative practices: 1) victim impact statements; 2) the courtroom as a literary setting. I am also interested in the way in which these lines are blurred as the transcripts of orally delivered victim impact statements might then be witnessed, shared, claimed, and discussed beyond the courtroom or included in the victim's autobiographical narrative. Both the courtroom as the stage of performance for certain narratives—victim impact statements, framed by the specific authority-stabilizing rituals that the victim has no control over—as well as the courtroom as a place constructed in the writings of the #MeToo movement reveal it to be a site of trauma²⁰ as well as a complex site

¹⁹ While much of #MeToo research has recognized the centrality of legal discourses in the movement, the setting of the courtroom (as a relevant place of struggle for both the victims and the movement as a whole) has been unexplored so far. #MeToo research that focuses on judiciary centers the relationship between the judicial proceedings and victims while disregarding place in this process.

²⁰ Many writings of the #MeToo movement, as this chapter shall explore, outline both the moment(s) of sexual violation and, particularly, the heteronomous processing of it as traumatic. "Traumatic," here, refers to a state of emotional devastation that signals notions of immovability, permanence, and profound disempowerment; "a phenomenon marked by an experienced that literally *overwhelms* the reaction between place, time, and embodiment" (Trigg 88). As the incident(s) in which a victim was sexually violated are (aimed to be) narratively reconstructed during a trial, the courtroom becomes a second site of trauma. This site emerges through the experience of disembodiment. In the absence of the sexualized violence that incites the affective experiences that construct the site of abuse, the site of trauma is a continuation of this disembodiment. Should the narrative processes of a trial signal another moment of (violent) desubjectification, then this continuation

of struggle for the authors' agency. Here, the courtroom is constructed through negotiations of disempowerment and performances of agency for victims of sexualized violence.

The Victim Impact Statement

While the #MeToo movement has sparked an interest in victim impact statements, most of them remain largely unread, unwitnessed, and simply unrecognized even in discussions about legal cases. As a testimonial piece, a victim impact statement follows its own genre-specific conventions. It “straddles an interesting divide between a *crie de cœur* and a formal witness statement. Its oral performance, therefore, becomes an important facet of its delivery, as it forms part of the ‘theatre’ of law. . . . [M]ost VIS are submitted in writing for the court to read in silence . . .” (Giles 78). When read only in silence (or read once in court only to be later drowned out by the plethora of documents a typical court case generates), victim impact statements appear to be a disguised extension of victims' disempowered silence in court. Since its advent, which has always been entangled with legal discourse, the #MeToo movement has presented and made a profit out of counterexamples to the lack of recognition of this specific genre, most notably, of course, Chanel Miller's.

Fiona Giles reads Chanel Miller's victim impact statement alongside Sidonie Smith's “The Autobiographical Manifesto” (S. Smith), ultimately situating it under the umbrella of autobiographical writing. She demonstrates the ‘autobiography’ in Miller's statement through a close reading, outlining, for instance, how Miller's texts “contest[s] sovereignty” and “speak[s] as one of a group” (Giles 86). Indeed, the victim impact statement presents an autobiographical practice. This practice, however, is surely not an entirely agentic performance as it is, at the points of writing and witnessing, already heteronomously emplaced.

A task force appointed by President Ronald Reagan in 1982 assessed that the US justice system “has lost the balance that has been the cornerstone of its wisdom” and, to strengthen victims' rights, should establish “the victim, in every criminal prosecution [to] have the right to be present and be heard at all critical stages of judicial proceedings” (qtd. in Cassell 613–14). With continued victim rights advocacy, victim impact statements became an established practice in trials. While the constitutionality of victim impact statements was established by the US Supreme Court in 1991, the controversy their

resurfaces in the courtroom. However, as this processes hinges on the narratives that take place, it remains dynamic.

introduction in the US in the 1980s brought along has only partially subsided among criminologists and legal experts. Vicky De Mesmaecker notes that these statements are largely accepted but that concerns about “unfounded and excessive victim demands” (134) through the presence of victim impact statements in trials have remained. While some critics of victim impact statements have feared their influence on the authority of the judicial system (Culbert), Erin Sheley argues that victim narratives solidify this authority specifically because they convey the devastation of victimhood. This devastation is, following Sheley, something the courts depend on in order to secure their legitimacy as the penal authority (1285). Consequently, victim impact statements actually strengthen the legitimacy of the judiciary:

[W]e cannot only consider ‘the victim,’ ‘the defendant,’ and ‘the state’ as three separate entities vying for narrative control over accounts of harm in determining punishment. Rather, the stories of the victims and defendants already circulate through society outside of the courtroom, and the function of ‘the state’ in the trial context is to vindicate the interests of this society. (1249)

Albeit in passing, Sheley writes about the courtroom as a place where stories are brought to. Here, she underscores the publicness of the courtroom as a place that negotiates stories culturally established as ‘of public concern.’ In fact, ‘society’ is as much part of a trial in Sheley’s assessment as it is part of the inextricable trinity ‘victim/defendant/state.’ Because the context of the trial brings the stories of the victim and the defendant together, argues Sheley, there is no competition over ‘narrative control’ in the ritualized setting that is the courtroom. This seems hardly convincing, however, as the rituals of a trial specifically aim to establish a ground on which narrative control is sought by the parties involved. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the cross-examination process. Next to the cross-examination process, victim impact statements also reveal themselves as grounds on which the control over a narrative is struggled for and, in many cases, aimed to be reclaimed. Sheley rightly points out that the stories that circulate inside a courtroom also “circulate through society outside of the courtroom.” However, she provides no argument as to why the courtroom would take a “vying for narrative control” out of circulation. Yet, Sheley points to the courtroom as a point of exploration of where stories are placed and where stories take place.

Aside from Sheley’s focus on victim impact statements as a mechanism to strengthen the legitimization of the unique authority the judiciary depends on, further argumentations for the *raison d’être* of victim impact statements are best laid out in Paul Cassell’s *In Defense of Victim Impact Statements*: 1) the described harm that the victim experienced aides the judge in establishing a suitable sentence; 2) victim impact statements may be cathartic for

the victim; 3) they may further the perpetrator's awareness of the impact of their crime, increasing the possibility of successful rehabilitation; 4) they can generate the notion of a 'fair' sentence in which the victim's experience was considered. These arguments remain theoretical in Cassell's statement, lacking an exploration of whether or not the assumed influence, catharsis, awareness, and fairness actually materialize.

Victim impact statements are either orally delivered in court or submitted in writing to the judge by a victim of a crime (or, in cases that have resulted in death, the family of the victim) before the sentencing but after the defendant has either pleaded guilty or was found guilty. Established to increase victim participation, the possibility of delivering a statement prior to the perpetrator's sentencing suggests an influence on the degree of penalty. This influence is, of course, abstract as the judge is not beholden to invoke the statement in sentencing. At this point, there is no reliable inquiry into the degree of supposed influence of a victim impact statement on the outcomes of a trial. Consequently, I argue to regard victim impact statement as part of the processes of the judiciary that promise agency while, at the same time, establishing its superiority as the supposed representative of 'the public.'

Notably, victim impact statements are not part of the public records of a trial in their entirety as they may be filed under seal or have the victim's name redacted. Yet, these statements have played a significant role in the #MeToo movement. Indeed, the influence of the publication of Chanel Miller's victim impact statement on the #MeToo movement can hardly be overstated. When Miller published her victim impact statement, disappointed by the lenient sentence, she states, "I want the judge to know that he ignited a tiny fire" (K. J. M. Baker). Tanya Seriser believes that the metaphorical fire ignited through the publication and recognition of Miller's statement was, indeed, "far from 'tiny'" (*Speaking Out* 71). Among receiving broad public and vice-presidential attention, the publication of Miller's statement is also considered to have incited a legal change: a new mandatory minimum sentence for penetrative sexual assault cases in California. Perhaps most notably, the now-viral victim impact statement started an ultimately successful campaign to recall the trial judge, Aaron Persky, in the 2018 California primary elections.

Miller's statement alters in function, meaning, and influence through its different placings. While the statement that is delivered to influence sentencing through its illustration of the severe pain, shame, and lasting trauma caused by the crime appears entirely irrelevant when solely regarded within the confinement of the courtroom, it became influential when witnessed in public, a piece of writing recognized as "eloquent, powerful and compelling" (Rosen qtd. in Bever) and "a literary artifact" (Giles 88). Serisier writes, "[b]eyond the

context of the trial, the same words became a ‘powerful letter’ when released in the genre of public rather than legal speech” (*Speaking Out* 78). However, this is not entirely accurate. It is not that Miller’s statement only gained its power because it was read “beyond the *context* of the trial.” On the contrary, the context of the trial is crucial to her statement. Rather, it was the publicness of the statement that re-constructed it. And this publicness was not granted by its performance in the courtroom alone. While surely an example of “the failure of women’s speech to register in the domain of law” (78), the context and place of the trial are not removed from the statement once it was published and circulated in other domains.

Rather, Miller’s statement is as much a testimony of the trauma of sexual assault as it is about the trauma of the legal process she endured. Exemplary of Serisier’s core argument that “speaking out narratives are generally less about the experience of rape itself than they are about the aftermath” (71), Miller spends a great deal of the statement detailing the ways in which the legal proceedings are not only (re-)traumatizing in that they trigger memories of trauma but also through constructing its own moments of re-establishing a lack of agency, control, and dignity akin to the loss of these through the assault.

Miller writes,

I was not only told that I was assaulted, I was told that because I couldn’t remember, I technically could not prove it was unwanted. And that distorted me, damaged me, almost broke me. . . . I was warned, because he now knows you don’t remember, he is going to get to write the script. He can say whatever he wants and no one can contest it. I had no power, I had no voice, I was defenseless. . . . That helplessness was traumatizing. Instead of taking time to heal, I was taking time to recall the night in excruciating detail, in order to prepare for the attorney’s questions that would be invasive, aggressive, and designed to steer me off course, to contradict myself, my sister, phrased in ways to manipulate my answers. . . . The sexual assault had been so clear, but instead, here I was at the trial, answering questions like:

How old are you? How much do you weigh? What did you eat that day? Well what did you have for dinner? Who made dinner? Did you drink with dinner? . . . Are you serious with your boyfriend? Are you sexually active with him? When did you start dating? Would you ever cheat? Do you have a history of cheating? What do you mean when you said you wanted to reward him? Do you remember what time you woke up? Were you wearing your cardigan? What color was your cardigan? Do you remember any more from that night? No? Okay, well, we’ll let Brock fill it in.

After a physical assault, I was assaulted with questions designed to attack me . . .
(K. J. M. Baker)

At this point in her statement, Miller has already addressed the events of the sexual assault in detail, also speaking to Turner directly. In this excerpt, however, Miller addresses no clear perpetrator. Her lack of agency comes through precisely through the passive voice with which she describes her experience. The messaging with which she was confronted—that she is not credible because she does not remember the assault—needs no speaker because it, in Miller’s narrative, is ubiquitous.

In the court experience that Miller’s narrative constructs, the victim is not taking place. Being rendered voiceless in the battle for narrative control, Miller remains unsituated

throughout. Intradiagetically, Miller appears entirely powerless, indicative of her position vis-à-vis her perpetrator and the court. Miller is not only not involved in the struggle for narrative control, she is, as she narrates, entirely unable to participate in this struggle. So, the courtroom, as a place constructed by this particular struggle, remains, at this point, inaccessible to her as a subject. This inaccessibility is established because Miller, at this point in her story, performs a lack of narrative access to not only the experience of having been sexually violated but also the heteronomous recollection of this experience. So, Miller narrates a story in which she, beyond her function as a victim, is not placed, constructing a tension between her as a subject (the author of her story) and her as rendered an object by Turner and the proceedings of the court.

While her affective experience of trauma, lack of control, and humiliation is clear and central, she holds no power in it. Instead, the narrative makes evident a sense of force exercised on the author, framing every active statement as rather highlighting it as devastating (“I was taking time to recall the night in excruciating detail”) or almost ridiculous (“I was at the trial, answering questions like: . . . *What did you eat that day?*”). Here, Miller “evokes long-standing feminist and survivor critiques of the trial as a second violation” (Serisier, *Speaking Out* 73). More so, the narrative quite clearly conveys that the sexual assault perpetrated by Turner may be read as a forceful taking of the now-victim’s agency, the judicial process has revealed that whoever is rendered a victim has had no agency in the first place because, in this part of the narrative, any possibility or significance of notions of justice are fundamentally questioned. Instead of framing the legal process as a (perhaps uncomfortable) process toward this (perhaps unclear) idea of justice, Miller establishes that the process is, in fact, just a struggle over the power of narrative. Her case is particularly exemplary of that, as the evidence was unusually clear and plentiful. “In most rape trials, including this one, it is not the ‘facts’ that are in dispute, but the ‘narrative glue’ that combines factual elements into a story of either ‘rape’ or ‘consensual sex’” (Serisier, *Speaking Out* 75). Or, as Miller writes, “It is the saddest type of confusion to be told I was assaulted and nearly raped, blatantly out in the open, but we don’t know if it counts as assault yet” (K. J. M. Baker).

Considering this struggle over narrative power, the courtroom is the site of this struggle. In this light, Miller’s reading of her victim impact statement in which she blatantly calls out this struggle, critiques, and, in moments, even mocks the other side’s strategies, might read as a powerful participation or a practice of power she demands despite being seemingly immovable in the role of ‘the victim.’ Fiona Giles reads Miller’s (at the time

anonymized as ‘Emily Doe’) victim impact statement as not only a struggle for agency but a reclaiming and reconstruction of it. Already with her opening sentence addressing Turner directly, “You don’t know me, but you’ve been inside me, and that’s why we’re here today,” does Miller reclaim her agency, argues Giles (82). Pointing out that the legal process does not “seek to understand her as a subject,” (82), Giles reads Miller’s assertion that there is a ‘me’ to know; an insistence on “her agency, her perspective, and her sovereignty as an individual” (82).

Through this first sentence,

Doe and Turner . . . become two actors alone on a stage—their recent histories, the scene of their encounter, and the subsequent effects on both their lives unfolding in an almost Pinteresque study of uneasily intertwined characters. By constructing this pairing, and assuming the authority to place them together—expressed through her phrase, ‘that’s why we’re here today’—the lead actors are deliberately returned to the scene of the crime. Here is an imaginative space in which may occur a replaying of events, a revisiting of their dynamic alone together, and a recovery of the agency Doe lost that night. (81)

What Giles does not address is that in this reading of the imaginative space authored by Miller, she is only known as Emily Doe to the general public, an anonymizing device and play on a widely used placeholder, mostly for victims. This anonymity points to one of the obstacles in the way of the ‘recovery of agency’ Giles sees here: a threat of safety and ostracization. In her memoir, Miller writes about ‘Emily Doe’ as a separate identity, one she could not have chosen but was given through the assault (*Know My Name* vii; 36). While this anonymization was supposed to grant her safety, the necessity of which is indicative of the general threat of violence victims of sexualized violence face after the assault, there is no possibility to construct this agentially, as it is the assault that constructs ‘Emily Doe’ in the first place.

Miller describes finding an article online through which she finds out details about the sexual assault in her memoir. Upon reading a comment, Miller writes,

I decided right then it was not true, no one of this was real, because I, Chanel, was sitting at the office, and the body being publicly taken apart did not belong to me. I suppose this was when Emily Doe was born, me but not me at all, and suddenly I hated her, I did not want this, her nakedness, her pain. It was Emily, all of this was Emily. (36)

Clearly establishing Emily Doe as separate from herself, Miller authors a passage in which the loss of agency through the assault by Turner is evident. Indicating the emotional devastation of the public negotiation about the events, Miller’s narration displaces herself from the event as much as possible. She is not a subject in both the assault and the articles published about it afterward. With that, the non-person Emily Doe takes place, while Miller does not. I write about a ‘non-person’ here rather than a placeholder term because as ‘Emily Doe’ deviates from the widely used ‘Jane Doe,’ it is somewhat specific. In the publicly available court documents, Miller is referred to as ‘Jane Doe.’ Yet, with the publishing of

her victim impact statement as ‘Emily Doe,’ there is enough specificity to this non-identity to establish clear meaning. Even before Miller’s identity—as in, her name—was known to the public, the name Emily Doe, although a mechanism to keep her anonymous, was (solely) associated with her, eventually becoming somewhat of a pseudonym.

This pseudonym is emblematic of the difference in identity permitted to Miller and Turner throughout public negotiations of the events. While Turner is, in most reports, referred to as a (talented) Stanford swimmer, Miller (Emily Doe) is, following the reporting, a young woman who went to a party, got heavily intoxicated, and was victimized. As Turner was also established as a (somewhat public) person outside of his perpetration, Emily Doe was merely a victim or, following some comments or Turner’s defense strategy, merely a (promiscuous) college girl who drank too much (Payton).

Instead of a “recovery of the agency Doe lost that night,” the opening statement in Miller’s victim impact statement rather simply narrates the loss of that agency. It is also against the backdrop of her previous anonymity in which Miller’s proclamation “Know My Name” as the title of her memoir stands. She positions this practice of lifting her anonymity in public as a reclaiming of agency. I shall return to this in a discussion of Miller’s memoir in more detail.

What Giles also does not address is that even in Miller’s sentence to Turner, it is not her, the author of this particular statement, that takes the authority to ‘place them together’ but Turner’s exercise of violence that, without Miller’s consent, even constructed the two individuals as connected in any way. Quite contrary to Giles’ assessment: Miller does not take the authority to ‘place them together’ but, rather, narrates throughout the entire statement how devastating and degrading it has been to be forcefully placed together first during the assault—“You don’t know me, but you’ve been inside me”—and in the courtroom “here today.”

Where the narrative does construct a performance of power is in Miller directly addressing Turner. In the space granted to her by the judicial process to speak somewhat freely and the place constructed through the trial, Miller can, at least in the moment of reading her statement, rely on the level of (physical) safety needed to address Turner directly, performing a notion of bravery and personal empowerment that she also appeals to in her statement. In fact, Serisier argues that Miller evokes the “quest narrative . . . where a victim transforms herself into a hero throughout her speech” (*Speaking Out* 70). The setting of this transformation is the courtroom as it grants the frame for the narrative performance as well

as a notion of safety and promise to have or gain a sense of power by influencing the sentencing.

Yet, if the narrative stops when the sentence is promulgated, it becomes merely another example of false promises of agency for women and victims of sexualized violence. Shortly after Miller delivered her statement, Turner was sentenced and “[t]he response to her statement only confirmed to Doe that she did not fully exist as a speaking subject within the trial” (77). Miller later wrote in an essay, “I yelled half of my statement. So when it was quickly announced that he’d be receiving six months, I was struck silent. Immediately I felt embarrassed for trying, for being led to believe I had any influence” (“Stanford Sexual Assault Case Survivor Emily Doe Speaks Out”; qtd. in Serisier, *Speaking Out* 77). Surely, reading the sentence as a response to the statement unveils not only the victim’s lack of agency throughout but is also another moment of shame in the process of sexualized violence.

Judge Aaron Persky’s reasoning of the sentence certainly positions it as a response to Miller’s victim impact statement. Persky picks up on a particular passage in Miller’s statement that, he argued, “is relevant to the—to the sentencing decision” (Levin) and quotes Miller stating, “The damage is done. No one can undo it. And now we both have a choice. We can let this destroy us. I can remain angry and hurt, and you can be in denial. Or we can face it head on: I accept the pain; you accept the punishment; and we move on” (K. J. M. Baker). It might be considered quite grotesque to quote the victim, stating this declaration influenced sentencing, thus perpetuating the promise that victim impact statements are media through which the victim may have at least a small amount of power over the degree of punishment, and then choose a passage in which not the victim’s emotional distress or her hopes for the sentencing are addressed but, instead, a passage in which she expresses a desire to not have her life defined by being victimized. More specifically, Miller goes on to state that Turner’s life will not be defined by his perpetration and, crucially, that “. . . what he did to me doesn’t expire, doesn’t just go away after a set number of years. It stays with me, it’s part of my identity, it has forever changed the way I carry myself, the way I live the rest of my life” (K. J. M. Baker). Persky’s evoking of Miller’s statement as part of the justification for choosing probation over prison time (something Miller specifically has stated she hopes will not be the case in her victim impact statement) reframes the medium of the victim impact statement as something to potentially be ‘used against’ the victim. Unsurprising then is Miller’s subsequent expression of embarrassment.

The Victim Impact Statement in Public

The mobility of Miller's narrative, however, alters this shame. The statement finding support and, arguably, exercising influence after its publication, for which digital media distribution was utilized to truly make it a public document, constructs new meaning. It is only this practice that allows Stephanie Larson to argue that through her victim impact statement, Miller "aks[s] not for accommodation of public space but rather for a transformation of the public sphere" (139). More specifically, the collective witnessing of Miller's statement is an extension of her testimony; one in which she was granted the space to speak more freely than in the leading and misleading questions she faced during cross-examination. It is this witnessing that seemingly demanded more than accommodation.

However, the medium of the victim impact statement when it remains confined to the courtroom not only merely asks for accommodation/a moment of inclusion, but, in the context of victims of sexualized violence, is celebrated for being a stage in which grievances about the previous occurrences may be voiced, moments of personal empowerment may be expressed, and hopeful notions about the future may be imagined. As Gibson argues, "[t]he [victim impact statement] genre not only makes space for marginalized perspectives but may also authorize the expression of emotions that have been marked as out of bounds by the norms of courtroom communication" (522).

Yet, Miller is only able to write this specific narrative because the US legal system has rather recently allowed victims in this position to deliver a certain performance. Miller's 'power' is entirely shaped by the courtroom setting, negating the possibility for it to be a practice of agency. When, in a later essay, she writes that she was "struck silent" after having "yelled half of my statement" ("Stanford Sexual Assault Case Survivor Emily Doe Speaks Out") before, the notion that her impact statement was merely a moment of deceptively being allowed to talk without actually being listened to emerges. As the sentencing silenced her once again, the power dynamics that had persisted all along resurfaced again. This, however, was significantly changed—at least on an affective dimension—when the narrative was replaced. Fundamentally, this illustrates the powerful effect of particular witnessing practices.

The witnessing practices enabled by the publication transform the meaning of the courtroom both in and for the narrative. Miller writes in her statement, "And then it came time for him to testify and I learned what it meant to be revictimized" (K. J. M. Baker). So, the setting that, as she writes, revictimized her ultimately becomes the place through which Miller constructs a (fragile) site of resistance. Clearly, without the possibility to resist the

state's authority that frames and might fully disregard her statement, Miller's autobiographical narrative practice nevertheless constructs a specific place in which, principally, affective resistance was possible. Although the narrative was a seemingly deflagrate part of the trial's documents, the courtroom remained a crucial part of it, framing the possibility of it igniting the small or big fire that many claim it had ignited.

Crucially, the narrative was published with the understanding that it had previously been performed in court. The article that published the statement prefaces it with the context that "At his sentencing Thursday, his victim read him a letter describing the 'severe impact' the assault had on her" (K. J. M. Baker). Consequently, a reading of it stands in the context of a collective imagination in which Miller bravely and eloquently confronts her abusers: Turner and the court (in court). Because Miller narrates that she remained disengaged from the struggle for narrative control in the courtroom, this implicit image in the story becomes particularly potent. With that, the tension that produces the courtroom in the first place is evident in Miller's narrative. It is a tension between an authority constantly in need of upholding and discursive masking of this process and the individual sovereignty threatened under this authority. A reading of the courtroom as both the setting of her narrative as well as the stage of its performance makes this clear.

The last passage of Miller's statement also underscores the importance of the place:

And finally, to girls everywhere, I am with you. On nights when you feel alone, I am with you. When people doubt you or dismiss you, I am with you. I fought everyday for you. So never stop fighting, I believe you. As the author Anne Lamott once wrote, 'Lighthouses don't go running all over an island looking for boats to save; they just stand there shining.' Although I can't save every boat, I hope that by speaking today, you absorbed a small amount of light, a small knowing that you can't be silenced, a small satisfaction that justice was served, a small assurance that we are getting somewhere, and a big, big knowing that you are important, unquestionably, you are untouchable, you are beautiful, you are to be valued, respected, undeniably, every minute of every day, you are powerful and nobody can take that away from you. To girls everywhere, I am with you. Thank you. (K. J. M. Baker)

What has morphed into a manifesto—for instance, when it was read out by members of Congress (Aguilera)—was, initially, a statement to be read in front of quite a limited amount of people in a courtroom. Yet, upon publication, an imaginative image of this reading emerges, in which Miller constructs a public stage, making herself be heard and expressing empathy with others, thus evoking an unspecific collective. This also marks the completion of Miller's narrative "reclamation of a heroic subjectivity" (Serisier, *Speaking Out* 73). Further, it establishes that Miller constructed her narrative to be a public one even before choosing to publish it on *Buzzfeed News*. By ending her statement with a notion of a resilient, heroic subjectivity, Miller performs the claim to agency that a victim impact statement

promises; and the possibility of which her previous narration has (almost) denied. Precisely her place in the courtroom enables this construction to begin with.

Additionally, it also points to a (longstanding feminist) ambiguity regarding the judiciary. While many sexualized violence narratives in which the courtroom plays a role by its presence, as opposed to its implicit role by being absent or unreachable, have countered prevailing myths about rape in cultural and legal discourses, “[s]peaking out, like much feminist politics around rape, . . . can simultaneously dispute the authority of law to determine the truth of rape and seek to reform the law so that it will make more just use of its authority when it comes to rape” (71). When it comes to the legal system, reform appears to be the proposed solution to the expressed grievances. This is no different in the Stanford case. The response to outrage about lenience in sentencing was a bill to impose a minimum sentence and the recalling of the judge. Evidently, the authority of the law is not challenged but remains the institution through which a rewriting of survivor narratives may occur, stabilizing the hegemonic cultural and legal notions of justice.

At the end of her statement, Miller notes, “I hope that by speaking today, you absorbed a small amount of light, a small knowing that you can’t be silenced, a small satisfaction that justice was served, a small assurance that we are getting somewhere” (K. J. M. Baker). The ‘justice served,’ at this point, was that Turner was found guilty on the three felony charges presented to the jury. Despite the extensive discourse on the failings of the legal system as exemplified by *People v. Turner*, the legal system’s authority remains untouched and evoked in the establishment of Turner as the ‘verified’ perpetrator. “For many survivors, and those who wish to support them, the criminal justice system remains the primary forum for officially validating women’s narratives through prosecution and conviction and for taking them seriously through punishment and criminal sanctions” (Serisier, *Speaking Out* 79). Surely, this perspective is not uncontested, especially in the light of the low percentage of cases that are reported, the influence of rape myths on the legal process (Dinos et al.), and “the tightly constrained discursive space available in a courtroom [that] is not a conducive arena for the work of transforming our language” (L. M. Alcoff 14).

Miller’s expressed hope to be a symbol for other victims of sexualized violence that “you can’t be silenced” stands in contrast to the extensively outlined ways in which she was, in fact, silenced by the trial proceedings that rendered the case a dispute over the narrative in which the defendant’s legal team made her lack of memory play a central role. Yet, the notion of a presence of her voice in court becomes a crucial element in a mediatized narrative

of empowerment, enabled by the collective imagination of a victim's resistance vis-à-vis the institutions that symbolize power and a complex history of a lack of victim advocacy.

It is the tension evident here that fundamentally constructs the courtroom as it exists in Miller's victim impact statement. While it is the institution crafting the structure of the text in the first place, Miller's authorship in public generates an image of empowerment in which the courtroom is both discursively constructed as a site of struggle and the setting in and through which meaningful survivor speech is seemingly possible. This speech, however, was only possible through the practice of collective witnessing outside of the courtroom. The imaginary of a victim (of sexualized violence) as a (speaking, sovereign) subject in court, detailing how she was not a speaking, sovereign subject in court, outlines the 'speaking out' practice to be place-specific. The law, here, is consequently not "*simply another* avenue for speaking out" (Serisier, *Speaking Out* 70; emphasis added) but a specific one, constructed by the tension between reclaiming and loss of agency.

Emplaced Performances of Empowerment

Although the publication of Miller's victim impact statement preceded the #MeToo movement by approximately one year, the narrative's continued presence as well as Miller's subsequent publication of her memoir in 2019 have made the statement a remaining focal point of the movement. When in her memoir, Miller writes about witnessing the victims in the Larry Nassar case speak publicly (*Know My Name* 306), she constructs a collectivity not only based on shared affective experiences. She narrates her witnessing of other victims in the courtroom as a cathartic event through which the courtroom, as a symbol and place, is transformed. "Watching the gymnasts speak was the first time I permitted myself to see the inside of a courtroom on-screen. For the last few years, I have avoided courtroom scenes on TV, shows, movies, even cartoons involving legal proceedings" (293). In this moment, the courtroom is a site of trauma, contrasting the moments in her narrative in which it is a site of resistance. This, in Miller's narrative, however, changes because

Then came Judge Aquilina. . . . She invited restoration and compassion into a space I had associated only with torture. *Leave the guilt here. It doesn't deserve any more of your family's time. . . . Quit shaming and blaming the parents*, she said. . . . *Leave your pain here and go out and do your magnificent things*. I didn't know instructions like this were possible. In court, the judge is the captain of the ship. My captain sunk us. (293)

If the publication of Miller's victim impact statement "ignited a tiny fire," the televised statements by Nassar's victims that Miller addresses here surely did the same. Indeed, the court proceedings in the case *People v. Lawrence Nassar* saw a new wave of highly

mediatized public victim impact statements, constructing a notable notion of a courtroom becoming a site of collective speak-outs.

Because Nassar had pled guilty, the victim impact statements were not preceded by a battle over narrative power. Further, public disapproval of Nassar was already dominant after images of child abuse were found in his possession. Many of Nassar's victims were underaged (at the time the abuse started), further solidifying public support. It is also worth noting that many reports about Nassar's abuse mention the victim's athletic achievements, particularly if there were international achievements "representing the United States" to be reported on. Although Nassar's abuse had persisted for decades, in which complaints were either not heard, not believed, not filed, or not prosecuted, once the case reached the trial that received public attention, the battle over narrative power was settled. Surely, the context in which victims delivered their impact statement was notably different from Miller's case not only because, in Nassar's case, there were numerous victims. Additionally, at the time the victim impact statements that Miller addresses were read out in court, Nassar had already been sentenced, in federal court, to 60 years.

It was part of Nassar's plea agreement for the case *People v. Nassar* that those impacted could speak out in court. Although the agreement reads that, "[i]ncluded shall be the 125 victims who have reported their assaults to Michigan State University Police Department and the other-acts victims who have been identified on the People's witness list," over the course of the sentencing hearing, around 200 victim impact statements were given. Katie Gibson argues that "the survivors in Lansing, Michigan, collectivized their victim impact statements to advance a rhetorical rupture at the sentencing hearing of Nassar" (521). Surely, the fact that the trial was heavily mediatized, that the statements were televised and later also distributed through social media, and that as the trial went on more and more victims asked to speak in court contributed to the construction of this collectivity and the magnitude of the performances of solidarity the readings of the victim impact statements constitute.

Because many of the statements are not only available as transcripts but were recorded (and televised), their claim to the courtroom is particularly notable. As Nassar is now in an entirely disempowered position, the collectivity of victims reading their impact statements, facing him, generated an iconography heavily mediatized as symbols of empowerment and, principally, justice for victims of sexualized violence. With no debate about the facts of the abuse and an already signed plea agreement that set the minimum sentence at 25 to 40 years, the collective performances of the impact statements are, in addition to a space in which the

trauma of the abuse is seemingly impactfully narrated, a demonstration of the now-gained empowerment of the victims vis-à-vis their abuser. The collective witnessing that occurred in the packed courtroom, through live broadcasting, and social media enabled this construction. Given the prevalent context in which victims of sexualized violence describe their experience in court as (re-)traumatizing and the uncovering of the lack of agency that the abuse already signaled, this performance, a construction of a different place than the courtroom in Miller's story, is a particular counterpublic.

The construction of a courtroom in which empowerment can be placed necessitates the resisting—the countering—of the hegemonic courtroom as it is constructed in discourses around sexualized violence (from the (female) victims' perspective). Because victim empowerment is impossible in dominant notions of the courtroom, the emplacement of empowerment in a courtroom setting, as constructed in the narrativizations of Nassar's trial, renders this particular courtroom a counterpublic. In this place, the victims practice narrative control and utilize the publicness granted through the mediatization of the trial to structure their performances of empowerment. In this collective practice of resistance, publicness is crucial because it signals the performative replacing of shame, only possible through pointed, public rejection. Crucially, the collective resistance that constructs this particular counterpublic does not entirely reconsider the courtroom but rather depends on the preservation of the legitimacy and authority it is culturally granted even in the now-altered place of the courtroom as a site of shame resistance and victim empowerment.

An exemplary reading of some of the statements further illustrates the performative construction of this particular counterpublic, considering their contents as well as their iconography. Although not on the list of speakers at the beginning of the sentencing hearing, on January 19, 2018, Aly Raisman gave a statement. As with the first 'wave' of the #MeToo movement, the involvement of already well-known figures increased media attention. The same is true for Nassar's case, as Raisman's presence further reinforced attentiveness. Raisman's presence in court followed after several high-profile gymnasts had also joined the accusations against Nassar and, through social media, expressed support for those present during the hearing.

While the recording published by ESPN shows Raisman clearly, her side profile in a medium close-up, the image that is displayed behind her, presumably with a beamer, is hardly recognizable and overexposed. *The New York Times* reporting on Raisman's statement, however, reveals the image. In the article, Raisman's side profile and the microphone in which she speaks are only visible as a silhouette but, behind her, the

projection of an image of her in a US flag-themed leotard in the middle of a performance on the balance beam is clear. On the right side of the image, at the edge of the beam, the white imprint “London 2012” is visible, placing the image at the 2012 Summer Olympics. Underneath the image, her name is projected in all caps.

Using the iconography of a particular notion of strength, the image signals an important theme in the Nassar trial: the construction of the notion that the victims he abused are (physically) strong, portraying a unique sense of control over their bodies in performances frequently noted for displaying strength, bravery, and elegance. It was curiously particularly mediatized that Nassar also abused Olympic athletes at the Olympic Games. This indicates the publicness in this abuse—as an almost global spotlight is set on the Olympics—and underscores either Nassar’s deviousness and/or the personal and institutional failing of those who enabled him. Notably, Nassar was not charged with any crimes related to the Olympic Games. Specifically, he agreed to the plea agreement that dismissed charges of “interstate or foreign travel with intent to engage in illicit sexual activity” (*U.S. Department of Justice*). Yet, evident not only in the sentencing hearing, the legal specifics are not particularly relevant to the cultural meaning of the trial or, presumably, to the victims. Regardless of legal specifics, his status as ‘guilty’ is comprehensive, indicating that the legal sphere hardly, if at all, has the ability to encompass the entirety of cultural relevance or affective experiences.

Further, the implications of Nassar’s abuse for the responsible organizations—Michigan State University (where Nassar was employed), USA Gymnastics, and the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC)²¹—were widely discussed and went on to be the subject of further legal proceedings. In December 2021, USA Gymnastics and the USOPC reached a \$380 million settlement with a collective of victims of Nassar who had pursued legal action for the organizations’ failings in dealing with early accusations against Nassar. This followed after a \$500 million settlement had been reached with Michigan State University and the representatives of 332 victims in 2018.

The role of these institutions in the abuse is also present in many of the victim impact statements, for instance, in Raisman’s statement:

Your abuse started 30 years ago, but that’s just the first reported incident we know of. If over these many years, just one adult listened and had the courage and character to act, this tragedy could have been avoided. I and so many others would have never, ever met you. . . . Over those 30 years when survivors came forward, adult after adult, many in positions of authority, protected you, telling each survivor it was O.K., that you weren’t abusing them. In fact, many adults had you convince the survivors that they were being

²¹ Until June 2019, the organization was called the United States Olympic Committee (USOC)

dramatic or had been mistaken. This is like being violated all over again. (*The New York Times*)

Here, Raisman focuses on the failing of those who should have witnessed the abuse or to whom it was reported. In her narrative, these people are also perpetrators as they (indirectly) aided Nassar's abuse. About the USOC, Raisman states,

Larry was the Olympic doctor and he molested me at the 2012 London Olympic Games. They say now they applaud those who have spoken out, but it's easy to say that now. When the brave women started speaking out back then, more than a year after the U.S.O.C. says they knew about Nassar, they were dismissed. . . . I have represented the United States of America in two Olympics and have done so successfully. And both USA Gymnastics and the United States Olympic Committee have been very quick to capitalize on and celebrate my success. But did they reach out when I came forward? No. (*The New York Times*)

Drawing a wider picture of the abuse, Raisman establishes herself as both a successful athlete—crucially having “represented the United States of America in two Olympics”—as well as a “little girl” and “innocent child.” Implicitly, this is responding to a cultural context in which victims of sexualized violence face demands to justify their role in the abuse. This is exemplified in Miller's case, in which she was insistently questioned and critiqued or not believed both within and outside of the legal sphere because she went to a party hosted by a fraternity and was heavily intoxicated. The process of justification that follows these scripts—that women may protect themselves from (sexualized) violence through (avoiding) certain behaviors—is therefore implicitly still present in Raisman's statement as she, aided by the picture of her displayed in the courtroom during her speaking time, simultaneously establishes her status and powerlessness.

Countering the powerlessness vis-à-vis Nassar's abuse and various institutions' dismissal of (early) allegations, Raisman also positions herself as a now-powerful survivor, having regained agency through solidarity:

Larry, you do realize now that we, this group of women you so heartlessly abused over such a long period of time, are now a force and you are nothing. The tables have turned, Larry. We are here, we have our voices, and we are not going anywhere. And now, Larry, it's your turn to listen to me. (*The New York Times*)

As Raisman unapologetically displays rage and directly faces her abuser, who is legally obligated to be present, in an orange jumpsuit, she constructs a performance of empowerment. This performance, however, is only constructed through the particular publicness in which it is exhibited. Raisman describes a collectivity of victims now in control of the narrative. This movement is depicted in opposition to the immobility during the abuse:

Imagine how it feels to be an innocent teenager in a foreign country, hearing a knock on the door, and it's you. I don't want you to be there, but I don't have a choice. Treatments with you were mandatory. You took advantage of that. You even told on us if we didn't want to be treated by you, knowing full well the troubles that would cause for us.

Lying on my stomach with you on my bed, insisting that your inappropriate touch would help to heal my pain. The reality is you caused me a great deal of physical, mental

and emotional pain. You never healed me. You took advantage of our passions and our dreams.

You made me uncomfortable, and I thought you were weird, but I felt guilty because you were a doctor, so I assumed I was the problem for thinking badly of you. I wouldn't allow myself to believe that the problem was you.

From the time we are little, we are taught to trust doctors. You are so sick, I can't even comprehend how angry I feel when I think of you. You lied to me and manipulated me to think that when you treated me, you were closing your eyes because you had been working hard, when you were really touching me, an innocent child, to pleasure yourself. Imagine feeling like you have no power and no voice. (*The New York Times*)

Most crucially, Raisman narrates Nassar's abuse as an abuse of power both because he was in a position of authority simply due to being their doctor and, further, because he was their doctor in a particular and isolated environment, in which a culture of clear hierarchies and intimidation was well-established, as documented within and outside of the Nassar case context (Daniels; Stirling et al.). Thus, the mandatory treatments were, as Raisman describes, unavoidable. Raisman also narrates immobility on another layer in which Nassar ensured the victims' inability to escape his abuse while taking advantage of his status as a doctor: shame. "I felt guilty because you were a doctor, so I assumed I was the problem for thinking badly of you." The layers of Nassar's abuse of power are evident in the simple image: "Lying on my stomach with you on my bed, insisting that your inappropriate touch would help to heal my pain." The literal immobility (an unavoidable, encased space), the vulnerability (the promise of medical treatment and pain), and the difference in power in the interpersonal relationship that allowed Nassar to disguise his abuse as treatment, inciting an implicit shame, are narrated here.

With the now public movement, Raisman establishes, "... I have both power and voice, and I am only beginning to just use them. All these brave women have power, and we will use our voices to make sure you get what you deserve, a life of suffering spent replaying the words delivered by this powerful army of survivors" (*The New York Times*). Utilizing the courtroom as the stage that it is, Raisman makes remarks akin to rallying cries that put forth both her personal sense of empowerment as well as a collective one. Having been granted power by the judiciary, Raisman places the regained agency she constructs in her statement in the public and legal sphere. Evident in the several legal actions that ran parallel and followed the Nassar case, this use of 'power' and 'voices' remains dependent on the public and legal sphere, dependent on a collective witnessing and legal notion of justice.

Already during the reading of her statement, the witnessing that occurs in and through the courtroom setting is crucial. Set in the courtroom, evoking the authority it symbolizes, the victim impact statements in Nassar's sentencing hearing were public spectacles. Raisman's victim impact statement, for instance, was witnessed by those in the courtroom, those watching the broadcasting, and those consuming the mediatization of it. This

witnessing precedes the victim's consent to be identified publicly. As this practice interrupts a crucial mechanism of (Nassar's) abuse—the utilizing of shaming dynamics to silence the victims—it epitomizes a catharsis. The statement evokes the image that the abuse that started and persisted in isolation and silence was now, with the presence of victims in court, not only stopped but penalized in a collective publicness that ensures legal punishment as well as social ostracizing.

For instance, Rachael Denhollander starts her victim impact statement by thanking the Judge “for giving all of us the chance to reclaim our voices. Our voices were taken from us for so long, and I’m grateful beyond what I can express that you have given us the chance to restore them” (Ducharme). Evoking a metaphor that had already been “virtually universal throughout the early movement” (L. M. Alcoff 179), Denhollander also positions her presence in the courtroom as an active one, framing the reading of her statement as a construction and demonstration of agency. This contrasts Miller’s victim impact statement profoundly. Within the confines of the courtroom, Miller’s statement remains a demonstration of her lack of agency as a victim of sexualized violence. It is only in the witnessing of the statement outside of the courtroom but with the courtroom as a setting, allowing a collective imaginary in which Miller stands empowered vis-à-vis her abuser, that the text is connotated with a practice of agency.

Notably, Denhollander was the last person to deliver her victim impact statement. Thus, her statement stands in context with the previous easily collectivized statements whose similarities are as striking as they are unsurprising given the parallelism of the abuse. In the mediatization of it, it also stands in context with the Judge’s immediate response, stating,

You found your voice and you found a world of support. He will lose his voice and his freedom, his ability to move. . . . I think you all, in the me too movement, need to put lines above that. I have a name, I have a voice, I matter. And why? Because all of you have come forward as sister survivors. But why more than that? Because you started the tidal wave. You made all of this happen. You made all of these voices matter. Your sister survivors and I thank you. You are the bravest person I have ever had in my courtroom. (Ducharme)

Surely breaking the realms of established rituals and rhetoric of legal proceedings, the support voiced by the Judge here solidifies Denhollander’s statement as a public performance of reclaimed agency, drastically shifting the power dynamics that enabled the abuse. Crucially, Judge Aquilina addresses the now apparent shift in mobility: as “you found your voice . . . [h]e will lose his . . . ability to move.” Similarly, the image of the ‘tidal wave’ started by Denhollander evokes the notion that collective, forceful movement enabled the end to Nassar’s abuse as well as its punishment.

Yet, this summary of Denhollander's statement as a performance of agency stands in contrast to her narration during this performance. Following the pattern of statements that preceded hers, Denhollander narrates profound immobility, trauma, and shame not only because of the abuse but also in the effort to speak out about it. While Denhollander briefly describes the abuse perpetrated by Nassar, she focuses most of her statement heavily criticizing MSU and USAG for their mishandling of early accusations against him. A description of the emotional difficulties in speaking out follows. As she states, "I was being attacked for wanting fame and attention, for making up a story to try to get money. . . . The cost, emotional and physical, to see this through has been greater than many would ever know" (Ducharme).

Emphasizing a rhetoric of powerlessness, Denhollander repeatedly asks, "How much is a little girl worth?" throughout her statement, a rhetorical question aiming to support her plea for the maximum sentence. As she states at the very end, evoking the question she poses early on in her statement, "I plead with you to impose the maximum sentence under the plea agreement because everything is what these survivors are worth" (Ducharme). Here, Denhollander implies that the judiciary determines the extent to which the victims' harm is believed and, with that, fundamentally reflects on the recognition of their identity. In this performance, there is a tension between the profound dependency this constructs—a validation of the authority of the court—and her participation in this decision by being able to plead for it in court. Yet, the determination of the victims' 'worth,' in the way Denhollander establishes it, remains wholly in the hands of the legal system. Of course, her influence on this decision remains theoretical. Nevertheless, the Judge's response particularly strengthens the notion of this influence, establishing Denhollander's performance as one of agency. The mediatization of these moments now stands against the backdrop of the *de facto* life sentence Nassar received. It is only in light of that, that a reading of Denhollander's victim impact statement as a claim to agency is possible. As the sentencing hearing provides the place to discuss the measure of punishment under the premise of justice in the legal realm, the granting of Denhollander's request frames her statement as agentic, influential, and powerful regardless of legal specifics or the judicial process in determining the sentencing.

Denhollander's text is composed of a tension between profound powerlessness and new, collective empowerment. The text underscores her plea for the maximum sentence by outlining the profound debilitating effects of Nassar's abuse, stating ". . . I walked through Larry's door in 2000 and never walked out the same" (Ducharme). Throughout,

Denhollander connects the abuse she experienced to other (potential) victims. She writes, for instance,

[a]nd as I and so many other women and little girls were being violated, Larry found sexual satisfaction in our suffering. As we were being sexually violated even as very young children, as young as 6 years old, Larry was sexually aroused by our humiliation and our pain. (Ducharme)

Later, she narrates about becoming a gymnastics coach and “wondered if any of them would find their way into his exam room” (Ducharme). She continues,

When one of my little girls was finally referred to him, I took a chance and I spoke up and I was kindly cautioned for my own sake to remain silent. My little baby gymnast was sent to Larry before I even knew a decision had been made to do so. . . . And I cried in my kitchen, and I don’t know yet if that little girl walked out the same that she walked in. (Ducharme)

Throughout, Denhollander draws on various other cases to underscore the extensive range of Nassar’s abuse, illustrating the routinized manner in which he abused her but also collectivizing her affective experience. In this part of her story, Denhollander is scarred by the abuse, aware of its continuation but utterly powerless to stop it.

Yet, embedded in the powerlessness Denhollander narrates, she also establishes herself as now superior to Nassar. Early on in her statement, Denhollander addresses that, “. . . Larry is unlikely to live past his federal sentence. . .” (Ducharme). Against this backdrop, she later expresses feeling pity for him.

Larry, you have shut yourself off from every truly beautiful and good thing in this world that could have and should have brought you joy and fulfillment, and I pity you for it. You could have had everything you pretended to be. . . . I have lived the deep satisfaction of wrapping my small children up in my arms and making them feel safe and secure because I was safe, and this is a rich joy beyond what I can express, and you have cut yourself off from it, because you were not safe. And I pity you for that. (Ducharme)

Here, Denhollander breaks with the narration of devastation that, in theory, might influence the sentencing. Instead—against the backdrop of a presumably *de facto* life sentence Nassar already has to serve as well as him having pled guilty—Denhollander turns to an extensive outline not precisely of joy but of joyous experiences she specifically excludes Nassar from. Emphasized here is not her continued, joyous life but pity for Nassar that ultimately constructs a notion of empowerment. Denhollander expresses a sense of personal victory through these lines.

Akin to Denhollander’s proclamations, expressions of resilience and persistence are present in many victim impact statements given in Nassar’s sentencing hearing. Gymnast Chelsea Zervas for instance states, “[w]hile us survivors are carrying on with our lives and succeeding, you will be rotting behind bars where you belong. . . . I have grown as a person and have become stronger. I am a survivor. Here I am today facing my abuser. I am finally being heard. I am no longer hiding my story” (*Nassar Victim: Chelsea Zervas Statement*).

Ultimately, the tension between powerlessness and empowerment is revolved in the victim impact statements read in court vis-à-vis Nassar, who, in the mediatization of these proceedings, comes to symbolize a fallen sexual perpetrator. Although many victims address the institutional inadequacies that enabled Nassar's abuse, his conviction remains the catalyst for the victims' performances of agency. The courtroom is crucial here for these performances not only because of the particular public witnessing the setting enables but also because of its initial role in the legal and, with that, public legitimization of the victims' experiences.

The collectivity of victim impacts statements in the Nassar case may read as a uniquely cathartic example of a particular feminist anti-rape practice, namely the conviction that "[b]y claiming a space of centrality and dominance, demanding to be heard, and speaking out against perpetrators, survivor rhetoric dramatically defies traditional expectations regarding who can speak to whom, when, and about what topics" (Palmer-Mehta qtd. in Gibson 523). In this regard, Katie Gibson particularly stresses the "pervasive expression of anger by the survivors" (524) as a disruption to procedural norms in the courtroom. Surely, Nassar's sentencing hearing was particularly unusual given the public attention it gathered in the context of the newly viral #MeToo movement. It was the construction of this particular publicness that enabled the collective expression of anger and, more principally, the highly mediatized performances of agency. The narrative practices constructed in these cases position the courtroom as a central setting for a rhetoric of empowerment. It becomes a place in which an imaginary of victims 'face'—stand against—their abuser without threat to their (physical) safety. Embedded in narratives that outline their lack of self/agency, this image is utilized as a symbol of empowerment in the #MeToo narratives addressed here.

Victim Impact Statement: An Autobiographical Narrative

Another prominent victim impact statement that belongs to the initial #MeToo wave stands in notable contrast to this. On March 11, 2020, Jessica Mann delivered her victim impact statement against Harvey Weinstein. She had been a key witness in the trial that resulted in Weinstein's conviction on February 24, 2020. Of the five criminal charges presented, Weinstein was convicted of two: one count of criminal sexual assault in the first degree and one count of rape in the third degree, the latter case of which was the subject of Mann's testimony. On March 11, 2020, Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison. Earlier that day, Mann delivered her statement. While the trial was not recorded for the general public, Mann's statement was later published. The statement followed after Mann was already cross-

examined during the trial, in which her expressions of profound emotional distress were widely reported.

So, Mann starts by stating, “[t]he day my uncontrollable screams were heard from the witness room was the day my full voice came back into my power” (Maddaus). Mann demands her place in the moment in which she can somewhat freely express herself, contrasting her experience during cross-examination. She outlines, “I swore to come here and tell the whole truth, only to be limited by yes and no questions, and premises framed by the defense that were grossly misrepresented” (Maddaus). With this, Mann frames the performance of her victim impact statement as an empowering moment of her claiming a place in the hearing, something denied to her through the legal proceedings of a rape trial. Yet, this occurs within the frame the court permits and also within the broader purpose that her impact statement is supposed to serve. Nevertheless, the statement as it is mediatized is not merely part of legal documents but, through its online publication, becomes an autobiographical narrative. Available to a broad public outside of the courtroom, the statement is framed as a documentation of the moment in which a victim tells her story, considerably distinguished from other (seemingly impenetrable) legal documents.

Placing the public continuation of a narrative, claimed as one’s own, at the center of autobiographical practice, the medium of the victim impact statement can be used in the context of this practice. Autobiographical narratives perform a construction of a subject, something that already introduces a challenge when reading victim impact statements as autobiographical narratives as these statements start from a place of desubjectification. Yet, it is particularly the response to this starting place that frames the specific autobiographicalness of victim impact statements. Engaged in the struggle for narrative power, these statements are constituted by the always ambiguous establishment of the author as a subject. Further, perhaps more so than other autobiographical narratives, victim impact statements hinge on the witness’ believing in the truthfulness of the events and seemingly intimate emotions laid bare. Being presented in front of an imperious institution that then publicly and impactfully judges this believability and, at least that is the promise, the value of the victim’s expressed suffering with the metric of the perpetrator’s (carceral) punishment. The #MeToo movement utilizes the specific genre of the victim impact statement by turning it into an autobiographical practice in which there is a productive tension between the subject constructed and the process of desubjectification narrated. This is demonstrated by the mobility of Miller’s victim impact statements, by the heavily mediatized performances of empowerment through victim impact statements in the Larry Nassar case, and by the

publication of Jessica Mann's statement, which was initially delivered during a trial from which the public was excluded.

This tension between constructing a subject and the narration of desubjectification is potent in Mann's performance. Most of Mann's narrative drastically contrasts her introductory claim to the place she makes through her assessment that with the practice of (freely) speaking in court, she regains her power and agency. Instead, Mann narrates a profound loss and continued lack of agency through the rape she suffered. Mann states, "I ask you to consider the horrors of being rendered immobile by my own biological response, while I had to endure his penis, raping me on his time, as slow as he wanted while he pleased himself inside my body" (Maddaus). Outlining what she refers to as 'victim behavior,' and drawing on the authority of "real science and the studies of trauma," Mann explains her response to the rape as "collapsed immobility" (Maddaus).

The lack of agency here is constructed on several layers. Firstly, Mann establishes her immobility in and through the rape, a state in which she does not act as a subject. Secondly, Mann establishes this immobility as an involuntary trauma response. It is not merely her behavior, rather it is 'victim behavior.' Mann emphasizes her lack of agency when she establishes her trauma response not as a strategic survival mechanism but as a bodily reaction that is both outside of her control and also contributes to her continued trauma, "I wish I had been able to fight him while he raped me. I could have walked away with a sense of control over my body instead of a deeper shame" (Maddaus). Thirdly, Mann's framing of this response—"rape induced paralysis"—points to the dynamics in which she was discredited, shamed, and simply not believed to be telling the truth because she responded to being raped in a particular way. This process of justification renders Mann's free, agentic expression in court an impossibility, as she is already faced with the narratives that have shaped the cross-examination and are culturally dominant enough to shape public opinion in the absence of sufficient justification.

So, to provide that justification, Mann does not narrate her affective experience or response. Instead, she establishes how that response was not hers but orchestrated by the trauma inflicted on her. She states, "The majority of the public has not understood that these responses were not something we consciously choose under the duress. In fact, voices like myself repeatedly stress the confusion this response caused, for not having a bodily response that fought back" (Maddaus). Through most of her statement, Mann establishes not only her lack of agency but also a lack of possibility to being embodied (in place). She is, "rendered immobile by my own biological response . . ." (Maddaus). Similar to the victim impact

statements previously mentioned, Mann also addresses how this is not merely established by sexualized violence but perpetuated by the legal, institutional, and/or cultural responses to it. As she narrates, “[f]reedom from Harvey became a truly hopeless endeavor as I watched Ambra Battaliana be smeared, shamed and attacked before the world” (Maddaus). Here, a notion of the silencing effects of shaming is constructed. As Mann establishes it, “the world” made an example out of Battaliana, discouraging any other woman from publicly (and legally) accusing (someone like) Weinstein of sexual assault.

Mann’s speech here makes clear that she, in this situation, remains the object of the court. The court, here, is a symbol of publicness. As the statement is entirely shaped by the legal narrative established by the defense, discrediting Mann’s accusation because she did not physically fight Weinstein and was in a personal relationship with him after the first incident of sexualized violence, Mann’s further assessment of being rendered immobile—viewing “[f]reedom from Harvey [as] a truly hopeless endeavor”—extends this legal narrative into a (consistently looming) public narrative against which she defends herself. She does so, for instance, when she reads out, “I want to remind you I told Harvey No. Forgive me for assuming that in private, after being threatened to not embarrass him, I thought I would be able to force my No and assert my right to autonomy” (Maddaus). Key here is the perhaps ironic plea to “forgive me” that engages with the notion that such a belief was preposterous in the first place. Mann establishes that she had no power vis-à-vis Harvey Weinstein not only because of the violence he inflicted on her but also because of his “position of power, authority, wealth and fame in society” (Maddaus). In Mann’s narrative, Weinstein is the acting subject, utilizing “invisible weapons known as abuse of power” (Maddaus).

While Mann positions her presence and voice in the room as an act of empowerment at the beginning of her statement, the role she finds herself in within her narrative contradicts the individual sovereignty she strives for. Although her statement includes moments of performative empowerment, the narrative makes evident that Mann could not engage in the struggle for narrative power during the trial. In the justifications that her statement is layered with, Mann makes this powerlessness conspicuous. The function of the courtroom as a symbol for ‘the public’ becomes clear as Mann struggles not only for the judiciary’s recognition but for her believability in front of a hegemonic public; something that alters the narrative of her assault and, as she implies, enables a sense of empowerment. This dependency, however, ultimately unveils Mann’s placelessness (in the courtroom) because she is, in the performance of her statement, unable to engage in a struggle for narrative

power. Presuming that a ‘taking place’ as a subject is contingent on some sort of narrative power, the unveiling of a lack of such also unveils placelessness.

Although positioned as empowering, the narratives shared remain demonstrations of the victim’s powerlessness against their abuser and, now, their dependency on the Judge (a symbol of a hegemonic public determining a victim’s believability). Similar to Denhollander, Mann also evokes the notion of the sentencing as a determination of her worth.

I ask, that you can contemplate that rape is not just one moment of penetration, it is forever. Whether that rape exposes a victim to a lifelong disease, a pregnancy, injury, mental disorders—the impact will last a lifetime. It baffles me that men can go to jail for a minimum of 5 years up to 20 for drug charges, yet in my case of rape, the maximum sentence is 4 years. How have we so disvalued a human being’s right to autonomy and the right to live in their own body free from violence? How am I not worth more than cocaine? The answer is, I am worth more. 3rd degree and 1st degree rape, having experienced both at the hands of Harvey Weinstein have forever equally altered my life. (Maddaus)

Here, Mann returns to the victim impact statement’s primary purpose: illustrating the harm suffered by the victim in order to, theoretically, influence the extent of their sentence. Mann specifically asks, “to be given the gift of knowing exactly where Harvey is at all times so that I can truly live, and I ask that the public be given that gift as well” (Maddaus). At this point in Mann’s narrative, her plea emphasizes that the frame of the story as set by the courtroom inhibits a construction of agency, as Mann continuously returns to the harm inflicted on her (the harm that has rendered her immobile and displaced in her own body), justifying, even demanding, the lifelong imprisonment of her abuser.

Yet, Mann returns to the notion of performative empowerment at the end of her statement. “Today I have no shame. . . . I have found my voice and together we can have a future vision where monsters no longer hide in our closets” (Maddaus). Narratively, this resolves the tension between the powerlessness Mann establishes and her presence in court, reading the statement. Both in the moment of her performance and the reading of her statement after the sentence was determined and Weinstein had already been ostracized culturally, losing the positions that left him in the position of power frequently referenced in the stories of his abuse, Mann’s assessment that “[f]reedom from Harvey became a truly hopeless endeavor” evokes that tension. Mann’s narrative starts with a claim to agency, having regained it through a scream and through voicing a story of voicelessness and placelessness. In the end, Mann finds a narrative conclusion, returning to a performance of agency, although she emphasizes that the voicelessness and placelessness are continuous, for instance by stating, “that rape is not just one moment of penetration, it is forever”

(Maddaus). It is this tension, a struggle for sovereignty, that constructs the victim impact statements that become autobiographical narratives in and through the #MeToo movement.

Victim Impact Statements Replaced

As I have indicated earlier, the courtroom not only frames these statements but is also the setting in which they are delivered, influencing the public witnessing of the statements even when they are published and consumed afterward. While the impact statements in Nassar's case were televised, securing the courtroom as the stage for these performances in the (viral) clips that circle the digital #MeToo spheres, the courtroom is also a focal point in the narratives delivered there outside of the public eye. Upon the publication of Miller and Mann's victim impact statements, for instance, the image of their presence vis-à-vis their abuser frames the witnessing of their statements outside of the legal realm. In the context of the #MeToo movement, in which narratives of a replacing of shame and a renegotiation of power dominate, these collective imaginaries construct and sustain the struggle for sovereignty that victims of sexualized violence publicly engage in. In this struggle, the legal sphere and, tangibly, the courtroom, remain central points in which this replacing and renegotiation are performed. Nevertheless, these practices sustain the authority of the court, as the court determines the validity of victim narratives. As the legal process is a struggle over narrative control, the victim impact statement, in a #MeToo context, is a medium in which victims of sexualized violence engage in this struggle.

The principal practice of disruption is, however, not the victim's agentic presence in court—a possibility that remains highly questionable—but the potential of the narrative in a construction of a different public, in which victim impact statements are reproduced as autobiographical narratives signaling performances of empowerment. While I have addressed the change in narrative upon gaining publicness and, with that, having the ability to construct a particular publicness and, more precisely, a particular collective witnessing, I have yet to thoroughly explore the role of the victim impact statement when they are published in autobiographical narratives of the #MeToo movement. Notably, this narrative practice can be found repeatedly in a #MeToo context.

Rachael Denhollander incorporates her victim impact statement in her memoir. As I have briefly addressed before, Denhollander quotes her victim impacts statement in short paragraphs, interrupted by a narration of her thoughts, perception of the room, or further commentary. In between paragraphs of her statement, Denhollander narrates a loss of identity, furthering the story she constructs in her statement:

For more than a decade, I had refused to allow my abuse to define me. But others didn't extend me that same courtesy. Once people knew about my abuse, they no longer saw me first as a congregant, attorney, or any of my other positions. They saw me as a sexual assault survivor. If I offered a reasoned opinion on abuse, I was immediately categorized, maliciously or not, by my own history as 'emotional,' 'wounded,' or 'projecting her own experiences.' Knowing that this was the predominant way people—even the most well-intentioned—thought about me was one of the most painful parts of this experience. (305)

What follows is Denhollander's direct address to Nassar's defense attorney, Shannon Smith. In her memoir, Denhollander regains the narrative control she describes being taken by Smith through cross-examination.

Originally, I had no intention of referencing Shannon, who had stopped coming to court after the first few days of impact statements. But when Bailey, another survivor, gave her statement, she expressed her disagreement with how Shannon had handled the case. One of Larry's attorneys interrupted her. Apparently Shannon was following the proceedings from afar. I learned later that she had instructed that lawyer to object to Bailey's statement and to insist that Angie instruct the rest of us not to discuss defense counsel again. The judge had allowed Bailey to continue, but I decided right then that my fellow survivor wouldn't be left alone. I'd back her, if it was one of the only things I put in my statement. I kept my remarks factual. I drew no conclusions and made no attacks. Instead, I recited publicly available facts from the preliminary hearings, pointed and calculated to respond to the exact attacks Shannon had levied against me. (306)

Here, Denhollander establishes herself as composed and impersonal, countering the assessments of her as "emotional" and "wounded" that she describes as identity-shattering. While the reclaiming of narrative control is evident in the statement alone, Denhollander's description of her decision further constructs her as not primarily a victim facing her abuser, but rather a fierce advocate for other victims of Nassar, constructing a particular solidarity based on shared trauma. However, she does not highlight her own emotional devastation in this but rather positions her narration of regained identity as a defense of "another survivor."

After having presented her "final request" to the Judge, Denhollander writes,

I stood as the judge spoke gracious words of encouragement, and then I gathered my notes, turning one final time to look at Larry. As I turned back toward the courtroom, I was overwhelmed at the gift we had all been given. The strength we had found together. What I had hoped to accomplish had grown so far beyond what I could have even imagined, because of every voice that was raised. (313)

With that, Denhollander narrates full control over the courtroom as a setting in her memoir. As Denhollander tells the story of her participation in the lawsuit against Nassar, this moment comes toward the very end of her memoir, concluding that

What I had set out to do—stop a predator and give survivors a voice—had been accomplished. No, the work wasn't done. But that chapter was. And in many ways, that chapter was less about finishing and more about starting. Starting the healing for so many. Starting a new day where Larry had no more power. Starting the change. Starting to find our voices. And together, we had. (315)

With the annotated publication of her victim impact statement as an autobiographical narrative, Denhollander concludes her narration of regained agency. Thus, in her story, the courtroom becomes a place of catharsis. Crucially, this catharsis is constructed through her narration of an agentic performance in the courtroom, the end of which is marked by a last

look at Nassar and a bodily and symbolic ‘turning away’ more than the actual sentencing. Although the de facto life sentence enables Denhollander’s narrative to be framed as empowering and cathartic, intradiegetically, it is Denhollander’s ability and willingness to demand this sentence that concludes the tension in her story.

Unlike Denhollander, whose victim impact statement was already publicly available before she included it as part of her memoir, Rachel Haines, who had also been abused by Nassar, only made her statement available to the public by quoting it in her memoir *Abused: Surviving Sexual Assault and a Toxic Gymnastics Culture*. Throughout the trial, Haines was not publicly identified and was only referred to as ‘Victim 195.’ Upon the pending trial, Haines describes struggling with accepting having been a victim of Nassar’s. Presented with the “opportunity” to speak in court, Haines writes, “I decided that I needed to speak, too” (113). Yet, she ultimately did not speak but penned a letter that her mother read out for her in court, prohibiting (televisual) recordings of the reading. She writes, “I had been following the recording every day prior to this one, and as Victim 195 was given the floor to speak, the cameras turned to Larry and the sound was turned off. I knew my words were being read at that very moment” (116).

Despite her physical absence in the courtroom during this reading, Haines reclaims a place in the trial that saw a collective and highly mediatized presentation of victims’ experiences with sexualized violence and retellings of their subsequent trauma with her now public narration of it. Although through a different presence, Haines positions the moment as the time to speak for “Victim 195.” Through her absence, however, the focus is not on an empowering imaginary of her facing her abuser—as the notion of this moment was, as Haines describes, the reason for her absence—but rather on Nassar’s reaction. Haines writes,

I saw Larry’s face with no sound. I saw his reaction to my words, but didn’t know which words were impacting him. I saw his chin quiver and his eyes stare deeply at my parents. His gloomy, ashamed face stared at the faces of parents who had trusted their children with him. I watched his gaze never break as his presentation of innocence faded away into sadness and regret. I knew he was feeling what I was saying, I knew he was hurting. . . . Minutes later, my mom called me. . . . She explained that Larry had never looked away, and she felt that he had truly listened to my statement as it was different from the painful venting of the girls before me. Once my speech was over, we all swear we saw him turn to his defense attorney and mumble, ‘I can’t do this anymore.’ After this day, I can truly say my healing began. Knowing my parents had stood as one powerful force to fight for me created a foundation for rebuilding. Together, my parents and I ended my anger and hatred toward Larry Nassar. (116)

Here, Haines performs a sense of empowerment through the notion that her words had an impact on Nassar. Keeping his attention and gaze, in this story, signifies a changed power dynamic. Through this, Haines establishes a presence in the courtroom in her memoir that disregards her existence in it as only Victim 195, a non-subject without any ability to exercise

agency, a dynamic established by the traumatizing assault that rendered Haines incapable of “facing Larry and speaking to him” (115). Of this thought, Haines writes,

My body shuddered at the thought of just seeing his hands. His tools of abuse. I feared they remembered me, they remembered the feelings of my body. I went numb at the thought of his eyes looking at me, analyzing my figure, remembering how it felt on his bare hands. I imagined him picturing my ‘treatments’ with him. (115)

As the assault permeates her memory, her movement is restricted. While this points to the far-reaching, devastating effects of Haines’ trauma through Nassar’s assault, she nevertheless positions her absence in the courtroom as a performance of empowerment. Throughout her memoir, Haines frames her affective recovery from the trauma as an act of personal resilience, narrating a sense of control in it.

Her victim impact statement is exemplary of this, as she writes about the process of writing it as not cathartic because she expresses her trauma and pain but because she narrates an overcoming of this pain through the writing.

My first draft was so angry. I was yelling at Larry, screaming my pain at him. I was trying to throw my hurt at him with such force that may he would feel it, too. I told him how much I hated what he did to me, that no jail time would be long enough for what he did, and that his abuse would affect me for the rest of my life. . . . And I watched woman after woman say exactly that I wrote in my first draft as they experienced the exact same feelings that I had. But that first speech didn’t make me feel better. In fact, it exhausted me. Every time I read my pain, I would sob. I relived my experience through my words of hatred, and no healing was happening. This speech wasn’t the closure my mind wanted, the ending my heart demanded. (114)

Finding no catharsis in an expression of anger, Haines writes about rejecting it, concluding that her emotional well-being depends on her ability to forgive Nassar. This narration of control over her trauma stands in marked contrast to Haines’ narration of the debilitating effects of it. While the reading of her victim impact statement in court makes it quite clear—her absence marks the power Nassar continues to claim over her sense of security and (affective) integrity—Haines’ narration of the reading and writing of the statement blurs this tension, as she positions herself as being empowered and freed through the court proceedings that includes her presence only as ‘Victim 195,’ so even in her absence from the courtroom. The notion of her emotional well-being as dependent on Nassar’s recognition of her words as well as her detachment from certain affects that remain attached to her experience (specifically, the anger that Haines writes out of her statement, draft by draft) unveils her narrative performance of empowerment as ultimately conceptually fragile. Although Haines shares her letter to Nassar that includes the proclamation, “Larry, I forgive you” (118), her narrative remains permeated by descriptions of continued, debilitating trauma as a result of Nassar’s abuse, directly contrasting the narratively constructed performance of empowerment depended on Haines’ forgiveness of Nassar.

Yet, through her memoir and the publication of her victim impact statement, Haines makes a certain, retroactive claim to the courtroom as her place of empowerment. Her statement is preceded by the explanation, “*Before this book, my statement was not released to the public. I was known only as Victim 195, The only people who heard my final words to Larry were those parents in the courtroom that day*” (116). Here, Haines emphasizes that she is now not only known as ‘Victim 195,’ pointing to the (public) identity she constructs in and through her writing. Haines also includes her description of watching Nassar’s reaction to her words on television, further placing herself as part of the process. Intradiagetically, the subsequent publication of Haines’ statement establishes a linearity in which the sense of empowerment gained through a certain presence in the courtroom results in new possibilities for movement and, with that, the ability to (re-)claim a place.

Chanel Miller also includes her victim impact statement at the end of her memoir. However, she does not include the words from it in her narrative but rather includes it as a paratext, following the acknowledgments. It is headlined “Emily Doe’s Victim Impact Statement,” re-emphasizing the difference Miller draws between herself and ‘Emily Doe,’ her identity as (merely) a victim. The narrative in her statement that, in the context of her autobiographical writing, now follows an extensive story of her powerlessness during the assault and her voicelessness during the trial reframes her claim to agency in the statement. While the tension between her performance of agency and the description of her trauma remains, the statement now follows a narrative in which Miller constructs an identity. The declaration of the statement that unleashed Miller’s memoir as “Emily Doe’s Victim Impact Statement” indicates the separation between her and the initial statement that, intradiagetically, is symbolic of her powerlessness.

Yet, with its inclusion at the end of a narrative identity construction, the statement is reframed once again. While the anonymous publication incited public outrage about the sentencing and the (successful) campaign to recall Judge Persky, it did not mark the (re)turn of narrative control to Miller as she remained anonymous. This (perceived) necessity to remain anonymous underlines the cultural mechanisms that inhibit the construction of agency and ridding of shame for victims of sexualized violence. However, in the paratext to the memoir that lifted this anonymity—fittingly titled *Know My Name*—this narrative control is performed.

While Miller introduces the identity/concept of ‘Emily Doe’ as not belonging to her—an identity imposed on her by having been made a victim (*Know My Name* vii; 37)—she later, at the end of her memoir, writes,

I began this story alone as a half-naked body. I remembered nothing. There was so much I did not know. I was forced to fight in a legal system I did not understand, the bald judge in the black robe, the defense attorney with narrow glasses. Brock with his lowered chin, his unsmiling father, the appellate attorney. The obstacles became harder, I was up against men more educated, more powerful than me, the game rougher, more graphic, serious. I read comments that laughed at my pain. I remember feeling helpless, terrified, humiliated, I cried like I've never cried before. But I remember the attorney's still shoulders as *guilty* was read. I know Brock slept ninety days in a stiff cot in a jail cell. The judge will never step foot in a courtroom again. The appellate attorney's claims were shut down. One by one, they became powerless, fell away, and when the dust settled, I looked around to see who was left.

Only Emily Doe. I survived because I remained soft, because I listened, because I wrote. Because I huddle close to my truth, protected it like a tiny flame in a terrible storm. (326–27)

With that, Miller reclaims Emily Doe as belonging to her, as she constructs her identity as more than merely the “half-naked body” she is in the (legal documents of the) assault. In positioning herself as the only one “who was left,” Miller reframes the anonymizing pseudonym as not a mechanism with which to stay safe from social vitriol or ostracizing due to being a victim of sexualized violence (or not being believed to be a victim of sexualized violence). Instead, Emily Doe becomes a persona Miller assumes, emblematic of the resilience needed to withstand the legal process in which Miller narrates herself as entirely without agency. While ‘Emily Doe’ remains because she remains a victim of sexualized violence, the publication of the victim impact statement as “Emily Doe’s” is reframed by Miller’s recharacterization of this initially heteronomous identity.

As Miller’s statement came to be connotated with notions of empowerment through its publicness in the #MeToo movement context, its publication in her memoir—in the aftermath of the movement practices that rendered Miller’s statement a testament to the power of victims of sexualized violence after all, regardless of its insignificance in court—also engages in the practice of reframing. The setting of the performance of Miller’s victim impact statement is only part of a collective imaginary in its public witnessing. However, as a paratext to Miller’s memoir, the setting is now well-established as Miller constructs the courtroom in her writing.

The Courtroom in #MeToo Narratives

Indeed, most of Miller’s book focuses on her experience through the legal process and, with that, also her presence in the courtroom. Throughout, her powerlessness is evident. The preparation for her first appearance in court already shows Miller’s narrative clearly naming the performative character of it. “*What are we supposed to wear*, she said. Images we’d Googled of *women’s court clothes* displayed tall women with hands on their waists, long

hair twisted into soft tendrils, pencil skirts, legs slender as stairs banisters on pointed heels. *How the heck are we supposed to look like this*” (106). Miller’s story is one in which its subject is consistently being confronted with a process that negates its existence as a subject. Miller struggling with constructing herself in the best way possible to face the imminent scrutiny, to the point of evoking almost comically stereotypical images to, ideally, model herself after, establishes her lack of control.

Miller, as a subject in her memoir, is rendered as already out of place during the trial before even reaching the courtroom. She narrates,

I was ready for October 5. On the night before my flight, my small suitcase sat packed and zipped by the door. My red notebook was stocked with grounding techniques and encouragements: *You are more powerful than anyone who has ever hurt you. It is not pathetic to feel and react. You are stronger than you know, even if you can’t feel it yet.* I had soft pants laid out for the plane, clean socks. I stood in my flannel pajamas in the kitchen with a pair of scissors trimming the bonsai tree I’d bought to liven up Lucas’s apartment. My phone rang at 11:00 P.M.
I’m sorry, the hearing has been postponed, my DA said. Don’t get on the flight tomorrow.
 (103)

The seemingly mundane aspect of depending on the court’s (unpredictable) scheduling is emblematic of Miller’s role in the trial. While it is happening to her, she includes, in the authoring of the story, the small insistence in which she establishes (a sense of) control, like preparing encouraging notes to herself. Yet, throughout her memoir, she remains subjected to the dictation of an ominous, personified ‘court,’ communicating through her DA, inflicting fear and continuous life-interrupting situations.

Later, Miller writes,

The call came in. The hearing was back on. Alaleh said I could come see the space if I was free. I threw my empty bowl in the sink, hugged him, sprinted toward my car. The courtroom was small, much smaller than I’d anticipated, dark and cramped and musty. Natural light came in from mold-spackled squares in the high ceiling. In the corner was a withered flag that never rippled, only hung, permanent in its formation of folds. Everything was stagnant and dreary, like the air had been stored there for years. I would be entering from the doors at the back, walking down the aisle like a bride. I didn’t like this period of vulnerability, everyone’s eyes on my back as I approached the witness stand. I would have preferred to emerge before them, more of a ta-da moment. The judge would be sitting to the left of me, perched above, a bigger bird in the same nest. My DA would stand before me at a podium. I would be looking directly at her. (104–05)

The moment in which Miller first gets to see the place she (at this point, already expecting to carry a (re-)traumatization) is as much dictated by the powerful entity established as ‘the court’ as her position and gaze when she is in it. The power of the courtroom is contrasted with its description as a somewhat mundane, run-down room. Nevertheless, the rituals Miller describes solidify the place as constructed not by its somewhat eerie, scruffy appearance but by these movements within it. In this description, there is no agent to the determination of these movements but, rather, the securely constructed place, as it holds the ritualized processes Miller is being introduced to, already dedicates these.

During her time as a witness in the trial, Miller establishes her lack of agency based on her lack of memory of the assault. Miller describes the first line of questioning by Deputy District Attorney Alaleh. Upon being asked “*What was the next thing that happened?*”, Miller narrates,

The little movie in my head stopped, the music fell away, the crowd in the glow of the porch light disappeared. Black, just black. I looked at her; a silent panic, a blinking, I have no answer. She had held me by the belly, letting me paddle around the water, and now she released her grip, watching me slip beneath. *I woke up in the hospital*. As the words left me, my head dropped forward, my thoughts scattered. She asked something, but I did not respond; in the transcript, the court reporter had only typed (*shakes head*).

I heard a sound, a long wail, a high cooing, that sailed and fell. It was growing louder, I could not stop. I wanted someone to hold my shoulders, but I realized nobody was coming. A room of strangers, sitting unmoved, as I cried into nothing. I had kept loved ones outside these doors, had made a grave mistake. I put two hands over my face, clenched my eyes. If I couldn’t see anyone they could no longer see me.

JUDGE: *Would you like to recess?*

DA: *Yes.*

JUDGE: *We’re going to take a brief recess. So I will step off the bench. Thank you.*

DA: *Oh, here’s a cup.*

I heard everyone scuffle out of the stillness, as if to say, *Shut it down, we’ve lost her*. I imagined all the gazes on me broken, snipped like threads. I heard the judge stepping off his bench. (113)

As Miller relays her lack of memory as a source of shame and part of her story that leaves her both isolated and particularly defenseless, the witness stand in her narrative becomes carceral. This lack of memory of the assault is contrary to her performance of memory of the legal process, as performed by the practice of writing. Still, Miller also mirrors her lack of memory in her writing, highlighting a moment in which she leaves the narration to the court reporter, leaving it an open question if she concurs with the reporter’s storytelling at this moment. With that, Miller narrates losing her own voice entirely with a narrative practice that mirrors this loss. The insufficient aim to convince herself that “If I couldn’t see anyone they could no longer see me” illustrates Miller’s immobility in this place and situation. At this moment in her story, the rituals that construct the place that Miller bases her narration on are also the source of her (affective) immobility.

The courtroom emerges as a site of abuse. On the first day of the trial, Miller narrates the moments leading up to her appearance in court in detail:

The security guards escorted my mom, Tiffany, and me into the tiny victim closet, which was furnished with a dirty yellow couch that looked sculpted out of earwax. A metal-legged desk piled with torn, expired magazines. A cloudy bag of markers with uncapped, dry heads. Dusty stacks of domestic violence brochures. A laminated red poster with bold yellow lettering read: VICTIMS HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED WITH FAIRNESS AND RESPECT FOR HIS OR HER PRIVACY AND DIGNITY, AND TO BE FREE FROM INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT, AND ABUSE THROUGHOUT THE CRIMINAL JUVENILE JUSTICE PROCESS. (109)

The experience laid out in the memoir up until and after this point leaves the reading of this declaration stained by a particular irony of false promises. Miller leaves it uncommented, except to describe that, in this “tiny victim closet,” there were, “Papers left behind with kids’ drawings; a drawing of a heart, cramped lettering inside, *Because I’m scared*” (109), indicating both the falsehood of the laminated red poster’s promise as well as Miller’s own emotional state.

In Miller’s narration of a run-down “tiny closet,” any previously built-up mystique about the courtroom is gone. Rather, it becomes a setting primarily constructed through and symbolic of Miller’s inability to move. Evoking her immobility during and through the assault, Miller now constructs a narrative setting in which she appears similarly immobile. As she writes, “*Take a look*, she said. Through a thin rectangular window in the door, I scanned the room, a small audience, the back of his head. I froze, locked on the bare skin of his neck. I wanted to hold on to my last moment of being hidden. But Alaleh was pulling the doors open, and there was nothing left to do but walk through” (110), her movement is not agentic but automatic, following the rituals of the process.

On the basis of having “nothing left to do but walk through,” Miller describes walking into the courtroom:

. . . I felt the eyes taking me in. I wondered if they were surprised I was Asian, if I looked like a woman, or a girl, if I appeared mundane, less pretty than imagined, why didn’t he choose someone better looking, stop, what are you thinking, be quiet. As I stepped toward the witness stand I wanted to keep walking and walking, but when I touched the back of my chair, I sat to face forward, here I am.

I was told to make myself comfortable. I did not understand what that meant . . . (110)

While establishing a process in which she is evaluated, prompting her insecurity about the audience’s perception, Miller breaks with the merely ritualistic movement when stating “here I am.” Embedded in a narrative that hardly constructs a subject—or, more specifically, constructs a subject continuously confronted with her lack of agency—and movement that is either ritualistic or involuntary, Miller nevertheless asserts that she is ‘here,’ claiming a certain presence. However, the story immediately returns to the process’ rituals, although equipped with a simple addendum that highlights the ridiculousness of being asked to make oneself comfortable. With that, the lead-up that has clearly established an impossibility for comfort returns, framing the now preceding questioning as not only outside of Miller’s comfort but outside of her control.

Intradiagetically, this lack of control is unambiguous. However, it is Miller’s writing that constructs this subjection. Any exploration of her affective powerlessness stands in tension with the practice of not declaring this powerlessness but authoring the processes that

evoke it. The “here” where Miller is is not the courtroom as it only existed during the trial *People v. Turner* but the place that Miller narrates in her memoir. The literary setting constructed here is subject to the changed meanings it may be connotated with through the writing and reading of her memoir. However, Miller’s setting is a ‘here’ in which she can be, contrasting the place in which she was first subjected to cross-examination, where her non-existence in that place is evident. This particular courtroom ended with the sentencing and is only evoked in reconstructions of it through the trial’s retelling and mediatization. Miller’s ‘here’ evokes it but constructs a different place.

So, in the reading of Miller’s narration of her appearance in the courtroom, two principal things happen: Firstly, a narrative is constructed in which it is evident that Miller, as a victim of sexualized violence, cannot exist as a subject in the courtroom. This is not only a key grievance of the #MeToo movement, as the movement’s messaging continuously turns to legal questions and reforms, but also a re-production of the dynamics of sexualized violence and the shame that are a seemingly inseparable part of it. Secondly, the narrative practice of the courtroom as a literary setting in autobiographical narratives of victims of sexualized violence establishes a particular place—a ‘here’—in which they do exist as a subject after all. It is this place over which Miller, through her writing, practices a certain power, as to change its connotation regarding her powerlessness. This literary setting then also shapes the collective imaginary in which she emerges as agentic and demanding in the performance of her victim impact statement.

After being led to the bathroom, Miller continues, “I was embarrassed by who I was to everyone in that room, the one who drank herself to limpness, and now made wet gasping sounds into the microphone” (113). As with the narration of coming into the courtroom, Miller focuses on an assumed external perception that then constructs her (lack of) self. “That room” becomes a place in which she is vulnerable, on display to be judged. So, when she writes, “I was surprised to be carried by my own feet, following Bree back through the courtroom doors” (113), the passiveness through which she experiences her role as a witness is evident. Yet, because the witnessing of Miller’s writing also constructs the courtroom as the literary place in her story, there are moments of performative agency that shape that place and are shaped by it.

No Place in the Courtroom

The poem “if it please the court,” which is part of the poetic memoir *SHOUT: The True Story of a Survivor Who Refused to be Silenced* by Laurie Halse Anderson, positions the courtroom as a place in which victims cannot take place. Here, Anderson writes,

the courthouse reporter was out sick
 one day
 so they sent me in his place, the
 defendant
 a plain white guy, late thirties, kinda small, cheap suit,
 good haircut, charged with ugly
 counts
 of sexual assault, plus kidnapping he looked bored

...

as the police recited the details
 the rapist yawned

Defense lawyer did his job
 by attacking the victim
 shouting that she drank, she danced,
 she dressed to look good
 she wanted it, she followed him
 liked it rough
 or planned on marriage or extortion
 as she cried on the stand, long blonde
 hair
 in front of her face, a curtain for her
 sanity,
 he painted her into a corner with
 accusations
 fantastical but just barely legal
 screaming lawyers objected
 counter-objected, sustained, upheld
 blind justice torn apart by jackals
 the jury confused

...

I stayed till the court emptied and I
 could breathe
 again,

told the story to my editor, who did
 the right thing
 for journalism
 by assigning someone else to cover the
 trial
 defense lawyer negotiated a plea
 bargain,
 the rapist
 sentenced to some easy time in county
 jail,

...

Years later, walking in the mall
 with my daughters tall and gangly
 I saw him again, that rapist

only that time, he didn't look bored
because
he was hunting. (153–56)

Narrating her own experiences of rape throughout other poems, Anderson here focuses on her experience in the courtroom as a reporter. She establishes her lack of belonging in this space quite obviously by narrating being “sent” to someone else’s place, seemingly mundanely. Embedded in the context of autobiographical writing, the story then proceeds to chart a simple dichotomy between an unfaced, powerful perpetrator and a now publicly tormented victim. Throughout, Anderson, as the lyrical I, is not taking place in the story’s setting. While her disdain for the defendant and the courtroom proceedings—the ritualized notion of which becomes evident in the mundane tone with which it is narrated—is clear, an intradiegetically explicit narration of her emotions does not come back into the narrative until “the court emptied.” It is only then that, Anderson writes, she can breathe again.

This image—a breathless and ultimately voiceless reporter, involuntarily stuck in a specific place that ritually generates the proceedings that (re-)traumatize a victim of sexualized violence while leaving the perpetrator powerful enough to be bored—is emblematic of the lack of control that Anderson narrates. While the reporter’s involvement comes to a halt when she gives up her journalistic coverage of the trial, connecting the anonymous victim’s pain to her trauma, the story underlines the perpetrator’s power by concluding his story with him free, powerful, and “hunting,” so entirely untouched by the process and punishment. Anderson presents the reassigning of the case to someone else as without alternative, simply “the right thing.” As the line break suggests, it is the right thing not merely for the trial. In this regard, victims of sexualized violence simply have no place in the courtroom, regardless of their supposed function in it.

While this is clear for Anderson, as the lyrical I, it is also true for the victim of the assault on trial.

...
as she cried on the stand, long blonde
hair
in front of her face, a curtain for her
sanity,
...
that young woman shook so hard
I thought the roof would cave in
... (155)

The image of the victim relying solely on her hair as a “curtain for her sanity” makes evident that she cannot hide or leave, indicating the lack of power that is unveiled as she steps into the courtroom as the accuser. Not only is she subjected to “accusations fantastical but just barely legal” that “painted her into a corner,” but the emotional state Anderson narrates

suggests she is the one on trial, as the defendant remains bored. In Anderson's poem, the victim's actions are brought more into question than the accusations the defendant is faced with, although he ends up being found guilty. So, even in a situation in which, in the legal realm, the victim is believed, she is tormented, attempting to escape in a way that makes the impossibility of escape—of keeping her sanity—evident. In this context, Anderson does not need to establish that the victim's shaking does not bring the roof to cave in because, although her emotional trauma is, in this image, forceful, she remains controlled over the place she is in. The force of her emotional trauma, thus, remains within herself and without impact (on place).

In Laurie Katz's memoir *Liar Laurie: Breaking the Silence on Sexual Assault*, one of the perhaps most mundane of rituals illustrates her placelessness and lack of agency in the court. The foreword tells the reader that Katz is "tired of people mispronouncing my last name. It's pronounced 'Kates'. Yes, I know your mother-in-law / childhood best friend / barber pronounces it 'Cats', but I come from a family of nonconformists" (7). When she is waiting to enter a courtroom for an Emergency Order of Protection after the person who assaulted her is also continuously stalking her, whom she refers to as 'Noah,' she describes, "When they called 'Laurie Cats', I got up from my pew and walked up to the aisle to stand in front of the judge. . . . Looking up at her sitting on the raised bench, I felt impossibility small" (20–21). While the mispronunciation itself is a common, perhaps tedious occurrence, the narration of this mispronunciation in this instance establishes Katz as a non-subject in the place she is now allowed to enter, in which she is seeking a particular authority to regain (a sense of) safety as a non-subject. In the reading of Katz entering the room not upon being called but upon "Laurie Cats" being called, a division between the self Katz constructs in her memoir and her role as a victim in the courtroom is established.

Katz further narrates being subjected to alienating processes:

Most of the time that day was spent in a larger room, with hundreds of people who were waiting to get called up to fill out more paperwork. . . . There was no privacy. I don't know how many times that day I had to say 'I was sexually assaulted, and the guy is now following and harassing me,' to a room full of strangers. (20)

As Katz's narration objects to any mystification of the courtroom—"Going to court isn't like how they show it in the movies" (19)—the disconcerting procedures are foregrounded. Katz is confronted with the judge's questioning about her not reporting the sexual assault, emphasizes that the experience was "filled with ridicule and humiliation" (19) and, ultimately, did not result in any sense of safety, despite being granted a temporary Emergency Order of Protection. Rather, Katz writes about deciding to not attend the necessary court proceeding to extend the Order because "I was too afraid to face Noah and

I would have to face him alone” (22). So, at the end of a process from which Katz separates herself because she does not have the place to exist and act in the courtroom, her movement is further restricted.

In an essay titled “Sixty-Three Days,” published in *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture* (Gay), author AJ McKenna evokes a construction of the courtroom, in its absence, that demonstrates an exclusivity to it. McKenna narrates difficulties in conceptualizing their rape as rape and a longing for a previous unawareness about it. Throughout, they already address the legal sphere’s inadequacy in holding their story, asking, “How could I explain, in court, that I spent the whole time terrified of what I’d have to do?” (McKenna 81–82). “How could I tell a jury how frightened I was when you said, ‘Okay, Now You?’” (82). McKenna lays out the aspects of the narrative that, to them, have complicated their own interpretation of these events, struggling to name the person they address as “My rapist” (87), as the same aspects that keep them out of the courtroom, a place they establish as the only viable concluding site to a rape narrative.

Eventually, they address their rapist directly in a poem.

*. . . but I cannot say your name, and
the woman who raped me sounds clunky and anyway
is legally someone who can’t exist:
English law defines rape as an act
committed only by the male. It’s sexual assault
when women do it. As if the two are easily distinguished,
but the woman who sexually assaulted me
is chunkier still than the woman the law calls impossible, . . . (87)*

While implicitly critical of a limited legal language that inadequately leaves out the possibility of non-female victims of sexualized violence, McKenna, first and foremost, tells a story about being limited to these conceptualizations in the authoring of their story. McKenna finds no real conclusion to this dilemma in terminology. This dilemma is rather symbolic of the continued struggle to not only author but affectively conceptualize an, in McKenna’s narrative, identity-shattering experience. So, McKenna’s crisis remains unresolved at the end of their narrative.

*It doesn’t matter if I’m one or one of many. I may call you my rapist but we know that
isn’t true.
Whatever law or rumor says, whoever else there was, you were never mine. You were the
rapist I ran into
And I thought This, this is the one that solves it, but it didn’t. Nothing ever does.
(87–88)*

While there is some ambiguous deviation from the limits of legal language previously established, McKenna does not establish any relief as a result of this. Most importantly, however, McKenna uses language to create a distance between themselves and the person who abused them. “My rapist,” they write, is neither legally nor affectively accurate, as the

personal possessive determiner suggests an inaccurate intimacy and, more specifically, a relationship between two subjects.

*My rapist. It feels wrong. Too intimate
somehow, suggests collusion, a joint enterprise. (87)*

Although McKenna narrates a somewhat linear arch toward accepting the terminology “rapist” regardless of (potential) legal accuracy, the impossibility of this narrative in the legal sphere remains and, crucially, McKenna’s emotional turmoil remains as well. The absence of the courtroom—something not only narratively established in an imaginary manner—here, negates the possibility of catharsis. This is rooted not primarily in a lack of language (“How could I explain?”; “How could I tell . . .?”) but, more specifically, in a lack of place, “in court.”

Another essay in the collection furthers the placelessness of (certain or most) victims of sexualized violence in and outside of the courtroom. The essay titled “Law and the Queer Woman or How I Sat in a Classroom and Listened to My Male Classmates Debate How to Define Force and Consent” outlines a legal critique that exceeds the desire for legal reform by establishing the author’s placelessness in the legal sphere. Divided into five parts, the essay chronicles the author’s, anonymized as V. L. Seek, early experience through law school and the sexual assault they experienced. The second part of the essay addresses the assault Seek experienced through the narration of its aftermath. It is introduced with what is presented as a quote from the 1914 court case *State v. McClain*, “There must be the utmost resistance by the woman by all means within her power” (Seek 178). This sentiment goes back to a 1906 case presented before the Supreme Court of Wisconsin, *Brown v. State*. The victim, in this case, was a sixteen-year-old girl who was, so the accusation, raped by her neighbor. While the defendant was convicted of rape in the first instance, the decision was overruled by the Supreme Court of Wisconsin because, as the opinion of the court stated at the time,

[n]ot only must there be entire absence of mental consent or assent, but there must be the most vehement exercise of every physical means or faculty within the woman’s power to resist the penetration of her person, and this must be shown to persist until the offense is consummated. (qtd. in Findlater 1358)

According to this ruling, the evidence of having demonstrated this very particular resistance is on the victim/accuser. Crucially, it also frames the prevention of rape as the victim’s responsibility, positing a lack of consent or a refusal to engage in sexual activity with the perpetrator as insufficient.

Against the backdrop of this legal decision, Seek writes, “For years, that night was my fault. I knew what rape was. I knew what consent was. I knew about first- and second-wave

feminism. I knew queer theory. But I swallowed the blame like that bottle of red wine and repeated to myself the lies that would run on loop for years to come” (181). As this is framed in the context of the “utmost resistance” sentiment to determine rape, the essay contrasts this legal conceptualization, the inclusion of which indicates it as the root of contemporary court ruling in rape cases, with a victim’s lived experience. As both *Brown v. States* and *State v. McClain* establish that excessive physical resistance is considered to be a form of resistance that is consistently “within her power,” Seek outlines that in an experience of rape where (this type of) resistance laid outside of her power, the legal expectation that it expected incites the personal blame they have suffered under, despite some sources of contrary knowledge.

The next paragraph is also introduced with legal language. Seek quotes from the Federal Rules of Evidence that determine

In a civil case, the court may admit evidence offered to prove a victim’s sexual behavior or sexual predisposition if its probative value substantially outweighs the danger of harm to any victim and of unfair prejudice to any party. The court may admit evidence of a victim’s reputation only if the victim has placed it in controversy. (qtd. in Seek 181)

Seek goes on to narrate her dissolution with the law throughout law school, turning to a debate about rape in a criminal law class. “We barely got to the second case in class, before the questions—repetitive and probing—began to chip away at the protective dissociation I used to stay disengaged. How do we define force? What does it mean to ‘resist to the utmost’” (183). Seek is displaced from the legal realm through their experience of having been assaulted in a way that would allow a court to question her resistance. Further, she is displaced from a possible civil case, so she implies, through the looming suggestions of promiscuity, making an accusation of assault implausible. Then, they narrate a de-placing from the study of law due to the trauma the assault inflicted. Because of their “protective dissociation,” they can no longer take place in the discussions the legal realm poses.

This de-placing continues as Seek explains, “In Evidence, we learned how to discredit a witness on the stand. We learned the exceptions that would allow you to introduce a witness’s sexual history to undermine the idea that she was raped” (183). The somewhat theoretical placelessness here is underlined even further when Seek narrates, “I also learned that a senior attorney who repeatedly sexually harassed a female attorney was not disbarred because the court did not consider his daily groping to be conduct involving ‘moral turpitude’” (184). Both the procedural rules of the sphere as well as the concrete cases that result from these procedures are, for Seek, the basis for an impossibility of belonging in the legal realm as a victim of sexualized violence.

So, Seek concludes that,

. . . conclusion seems out of reach when we are still stuck debating the facts, deciding whom to trust and what is true. We are trapped in a legal system that has never favored women and has never believed survivors. And we are mired in a circuitous and damning dialogue, so powerful that it invalidates our experiences, our traumas, our truths—a dialogue so powerful that we begin to doubt whether our experience was ever there at all. (187)

At this point, the narrative has moved to express a collective grievance. It is no longer merely Seek who doubts “whether [her] experience was ever there at all.” (Re-)turning to the sources of knowledge she hints at earlier, allowing her to move beyond the legal realm, Seek expresses that this is a collective experience. Even within that collective, however, Seek does not see a resolution. So, their narrative ends with a critique of the legal system, having outlined their effective and affective placelessness from it. In this story, this pertains to a placelessness as a plaintiff and as a professional, furthering the critique that no reform to the legal system would render it a place for victims of sexualized violence. Instead, in the context of law related to rape, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment, the narrative utilizes the proceedings that construct the court to unveil it as a place inevitably practiced through the very processes that render (certain) victims silenced because “When your truth is so inherently questioned, it is easier to say nothing than anything at all” (186).

The practice of narrating placelessness from the courtroom is also prevalent in a poem published as part of the collection *Resistance: Righteous Rage in the Age of #MeToo* (Goyette). While Seek and McKenna’s narrative constructs this placelessness through narratives that pointedly do not include the courtroom—indicating that their stories of sexualized violence cannot exist in a courtroom—the autobiographical poem titled “Not Guilty,” instead narrates an unresolved placelessness from within a courtroom. The author Donna J.A. Olson writes,

All eyes were on me,
All of them judging and cruel.
They were all hoping that I would screw up and flee,
Just wanting it done and to hear the judge’s rule.

They call my name,
And I start trembling in fear.
I feel like I am to blame,
Since I am the whole reason we are here.

I take the stand and swear in my oath,
In a trembling breath I tell them all that I know.
The hateful words and touching that I loathe,
The violation that my body still showed.

The whole time he sat with a smirk,
A knowing in his eyes of everything that I told.
The outside was just a facade of the monster that lurked,
But it was an act that he completely sold.

I could tell by the faces gathered,
That believed in him and not me.

My whole world seemed to completely shatter,
When the verdict came back 'Not Guilty.' (99)

While the lyrical I is the accuser, she narrates herself to be in the position of the defendant, judged and at fault. As she evokes an image of standing before all the eyes “judging and cruel,” the accuser she faces remains in power, “with a smirk.” She writes not only about collective disbelief—ultimately at a pinnacle in the verdict—but also establishes that her presence is both entirely responsible for the situation and also unwelcomed. The gazes she describes determine that the courtroom is not a place for her to exist as a subject. Although she “take[s] the stand” and “tell[s] them all that I know,” she does so “[i]n a trembling breath” and with a body still showing “[t]he violation,” drastically contrasting the notion of indestructible calmness the defendant is described with, as evidenced by a particular gaze, a smirk and “knowing” look.

In this poem, the verdict, the point at which the room’s disbelief that displaces her from it reaches its judicial consequences, is a foregone conclusion, not only because of the poem’s title. The arrogance with which the defendant, simplified as a “monster,” is positioned makes evident that there was no tension at any point. So, the telling of her story on the stand, under oath, was bound to be void, as not only the victim’s shame but also the “judging and cruel” eyes on her that emblemize her lack of belonging in the place she finds herself in are established at the point where she gets to voice her account. Because Olson establishes the defendant as unshaken by his position in this setting, the setting is what determines the gazes and disbelief that are mere consequences of the non-belonging that predate the beginning of the story. Given the setting they are in, the man accused of sexualized violence is in a safe place while the victim finds herself fearful, shamed, and accused.

The place of the courtroom as part of autobiographical #MeToo stories reveals the (productive) tension between the performance of agency in authoring (and publishing) a story of sexualized violence and the loss of agency as placed in the courtroom. With the construction of a ‘here’ in which victims can, through the process of writing, place themselves, a place countering the de-placing/placelessness of victims in the judicial process is constructed. It is here where the loss of agency and desire to (perform) empowerment is negotiated. Nevertheless, the courtroom in autobiographical #MeToo stories is also a place to narrate and complain about the de-placing of victims from the courtroom as authors place the narration of their affective disempowerment in this setting specifically. In many of these narratives, this particular setting emerges as (another) site of abuse. This is a crucial part of

the potency of narratives—performances—of empowerment placed there. In light of this, the construction and utilization of the initial site of abuse remains to be explored.

4.3. The Site of Abuse

Discussing the circulation of #MeToo stories through (digital) spheres, I have previously briefly addressed Oldfield and McDonald's reading of the Saxon Mullins case in Australia. In their analysis of media coverage at the time, Oldfield and McDonald also note a central role of the assault's geographical location (an alleyway). Like the assault Chanel Miller experienced that was oftentimes termed "Stanford dumpster assault," Mullins' story also became known as "Kings Cross rape" (Oldfield and McDonald 227). Oldfield and McDonald read the Kings Cross alleyway, in this case, as a "parafunctional space," citing Keith Hayward's definition of these spaces as "the abandoned, anonymous and seemingly meaningless spaces without our midst—the places on the (metaphorical) edge of society" (228). The meaning engendered in the practices of crimes or assault are surely not the only but the most obvious ones as they may, at least in some cases, make the news. Even in places "on the (metaphorical) edge of society," meaningfulness is undoubtedly abundant.²² This meaning, however, while not necessarily more unpredictable than in places less frequently "employed for purposes outside of their 'official' use" (228), demonstrates that the meaningfulness of places is not merely tied to hegemonic notions of "'official use'" but to the actual practices occurring in and through them. Evidently, the process of constructing 'parafunctional spaces' both assumes and creates meaning tied to these places. Put simply, an alleyway becomes a site of abuse through the same processes through which domestic settings become sites of abuse. This, however, changes their connotations and/or functions (as symbols) in larger cultural discourses only incidentally. While an alleyway is oftentimes used to signal danger, the same does not occur for domestic settings, campuses, work spaces, or hotel rooms, to name just a few examples.

I consider the site of abuse as a place constructed by disempowerment, fully shaped by the violence exercised and experienced there. In the practice of narrating it, however, it may also become a site of a performance of agency. Texts may establish a claim to their

²² Hayward's use of the term goes back to an essay by Papastergiadis and Rogers, who employ the term to describe spaces (or, as I would argue, places) that seem decayed, unwanted, and unused in terms of their supposed intended functionality. Papastergiadis and Rogers rightly point out that although parafunctional spaces appear forgotten, they may serve important functions different than the ones intended for them. Neither Papastergiadis and Rogers nor Hayward make an argument regarding the use of the term 'spaces' here (rather than places) other than a lingering but unexplored notion that 'spaces' is somehow more comprehensive.

place of trauma and rebuild it by narrativizing it. Nevertheless, it is also a symbol of this notion of powerlessness, profound immobility, and isolation. While the publicness of shame constructs a collective, the narration of the site of abuse rather points to the tension between a loneliness of the place and the sense of collective in sharing it (publicly) or, in the bigger, public #MeToo cases, offering a blueprint for many other stories that might as well all be the same.

In a YouTube video titled “This Is My Assault Story #MeToo,” the video’s presenter, who introduces herself as Kate, documents her process of putting the mattress she was assaulted on in her front yard and writing “Me Too” on it with a black marker (*As/Is*). The video was published on a channel belonging to the media company BuzzFeed. Towards the end of the video, Kate explains that she works for BuzzFeed. At the beginning of the video, she draws the viewers’ attention to a mattress, which is leaning against a wall in her living room. She explains, “It has actually been sitting there for about six months. I thought about donating it, I thought about what I could do to destroy it. And I thought about just throwing it out. So, I decided, finally, that I should participate in this Me Too movement.” She then briefly introduces the #MeToo movement, pointing to Tarana Burke’s first use of it and Alyssa Milano’s tweet that turned the local movement into a viral one. Kate then explains,

I was raped. A few years ago. . . . I kept sleeping on the mattress that I was raped on. I am going to move this mattress into the front yard tomorrow morning. . . . And then I am going to leave a bunch of sharpies and a note to welcome other people to write a message, share anything they want. (*As/Is*)

In a vlog-style format, the video then shows parts of the process of moving the mattress outside. In voice-over, Kate narrates, “I think I kept sleeping on this mattress because I still had so much anger and shame that I was holding on to. And I am not going to do it anymore. I am over letting this control my life.” The video then shows a time-lapse of Kate writing “ME TOO” on the top half of the mattress. A close-up of the writing reveals that, underneath, she also wrote: “on this bed, in my house, on a second date.” Close-ups show the process of writing the invitation for other people to write their stories on the mattress as well. In voice-over, Kate says, “So, this is me taking another step. Moving towards another direction of reclaiming my life and empowering myself to say that ‘It’s gonna be okay.’”

At the end of the day, the video shows Kate returning to the mattress, seeing additional writings on the mattress. The video shows two other people stopping, talking to Kate, witnessing the writings of other people on there and then writing on it themselves. Close-ups show some of the brief texts written, for instance, “#METOO summer before my SENIOR YEAR OF COLLEGE”; “Every woman I know has a story. Mine started at 14 and ends today

because I am no longer silent. xo”; “My mom, too, walking down the street”; “My sister, too, at my wedding.”

Through the practice of moving the mattress to a now-public place (not the placement in the front yard but the invitations to write on it mark it public) and the practice of taping and sharing this process in digital spheres, Kate makes the rape she experienced public on two layers. Similarly, she also makes a performance of empowerment public. As she explains continuing to sleep on the mattress due to her shame, the movement of the mattress and its alteration with the initial writing of “ME TOO” on it perform an end to that shame. This is also reflected perhaps most pointedly in the story that renders the writing as the end of assault: It “ends today because I am no longer silent.”

With the additional writing on it, the mattress ceases to be a site of abuse. Instead, it is rendered as a place for solidarity and empowerment. Crucially, the empowerment Kate narrates is dependent on the shared practice of writing. In the performative conversation from what is framed as a place of private shame into a public demonstration of solidarity, the initial writing of “ME TOO” already tells a story about an experience affectively *shared*. In the video, the engagement with the site of abuse and the ability to alter it is positioned as not only an enactment of agency but a reclaim of it. Kate’s movement of the mattress is shown throughout, narrated, and framed as controlled, agentic, and, in part, strategic choices. This movement—the pushing of the mattress outside—fundamentally foregrounds a transformative quality of sharing. The collective writing that is then revealed to have altered the mattress entirely further renders Kate’s experience as universal. With the collective writings on it, the mattress is not only no longer a site of abuse, but it also no longer displays a clear ownership. Instead, it reveals a visual installation of a rhizomatic network.

Notably, Kate’s movement practice did not merely resemble the “#metoo” writing practices in digital spheres but itself became visible through its digital mediatization. Prior to the other writings on it, the particular display of the mattress reveals that (sexual) abuse can and does happen in private, domestic, seemingly safe settings. The further collections of stories—the mattress now as a storyboard—ultimately reveal that (sexual) abuse can and does happen anywhere. With that, the mattress becomes both a place of resistance, resilience, and shame rejection as well as a collection of various other sites of abuse.

There Is No Safe Place: The Ubiquity of Sexualized Violence

The anthology *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture* (Gay) features an essay titled “The Ways We Are Taught to Be a Girl” by an author anonymized as xTx. Under the premise

that various experiences of sexual harassment are principally formative to the development of girls, xTx recounts specific incidents of sexual harassment and sexualized violence in her life. She evaluates these experiences using a point system, which she elaborates on throughout the essay. xTx introduces this premise:

The ways we are taught to be a girl start when you are very young. When you are being taught, you don't know about the points. When you are being taught to be a girl, the lessons are simply accepted—the price you pay for your curves, your holes. It's only later, when you are older, after you've been taught, that you find out about the score sheet. Prior to that, it's just what happens when you are a girl. (115–116)

Based on this, each experience narrated is headlined as a “Lesson.” Notably, the descriptions of these lessons start with the place in which they occur. “Lesson One,” writes xTx, is introduced with an almost cliché, idyllic image, “We had a place in the country we'd go each summer, an old place on a half acre on the outskirts of a one-stoplight, white-trash town. Woods, river, and railroad tracks; free-range roaming, sunburn, snakes, tadpoles, crayfish, filth, mosquito bites” (116). As, at this point, it is clear that this seemingly idyllic place is not only a potential site of abuse but, in this narrative, the first place in which the author, as a young girl, experiences sexual harassment, its initial description already illustrates the ubiquity of the lessons laid out throughout the essay. With this opening place description, the overarching lesson is established: there is no safe place or movement for girls. In the first episode of the essay, the description of the idyllic summer setting continues,

I had made a same-age friend who lived with no father, two older brothers, and three sisters in a house too small for its ~~captors~~ [sic!] inhabitants. . . . We walked barefoot a lot. We swam in the river. We climbed trees. We made up adventures. We played dolls sometimes. We were tomboys but we were girls first. (116)

Establishing the lack of safety that being “girls first” connotes in xTx's text, the subsequent movements narrated are accompanied by a tension of imminent sexualized violence. A single sentence paragraph introduces this danger more concretely, “Her oldest brother liked to give me hugs” (116). While this tension first is resolved with the single-word paragraph “Adventures” (117), xTx then describes,

A fort down by the river. Fiberglass. Aluminum. Boards. Dirt. It had bunk beds. And boys. Her brothers. She brought me there one day. I was maybe seven. Now I wonder, did she lure me? Was this the plan all along? Adventures. They kissed her with tongue to show me how easy it was. ‘See? No big deal. Now you try it.’ I didn't want to try it. The fort was hot. The door was blocked. I didn't want this. Seven years old? Eight? Nine? Six? Which age makes it better? ‘Just do it!’ These weren't the words. These were the words. I was a child. I was scared. She said them too. Three against one. I didn't do it. They did it. I did nothing except endure my first lesson on how to be a girl. (117)

With the summary of this experience as the “first lesson on how to be a girl,” xTx establishes that albeit this incident is traumatic for her—indeed, a life-altering memory that would later

restrict her (own sense of) movement—it is also non-specific, having taught not only her that any place and movement may bring about dangerous, harmful, and, most importantly, shameful experiences but that this is an inescapable pattern experienced collectively among girls. In a subsection of the essay titled “*Summary*,” xTx turns to a second-person narration, writing, “Sometimes you will be forced into things you don’t want to do. . . . The way you are taught to be a girl will become how you are as a woman—a woman who is, at her core, not good enough, without worth, tarnished” (118). Ultimately, xTx ascribes “2? 3? 1?” “points” (118) to the experience, expressing uncertainty in how to judge the severity of this story. This re-emphasizes the now-established perspective that the incident described is an introduction not only to the essay but to xTx; it is an introduction that reframes her identity (as a girl) and any place, be it as simultaneously innocent (a theme important in the description of herself as a naïve, vulnerable girl) and mundane as “A fort down by the river,” a potential site of abuse. Foreshadowing further incidents of powerlessness and sexualized violence, the point system introduced signals that only the predictability and ubiquity of such incidents would even suggest sense-making in the attempt (and difficulty) to grade them.

Subsequently, “Lesson Two” follows and occurs at “[t]he same summer place. The back porch” (118). Narrating this experience also from a first-person perspective, the author, again, turns to a second-person narration in the subsection titled “*Summary*,” this time concluding that “If they want it, they can take it. What you want or don’t want is irrelevant (119). “Lesson Three” follows at “[t]he same summer place” (119). xTx describes being groped by a father’s friend while “watching cartoons. In a room. By myself” (119) and subsequently concludes that “If you do nothing, it’s your fault. . . . This is how you are ~~shamed~~ [sic!] shape into a woman” (120–121). These vignettes establish that the author laments that experiences of sexualized violence have altered not only her movements and identity through shame but that of other women as well. However, the author also makes clear that this shaping remains inevitable. The descriptions of the sites and situations of abuse show that, for girls, there is no escaping sexualized violence and, with that, there is also no escape to the debilitating “lessons” it instills.

While the stories establish the victim’s innocence, the summary reframes their inability to escape as shameful. xTx concludes “Lesson Five” by writing, “You could’ve left but you stayed. You wanted it and he knew. The ways we turn the gun to our own temple” (125). With the tension drawn between the ubiquity of sexualized violence established in each story—stories that heavily focus on the description of the seemingly non-threatening, mundane places in which sexualized violence occurs—and the inner speech in which the

victim addresses herself with increasing guilt, shame, and disappointment, the narrative constructs a dissolving of that tension only in the conclusion that the victim is consistently manipulated by a social structure that allows no other summary than the self-deprecating internal monologue presented.

The last summary concludes the author's and, with that, girls' defeatedness and defenselessness. xTx writes, "Men are strong. Also, see lesson summaries; 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5" (2018, 126). She draws this conclusion following the narration of being left alone in a car by her friend with an "older friend" she did not know when she was a teenager. The author concludes this vignette, writing only "We were in the backseat and ..." (126), leaving the narration seemingly unfinished, indicating clearly that the story is common enough to not need an ending in order to be understood. In a concluding section, xTx continues this implication, switching, again, to a second-person narrator while describing "the smaller" lessons that "aren't worth writing about" (126). For xTx, these include,

the 'sit on my lap uncle' who nuzzles your neck and won't let you down, calls his mustache 'a caterpillar'—'doesn't it tickle?'—the bouncer who frisks you slow and long and between your legs in a dark hallway when your group has already gone ahead into the club, the 'fuck you dumb bitch' when you tell him no . . . (126)

Despite the range in specificity of these examples, xTx frames these situations as commonly experienced and establishes an implied, assumed relatability that renders the description of these experiences as incontestable, needing no justification or further explanation of the implied devastating effects.

Throughout, the ubiquity of sexualized violence is established and foregrounds the debilitating effects it has on women on the level of their (social) identity. As each vignette moves from place to place or, as for the first few stories, stays in the same place, the victim's immobility in the sense of their acute and general inability to escape (the situation and sexualized violence as a whole, as it is ingrained in their gendered identity) becomes increasingly evident. Yet, xTx closes her essay by stating, "If all these boys, these men, had chosen to treat me as more than 'thing,' my scorecard would be empty right now. None of this was supposed to happen. Didn't have to happen. I wasn't supposed to have a score. None of us were" (128), offering the theoretical possibility of being able to move through the world as a woman without being sexually assaulted or harassed. Placed at the end of the narrative, this possibility, however, reads as a desire requiring an alternate reality. Yet, xTx makes clear that the description of ubiquity is not necessarily an establishment of inevitability. Making sexualized violence evitable are, for xTx, the male perpetrators that have rendered her not a subject and, with that, powerless. Consequently, in the absence of influence on that, the threat of sexualized violence throughout any of her movements lingers. This movement

is always gendered. Her essay makes unmistakably clear that there is no escaping her reality of walking through the world—of being placed—as a woman specifically.

Confinement, Silence, and Domestic Violence

On May 7, 2018, *The New Yorker* published an article in which four women, two of which remained anonymous, accused Eric Schneiderman of intimate partner violence. At the time, Schneiderman was Attorney General of New York but resigned hours after the article was published (J. Mayer and Farrow). During his time as Attorney General, he brought a civil lawsuit against Harvey Weinstein's company, The Weinstein Company, on the grounds of not sufficiently protecting employees against, among other things, sexual harassment. As *The New Yorker* article positions, Schneiderman was considered "an outspoken figure in the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment" (J. Mayer and Farrow). Because the allegations against him concerned not the workplace but his intimate relationships, they ignited another wave of public discussion about the role of domestic violence in the larger #MeToo movement (Dockterman; Gupta; Remnick). Upon his resignation as Attorney General, District Attorney Madeline Singas was assigned by the Governor of New York at the time, Andrew Cuomo, to serve as a special prosecutor for an investigation into the accusations against Schneiderman. Singas decided to not prosecute Schneiderman, stating "I believe the women who shared their experiences with our investigation team, however legal impediments, including statutes of limitations, preclude criminal prosecution" (Feuer). In response, Schneiderman published a statement in which he claims to "accept full responsibility for my conduct in my relationships with my accusers, and for the impact it had on them" (Feuer). One of the accusers, Michelle Barish, indicated in a tweet that she feels "completely vindicated by Eric Schneiderman's admission that he engaged in the abuse to which he subjected me and other women" (@MichelleBarish).

One of the women accusing Schneiderman, Tanya Selvaratnam, later published a memoir titled *Assume Nothing: A Story of Intimate Violence* about her experiences and her reckoning with being a victim of domestic/intimate partner violence and the process of publicizing the accusations. The memoir follows the publication of an op-ed in *The New York Times* in October 2018, in which Selvaratnam mainly focuses on the (emotionally devastating) aftermath of having publicly accused Schneiderman. She expresses a profound urge to conceal herself, apprehensive about her emotional well-being in the face of responses marked by disbelief, shaming, and defamation: "I wondered if he would come after me. I deleted my social media accounts, removed my name from the buzzer list at my building

and mailbox. I got a throwaway phone and made plans to leave the country for a few weeks” (Selvaratnam, “What Happened After I Shared My Story of Abuse by New York’s Attorney General”). Ultimately, Selvaratnam positions the experience as empowering as she places herself in a collective of other women who have been victims of intimate partner violence, a step that, according to her narrative, necessitates a resistance to retracting and, instead, voicing her experience publicly. This, for Selvaratnam, self-evidently includes “shame that comes from publicly exposing intimate details of my life.”

Upon the publication of Selvaratnam’s memoir, *The New York Times* featured another story about the memoir, pairing it with an exploration of Vanessa Springora’s memoir *Consent*. In it, journalist Katie Roiphe summarizes Selvaratnam’s story:

the slowly building feeling, amid moments of tenderness and excitement, that something is wrong. She can’t eat certain things, has to wear her hair a certain way, can’t sleep in her own apartment, can’t talk on the phone with friends. In the bedroom, he chokes and hits her, calls her his ‘brown slave.’ He slowly chips away at her; she must occupy a smaller and smaller space, even as her life is outwardly glamorous, functional.

Selvaratnam writes explicitly about this confinement to decreasing space. This applies both to the literal, straightforward management of space—“He kept confining me to narrower spaces while accusing me of taking up too much space. He wouldn’t let me install a second closet in the guest room, so my clothes were squeezed into a small space until eventually he let me hang some items in his closet” (*Assume Nothing* 34)—as well as to the figurative presence Schneiderman takes up in her life: “When I wasn’t around Eric and in his environment, there was more mental space for my intuition about him to kick in . . .” (66).

Throughout, Selvaratnam’s narrative notably focuses on her movements and, more specifically, her movements through places as impacted by the abuse. Selvaratnam draws a strong dichotomy between public and private spheres mostly to emphasize the contrast between Schneiderman as a celebrated male feminist in spheres in which he moved publicly and the controlling, abusive intimate partner she describes experiencing in private realms. This paints Selvaratnam’s private places, or at least the ones she shares with Schneiderman, as the primary sites of abuse while the public, specifically the notion of sharing her experience of abuse (both in terms of voicing them and also in coming to the understanding that she is not Schneiderman’s sole victim), connotes a sense of safety. She writes, for instance,

After we returned to the United States, I felt another series of dark pivots in our relationship. By that point, I was essentially living with him. I had gradually taken more and more of my belongings from my apartment to his place. We talked about possibly staying at my place some nights, spending a weekend downtown, but he said it would take too much coordination because of his need for security. My building had twenty-four-hour guards, and I told him he could have his own security detail outside. But that didn’t make a difference. We never stayed at my place. I missed my life downtown, the

ease of contact with my support network of friends and collaborators, but he didn't want me out of his sight. (32)

Selvaratnam tells a story of linearly increasing abuse that confines her to her abuser, gradually narrowing her possibilities of resistance by controlling her movement. It is, as Selvaratnam herself prefaces her narrative, a tale of “the classic stages that structure intimate partner violence, stages that many victims go through: entrapment, isolation, control, demeaning, and abuse” (11). In its first parts, the memoir is also structured along these “classic stages.” To add to the process in which Selvaratnam implicitly and, at times, explicitly justifies herself to the reader, already responding to anticipated disbelief, includes statistics or excerpts from popular science writings on domestic violence. About these frequent excursions, Katie Roiphe argues that Selvaratnam’s “defensiveness speaks to the arduousness of this kind of revelation, the fact that it is going against not just entrenched power structures, but some formidable internal dictate of decorum or pride.”

As Selvaratnam also places herself among other prominent #MeToo stories and details many bonding experiences with acquaintances and strangers over sharing similar stories of abuse, she positions her story as general to the point of foregoing a narration of her emotions. Selvaratnam makes clear that her emotional response is not only common but psychologically predictable given the nature of Schneiderman’s abuse (and her childhood trauma of domestic violence she also somewhat tangentially addresses throughout) (*Assume Nothing* 11; 36). As she writes, for instance, “Demeaning behavior in the workplace has its own negative psychological repercussions. Such behavior in the home, in a romantic situation, is suffocating. With Eric, I sometimes felt as though he was trying to crush me, if not kill me, with his demeaning behavior” (51). The specific effect the narrated abuse has on her is, according to Selvaratnam’s story here, both her personal experience as well as a simple fact. Lingering throughout is the omnipresent acknowledgment that “[w]omen are blamed for staying and blamed for fighting back. They’re blamed for getting into the relationship in the first place” (76).

The way Selvaratnam narrates her (shared) home, the main site of abuse, mirrors the clear assessment that she supports with research on domestic violence: “The most dangerous place in the world for a woman is her own home” (81). In Selvaratnam’s narrative, this danger is connected to secrecy. The home she narrates remains enclosed because until Selvaratnam is confronted with the notion that Schneiderman’s abuse may be a pattern, thus extending beyond the limits of their particular domestic setting, the place in which the abuse occurs renders any ability to voice it and, with that, increase the possibilities of movement,

impossible. For instance, this becomes clear in Selvaratnam's narration of the abuse that occurred in a sexualized context:

When he first slapped me in the face while we were making love, it happened in the blink of an eye. No man had ever done that to me. He seemed to be testing me. I didn't know what to do. I tried to make sense of it. We had been dating for about six weeks, and I thought of him as a meditator, someone who espoused spirituality and who fought on behalf of vulnerable people. At that moment, I became aware that he could inflict great harm on me. Over time, the slaps got harder and began to be accompanied by demands. . . . He would slap me until I agreed to call him 'Master' or 'Daddy.' He recounted his fantasies of finding me somewhere far away to be his slave, his 'brown girl.' I wondered what he called his previous girlfriends. . . . A few times, he put his hands around my throat and tried to choke me. . . . I tolerated the situation because it was disorienting and so disconnected from the person he presented in public. (41–42)

Selvaratnam positions this non-consensual experience as outside of the realm of the publicly known Schneiderman that other people “[approach] as if he were the Second Coming” (37). In this narrative, the setting of the abuse—the home—is positioned as the principal condition that renders Selvaratnam immobile against it because, as she narrates, she does not recognize it as abuse and, crucially, does not recognize Schneiderman as a perpetrator because of his appearance as a public figure. So, without a perpetrator, the abuse becomes unrecognizable to the victim and, consequently, cannot be resisted.

Despite Selvaratnam's neat dichotomy, this distinction reveals fractions. Ultimately, the narration of Schneiderman depends on the construction of a particular public that worships him. Moreover, though, this perception greatly influences Selvaratnam beyond the realms of the public places through which they jointly move—in which she experiences him being “[approached] as if he were the Second Coming” or, quite simply, literally applauded. About witnessing this, Selvaratnam writes, “I heard the applause when Eric spoke, and I got swept up in it. Applause can be blinding” (49) as part of the answer to the question she poses seemingly on behalf of the reader “But why was I staying with Eric?” (49). Selvaratnam's memoir in large parts serves to answer this question in a quest for justification. On this quest, she makes it clear that there is no neat separation between Schneiderman as a public figure and him as an intimate partner despite a nearby “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” comparison (43). As Selvaratnam positions the allure of Schneiderman as the reason she first did not recognize his abuse as such and later as (part of) the emotional strain of leaving the relationship and (publicly) processing having been a victim of intimate partner violence, a process Selvaratnam considers a now permanent condition (174), the spatial separation that render the abuse specific is blurred. Selvaratnam's narration, however, heavily relies on this specificity. Through the process of Selvaratnam's writing (of both the memoir, her op-ed, and her contribution to the initial public accusation), the figure of Schneiderman is altered, enabling the narration that takes place in the memoir. With the movement of abuse both

narrated and experienced as seemingly private into a public discussion, the distinction drawn here breaks down.

Therefore, the site of abuse in Selvaratnam's story is crucial because it enables the practices of abuse but it remains, in the narration, otherwise unaltered by the abuse. In Selvaratnam's narration, danger lies in (a sense of) confinement through Schneiderman's abuse. However, her home, a place she does not share with Schneiderman, remains a symbol of liberation. She attaches neither trauma nor a sense of confinement to the notion of home in general. Instead, any escape from Schneiderman, enabled either by (free) movement through public places or a seemingly or almost autonomous retraction to her own place in which she describes exercising both control and, through that, (re)discovering an alternate perspective on Schneiderman, is crucial to recognizing and resisting the abuse. Selvaratnam writes,

Toward the end of our relationship, when I was mostly staying at my own apartment, I had to go by his place to pick up my Massachusetts General Hospital ID card; I was about to leave for my annual follow-up CT scan. When I walked in, I saw him with more open eyes. Now that I had distance and more objectivity, I saw less of the mask that had kept me with him. I asked how he was doing, meaning on an emotional level, and he prattled on about his poll numbers being down and his fund-raising goals being off. He seemed hollow.

He said he was trying to be mindful of making me feel bad about myself. A few minutes later, he asked if I was wearing perfume. I said yes. He said it was 'strong,' in a negative way. I had on the same perfume I had always worn, the one he had usually said he loved.

Intimate partner violence tends to happen in the shadows, behind closed doors, cloaked in secrecy. As Evan Stark explained, 'Without an 'audience' for their victimization, the 8 to 10 million women experiencing coercive control in the United States remain in a twilight zone, disconnected and undocumented.' . . . (55–56)

Having regained the ability to move beyond her shared place with Schneiderman is, for Selvaratnam here, the requirement for his allure to fade enough to disrupt the cycle of abuse. Although Selvaratnam describes recognizing the crucial shift in perspective through an interim absence from Schneiderman and, most importantly, seemingly free movement that this absence enabled, in the moment she steps back into his apartment, there is no narration of the spatiality, mirroring the hollowness with which Selvaratnam narrates viewing Schneiderman. As Selvaratnam's perspective shifts to the point of disrupting the place of intimate partner violence as merely "in the shadows, behind closed doors, cloaked in secrecy" and now, in the process of being read as a memoir, clearly with "an audience," the site of abuse—the restriction—is losing its significance.

In Selvaratnam's narrative, the place itself is not a site of trauma. Instead, Selvaratnam narrates restriction and, mainly, an inability to share her story as core aspects of what enables the specific violence she experiences. Further, she writes,

Before I met Eric, I often considered what I would do if I were attacked by a man. I had envisioned situations in which I might be ambushed, either in the woods near my place in Portland, Oregon, or walking down a dark street to my apartment in New York City. I imagined that I would start screaming like a banshee, kick the guy in the balls, yell at the top of my lungs, and flail my arms around as if I were possessed.

But here I was acquiescing to abuse in the home, at the hands of someone I knew. (75)

The dissonance in anticipated possibilities to experience violence (the conviction that one can practice some sort of resistance) and the then experienced violence, resulting in a crisis of self-perception, is the meaningful specificity to the site of abuse in Selvaratnam's story. With this narration, the places of abuse themselves—Schneiderman's apartment and, in the context of the sexualized violence narrated, his bedroom—are not relevant as they remain undescribed despite being specified. What Selvaratnam ultimately puts forth is that in her story of domestic violence, the place in which she was abused is, first and foremost, about confinement. So, as she performs a dissolution of this confinement, so does her site of abuse dissolve.

“If You Don’t Want to Be a Victim, Don’t Go to the Hotel Room”: The Power of Place

While the #MeToo movement has most crucially once again illustrated that sexualized violence is not confined to any one place, countering the possibility that displacement (a lack of certain movements through certain places) may actually result in (increased) safety, the high-profile #MeToo cases that have circulated media outlets have incited discussions about one particular site of abuse: the ominous hotel room. The use of hotels as (dubious) sites for business meetings has, since the #MeToo movement, become somewhat inextricable from Harvey Weinstein. What is now explained as a (challenged albeit enduring) common practice in certain industries read, to many people unfamiliar with this line-blurring, seemingly widespread Hollywood business practice, as notably strange: holding meetings in a large, luxurious apartment rented as a hotel room. Emblematic of a ‘victim-blaming’ cultural script that has been discussed in anti-rape advocacy work since its advent, the victims who accused Weinstein of sexual assault in a hotel room found themselves needing to justify their participation as soon as the story reaches the point of them entering a hotel room. For Weinstein's victims, this setting was either unsurprising or unsettling to the point of confusion but not retraction because 1) Weinstein was not the only producer to hold meetings in what is culturally understood as a somewhat domestic setting or 2) the versatility of hotel facilities allowed for an imaginary of a nevertheless professional setting.

In the #MeToo cases that name Weinstein as the perpetrator, the hotel room is not merely coincidentally a common site of abuse. Rather, “Weinstein had a *modus operandi*: inviting women into a hotel room or going to one of theirs, offering to help them with their movie career, asking for a massage, pressuring them for sex, remaining in contact afterward” (Hagerty). While Weinstein was, in most cases due to his professional status, already in a position of power over his victims, he solidified this power imbalance by situating his victims into a place that, albeit temporarily, is codified as *his* while also establishing a forced familiarity with the victim through having them enter his space. Further, a notion of privacy facilitated the assault, allowing it to proceed without interruption. Caroline Field Levander and Matthew Pratt Guterl contend that,

When a door and a doorway might otherwise draw the eye into another room and suggest what lies beyond the threshold, the boring blank, heavy, soundproof, and fireproof hotel room door, in the end, is a signal of the machine’s commitment to truly private space, so long as the bill is paid up. What happens behind that door is, truly, nobody’s business. (45)

It is this assumption that allowed Weinstein to move his act of workplace-related sexualized violence into a domestic setting. While the victims did not choose to enter a non-working relationship with him, their entering into a specific place Weinstein constructed for this very purpose reframes the abuse to suggest an artificial familiarity. As many victim accounts have testified since, this initiation then marked the starting point of being forced into interactions with Weinstein, including sexualized violence.

Hotels and hotel rooms have invited many conceptualizations that point to their seemingly specific hybridity. They make unmistakably evident what is true of other places that one may claim ownership of as well: “. . . [W]e dwell in a room not because it is our room, but because it becomes our room when we live in it” (van Lennep 209). Further, “the hotel signifies both the transitory and the stationary” (Finkelstein and Lynch 65). Evoking a façade of domesticity and promise of safety and privacy, hotels are also shared places in and through which interactions revealing cultural power dynamics occur. This is true of, for instance, labor relations, performances of social status, capitalistic consumption rituals, and (work-related) practices of inclusion and exclusion. As part of travel, hotels may function to perform a “staged authenticity” while, simultaneously, being saturated “with items whose function is to evoke the familiar and comfortable” (Finkelstein and Lynch 61). Bridging a tension between satisfying a need for adventure or change of scenery and enough familiarity to suggest a promise of safety, the hotel room, for a traveler, is “the pseudo-home, the temporary substitute home, built by anonymous architects but remade in a familiar, private, domestic mode by each new occupant” (61–62).

Yet, hotel rooms are not only used by travelers. As with any place, its meaning does not depend on its architectural purpose but on the practices that construct it. Perhaps most obviously, hotels are also a place of employment. The power dynamics embedded and ritually performed in service work become evident in hotels through the routines that aim to make the type of labor that goes into establishing domestic escapism entirely invisible (Brody 22; Sherman 44). This supposed invisibility is, of course, part of the constructed allure of hotel rooms that appear, at the same time, domestic/familiar and detached/adventurous:

In this room for which I do not bear any responsibility, . . . in that I merely appear in it as a number in an arbitrary series, I suddenly become freed of my obligations and traditions. I find myself transformed through the anonymity of the hotel room. . . . My hotel room on the other hand will be taken care of by an anonymous maid who will ‘take’ everything or at least almost everything and whom perhaps I will never see again. (van Lennep 213)

The ambiguous setting enables a unique experience, one that fosters a sense of comfort and familiarity, while simultaneously relieving individuals of domestic responsibilities. With the discreet redistribution of labor, intended to remain invisible to the guest, the hotel room, as a place, constructs the potential for homely anonymity

Prior to entering a hotel room, one walks through the hotel’s places that are permanently shared and not unique to hotels like bars, restaurants, or gyms, rendering the seemingly private hotel room a personal retreat. Nevertheless, the walk through these places is also a reminder that the place one establishes as a personal retreat through the practices that are permissible only within this place that promises privacy and safety is only temporarily personal and particularly fragile. With these dynamics, hotels and hotel rooms point to the possibility of “[t]he experience of privacy in the public domain” (Finkelstein and Lynch 64) and perhaps a key example of the fragility of these notions.

Levander and Guterl illustrate the flexibility of a place’s meaning with a simple allusion to *Pretty Woman* and *Maid in Manhattan*, underlining that “there is nothing surprising in the fact that hotels and the kinds of flexible spaces they offer guests and workers can effect transformations that are life changing—transformations, for example, of sex workers and domestics into ladies who lunch” (13). Further, they argue that,

[hotels] can be a palace, a home, an outpost, a refuge, a grim factory, a den of iniquity, a veritable slave pen, and sometimes all of these things at once. . . . Eugene O’Neill’s famous final utterance—‘born in a hotel room, and God damn it, die in a hotel room’—recognizes the hotel’s ability to move seamlessly from birthing room to hospice shows the hotel to be a place of privilege and power, a site of ritual relations and wildly unpredictable encounters, a pageant ground for the enactment of race, class, and gender, and a regulated transfer station for human traffic and capital movement. (14)

It is specifically the hotel room’s versatility despite its apparent stability that defines it. Within the described scope of functions it can adapt, the hotel room depends on its clearly

determined and practiced boundaries to uphold the sense of familiarity crucial to its resembling of a (temporary) personal, domestic site.

Alcoff points out that, culturally, “[c]onsent is defined merely sometimes as the absence of a ‘no,’ sometimes as requiring an explicit affirmation, and sometimes by behavior alone or even by one’s dress or location (such as a hotel room)” (83). It is this understanding that Weinstein’s attorney Donna Rotunno evokes when she states, “If you don’t want to be a victim, don’t go to the hotel room” (qtd. in Hagerty). Framing the entering of the hotel room as already consenting to a sexual relationship, Rotunno discounts Weinstein’s construction of a misleading situation in which the location facilitates his tactics of coercion. In Rotunno’s statement, the hotel room is not a place that may be a site of business interaction but always an intimate place, the entering of which suggests an awareness of a now-established intimacy. Here, in her function as Weinstein’s attorney, Rotunno evokes a myopic understanding of the versatility of places. Of course, her argument also clearly misses the inarguable reality that entering into any place—entirely regardless of the supposed intimacy this entering may suggest—does not inherently signify unequivocal and immutable consent to engage in sexual relations.

The faux-intimacy of the hotel room as the site of abuse lends itself to a narrative suggesting a more complex personal interaction between the perpetrator and victim, at least following Weinstein’s legal defense team’s narrative as exemplified by Rotunno’s statement. The mediatization of Weinstein’s crimes has made clear that the location renders the assaults not primarily acts of sexualized violence in the workplace but, in part, domestic violence, pointing to a seemingly complex relationship between Weinstein and (some of) his victims. With this, a barrier of public interest is evoked. However, this was quickly revoked in Weinstein’s case as his status as a public figure as well as the prominence of some of the women who accused him rendered the stories not only newsworthy but also ripe for voyeuristic consumption.

For the victims of sexualized violence that occurred in a hotel room, this temporarily private, isolated space did not symbolize safety. Rather, the notion that, indeed, “[w]hat happens behind that door is, truly, nobody’s business” (Levander and Guterl 45) is what renders the entering of a hotel room a potentially dangerous act. Further, in the case of Weinstein’s abuse, the victims did not expect to enter a private place. In fact, they did not enter a private place. Prior to being met by Weinstein in a bathrobe, the place that is about to be entered is agreed to be a professional site. Weinstein does not transform it into an intimate place. Rather, he constructs a permanent site of abuse. In the retelling of these cases,

the hotel room might morph into a place suggesting intimacy that should have acted as a warning signal. However, in the interaction between Weinstein and the victim, there is no intimacy that renders the place they interact in intimate. Throughout, it is Weinstein, as the perpetrator, who takes full control in determining the meaning of the place, thus utilizing the location to stabilize the power dynamics that are uneven from the very beginning and further solidify through the assault. In a heavily media-effective moment, prosecutor Marlene Martinez stated about Weinstein, “For this predator, hotels were his trap” (Beckett).

However, in the autobiographical narration of Weinstein’s assault, the victim authors the story and, with that, also constructs the hotel room that Weinstein rendered a site of abuse. It is this practice that grants permanence to the place, remaining a site of abuse, trauma and loss of agency even after it ceases to be the place Weinstein established. As narrations of it are witnessed/read/listened to, the place remains, although now with the authorship of the victim. The perhaps most prominent example of this is Rose McGowan’s memoir *Brave*.

McGowan titles the chapter in which she narrates being assaulted by Weinstein in a hotel “Death of Self.” She describes walking into a hotel, expecting to meet Weinstein downstairs until being told “that the Studio Head was stuck on a call, working from the office in his suite, and that I was meant to go up and wait” (117). Upon narrating her move to Weinstein’s hotel room, McGowan includes a justification to implicit criticism of her being willing to meet Weinstein in a seemingly intimate/non-professional setting:

When most people hear ‘hotel room,’ they imagine a bed, dresser, and little bathroom. The Monster’s hotel room was the entire floor of the hotel. Probably about three thousand square feet, like an average- to large-size house, definitely not the small hotel room the mind conjures. (118)

Without any detailed description, the emphasis on the sheer size of the hotel room already interrupts an envisioning of an intimate place.

McGowan’s movement through the place—first the hotel and then Weinstein’s hotel room—underlines the uneven power dynamic between them. She writes, “I went inside, and into the largest living room I had ever seen, and there my boss was, the Studio Head himself, on one end of a huge couch, talking loudly on the phone. He gestured for me to sit down” (118). Not only does Weinstein’s house-sized hotel room unmistakably signal wealth, but his ability to subtly dictate McGowan’s movement, as narrated by her, establishes his power. This continues as McGowan describes, “At about 10:30 a.m. we wrapped up the meeting and he said he’d walk me out . . . I exited the living room and walked down a hallway. Walking behind me, his huge size seemed even more overwhelming” (120).

At the time of the publication of McGowan’s memoir, several (including McGowan’s) public accusations about Weinstein had already been heavily reported on, enough so for

media outlets to conclude a pattern to Weinstein's abuse. McGowan narrates one example of what the reader already knows to be a strategic procedure, something McGowan also acknowledges, arguing that "... this hideous beast had a long track record of preying on young women. Turns out even in 1997, this was an open secret in the industry" (119). So, McGowan's narrations that solidify her inferiority to Weinstein in terms of wealth, social status, knowledge of and influence on the entertainment industry as well as physically read as anticipated responses to questions about her resistance to Weinstein's assault. Notably, McGowan had already faced and responded to these expressions of disbelief following her public and media-effective accusations against Weinstein and continued to after the publication of her memoir. While the justifications for her powerlessness appear as a response to non-specific expressions of disbelief, these expressions are, situating the memoir as part of McGowan's public presence, specific.

The ensuing narration of the assault further emphasizes McGowan's lack of agency: an inability to act or move.

'This is the Jacuzzi room.' I didn't know what to do, so I politely looked in and told him it looked nice. I had no idea why I was being stopped to look at a Jacuzzi when we all know what they look like. I made the appropriate you have a nice Jacuzzi sounds. It's superhot and humid. I feel a hand on my back and it pushes me farther into the tiny, dark, incredibly hot room. Everything at this point happens so quickly, and yet so slowly. I'm confused as to why I'm in this room. I can't breathe. He is standing right in front of me, taking all the space in the wood-paneled room. It all happens so fast. My clothes are getting peeled off me. I back into the wall, but there's nowhere to go. I freeze, like a statue. I don't know what's happening; my sweater is being pulled over my head and his hand pulls my pants down. He bends over and pulls my shoes off. I am now naked. This all happened in the space of about thirty seconds, it feels like. . . . I'm picked up and placed on the edge of the Jacuzzi. I am naked, up to my knees in the hot water. I curl into myself. I did what so many who experience trauma do, I disassociated and left my body. I went up above myself. He gets in the water with a large splash. He pushes me up against the wall. My knees are pressed together. He places his hands on them and pushes my legs apart. I am open wide to a monster. Literally more naked than I have ever been. He places his monster face between my legs. Alarms keep blaring in my head, *Wake up, Rose; wake up, Rose*. But I was frozen like a statue if the statue's legs had been spread wide. (120–22)

Here, McGowan narrates something that is happening *to* her not only without her consent but also without her (cognitive) presence. The passive voice foregrounds de-placing/her placelessness in these moments as opposed to the perpetrator's actions. While McGowan narrates this experience from her perspective, her narration unveils that there is hardly any perspective from which to narrate; so, her lack of agency emphasizes her inability to resist. At this point, Weinstein's seemingly limitless power over her is implicit in her powerlessness. With this shift of emphasis, it becomes clear that Weinstein does not merely possess power but exercises it, gaining it from McGowan's lack thereof.

While McGowan writes about the dissociation that is evident in her authoring of the story, her visual perspective remains unspecific. Instead, she alludes to specific performances of memory.

Anybody who's a sexual assault victim will tell you: the trauma does strange things to your sense of time, your memory. There are details you remember with uncanny accuracy—the shape of the tiles, the yellow quality of the light, the obscene bulbousness of a nose out of all proportion to the rest of a face—and then there are gaps in the timeline where there's nothing, nothing. Every second extends for a hellish eternity, but it all happens in a flash. And your life is never the same. My life was never going to be the same. Detached from my body, I hover up under the ceiling, watching myself sitting on the edge of the tub, against a wall, held in place by the Monster whose face is between my legs, trapped by a beast. In this tiny room with this huge man, my mind is blank. (122)

Bringing into question not only skewed memories but, along with that, a warped sense of time, McGowan places her experience of memorizing amidst a collective, drawing on an unspecific validation of it. As she states, the unclear sense of time and inconsistent memory she narrates are not merely her experience but ratified by “anybody who’s a sexual assault victim” and, with that, universal. McGowan’s narration does not reveal if the “uncanny accuracy” in memories she alludes to is hers or merely examples. This vagueness renders her specific experience irrelevant, at this point, rather indicating the universality of sexualized violence broadly and its profound effects on not only one’s memory or sense of time but also one’s sense of self. It also indicates the extent of Weinstein’s abuse specifically as other victims may or may not remember “the shape of the tiles, the yellow quality of the light, the obscene bulbousness of a nose out of all proportion to the rest of a face.”

McGowan’s explanation of her warped sense of time in these moments also brings attention to the fact that she narrates her assault in present tense. She establishes that the (fragmented) memories of the assault remain present, having permanently altered her sense of time. As this is embedded in McGowan’s continuous narration of her inability to move in the glimpses she narrates, the remaining presence of the assault suggests the remaining presence of this inability to move and, with that, act. Nevertheless, the narration disrupts her inability to comprehend the assault at the moment as she, in the writing of it, dismantles it. In it, she answers the questions she narrates having at the moment, “I try to make sense of what the fuck is going on. How did I get pulled into this position and pushed up against this wall? When did my clothes come off?” (122), drawing a permeable line between the continued presence of the assault and the assault in the moment of its presence. McGowan alludes to the permeability of this line when she describes that she “replay[s] what happened over and over” (123).

Here, the place McGowan narrates reveals the same permeability. Through her writing, the site of abuse performs a certain permanency, grounding the life-altering occurrence that

McGowan narrates. This permanency is practiced by McGowan's narration of the permanency of the devastation and trauma caused by the assault. As she puts it simply, "[e]very second extends for a hellish eternity, but it all happens in a flash. And your life is never the same. My life was never going to be the same." Through this trauma, McGowan remains in the place in which she was abused. Her presence here is a specific one, as she establishes herself as not being fully in place during the assault. Through the non-autonomous movement that led up to this moment and the forceful, albeit non-violent, disempowerment Weinstein exercises, McGowan makes clear that her lack of agency displaced her. So, in the authoring of the assault, McGowan only claims her presence in the place to the extent that she now has the ability to author it and, with that, transcend her voicelessness in the moment. The de-placing/her placelessness, however, persists. Clearly, the framing of this experience as the "death of self" also underlines this.

Having walked into the hotel with an expectation of safety (and publicness), McGowan here describes herself in a setting entirely dictated by Weinstein to the point that her movement in it is completely passive. McGowan narrates herself in a room where she is not really taking place, not even in her narration. Ultimately, she does not dissolve this. While she acknowledges that practice of remembering and, in writing, memorializing the site of abuse in excessive detail, reclaiming a sense of cognition in an experience that she summarizes with the "death of self," McGowan does not perform it. She mentions remembering details but forgoes describing them. With that, the place here is not hers.

This narration emphasizes her lack of control in being part of Weinstein's assault and, with that, brings into question the notion of control and agency in the first place. As McGowan writes a story in which she, at no point, could prevent or avoid the assault, the assault perpetrated by Weinstein marks not the beginning of a lack of control but the unveiling of it. McGowan's narration of her non-autonomous movements through the hotel—first subtly, directly by a manager, concierge, assistant, and Weinstein and, ultimately, forcefully by both Weinstein and, in moments, no one in particular as her body is simply no longer a part of her—frame this unveiling.

Yet, McGowan inevitably constructs a literary setting, albeit quite vague and obscure. This tension is crucial here: the construction of a place symbolizing the placelessness and immobility that come with the narration of being sexually violated. While McGowan practices a performance of empowerment later in her memoir, she does not directly dissolve this tension. Instead, she reemphasizes her lack of agency in her movement when she writes, "My life has been rerouted. I just got hijacked" (123). Throughout, it becomes evident that

McGowan does not establish the notion of an agency to ‘win back.’ The hotel room that Weinstein rendered McGowan’s site of abuse remains entirely outside of her control. More so: it remains a symbol of her lack of control and, involuntarily, a part of her story. As the assault further unveils a lack of agency to begin with, McGowan narrates a construction of it. Notably, she grounds this construction in the practice of speaking out about her experience of sexualized violence, ultimately concluding that “I’m at a pretty great place. I have enjoyed becoming braver and braver” (247). With that, as McGowan credits her speaking out, rejecting any shame of having been assaulted, as the reason for being in a ‘pretty great place,’ McGowan ultimately renders the literary construction of the place in which she was abused—the specificities of which are fundamental to explaining her inability to prevent or resist it—as part of her performance of empowerment.

“Somewhere on This Planet, a Man Is Touching a Woman to Death”: Places and Sites of Abuse

Myriam Gurba starts her memoir *Mean* with a call to not only imagine but “become a spot.” Specifically, she invites the reader to become a place:

Let’s become that park.
Let’s absorb and drip. We’re damp grains of earth. We’re grass purged of color. We’re baseball bleachers. We’re November’s darkness. We’re the baseball diamond’s sediment. We host Little League games by daylight. By dark, we become an Aztec altar.
We open our eyes. We allow them to adjust to the place and things described. (1)

As perhaps already indicated by the sharp contrast drawn, the park described in a personified manner is both generic—replaceable—and a specific setting. Gurba’s description indicates that parks like these are common enough to not need further descriptions of their particular spatiality to be understood. Rather, the various functions that alter them are their defining characteristics.

Staying within the notion of a personified park, Gurba continues to establish an eerie atmosphere that puts forth a self-evident familiarity while becoming increasingly specific:

Nothing squeaks or whimpers.
Nothing hums.
In a tunnel beneath the bleachers, a gopher daydreams. Roots sigh. Earthworms blindly go about their business.
A dark-haired girl walks alone.
Her foot falls onto the grass. We see up her skirt. She’s not wearing underwear, so we can see that special part of her. It’s the hole Persephone fell into.
Some swine fell down it too. (1)

The narration—a story of a Mexican woman being raped and murdered in the park—continues with the tone of a detached observer: the park itself, as established in the introductory imagination. The narrator makes clear that “We may feel that because we are

privy to the wreckage she belongs to us too, but she does not” (2). Albeit observing or even hosting this violence, the park—we, at this moment—remain seemingly uninvolved vis-à-vis the rapist who not only feels a sense of belonging over his victim (“Wrecking her makes him feel like she belongs to him” [2]) but, in the act of rape, claims it.

As the park is privy to the rapists’ thoughts and desires while the victim’s emotions remain unnarrated, it appears complicit. Although it remains seemingly non-participating, the personified park is neither disinterested nor entirely uninvolved. The victim’s first calls are not left unreplied-to. Rather, “Silence responds” (1). After a break in the story visually supported by a dinkus, Gurba writes, “A newscaster described the murder as ‘the bludgeoning death of a transient in Oakley Park’” (3). This statement indicates the importance of the park, the naming of which was given precedence over the naming or description of the victim. So, Gurba comments,

This description is cruel. It reduces her to transience, as if she personified it, and it ignores her name. Her name matters. It’s a word that philosophers fall in love with. It appears many times in the Bible: Sophia (3).

Sophia becomes a recurring theme in Gurba’s memoir. She is the figure of a ghost Gurba describes being haunted by. Although implied throughout, the connection between this “death of a transient in Oakley Park” and Gurba’s life remains unexplained throughout most of the memoir. Before the connection is explicitly drawn, the park and the notion of an altered place, which is personified and, with that, granted more subjectivity than the entirely disempowered victim through the retelling of the story, returns. Gurba writes,

You never know what spaces might turn into graves. It felt bad—OK, sickening—when I realized I’d partied on her grave, but you just never know if you’re standing on a spot where someone has been or will be beaten to death. It’s cheesy, but sometimes my concerns about the history of violence taint everything, even Shakespeare. That quote ‘All the world’s a stage’ becomes ‘All the world’s a grave.’

I tossed empty bottles on her grave before it became her grave. I was allowed to escape. I was allowed to walk away from that spot.

Sophia was not. Guilt is a ghost. Guilt interrupts narratives. It does so impolitely. Ghosts have no etiquette. What do they need it for? There is no Emily Post for ghosts. (54)

Because sexualized violence can not only theoretically happen anywhere but does, in fact, happen everywhere, the park becomes a mere symbol for any place as any place is a site of abuse. Before concluding that “‘All the world’s a grave,’” Gurba had already reminded the reader that “[s]omewhere on this planet, a man is touching a woman to death. Somewhere on this planet, a man is about to touch a woman to death” (33). Yet, the notion that places seamlessly change their meaning from the park that hosts both rape and Little League games to the spot in that park on which people party and are murdered is, in Gurba’s narrative, not

merely somewhat sinister but symbolic for the ease with which (sexualized) violence (against women) is treated.

Gurba later reveals her personal connection to Sophia's rape, one that is already hinted at with the description of (survivor's) guilt in the passage quoted above. In Gurba's memoir, a story that is indicated to be about rape, specifically, a rape the narrator experiences, begins with a detailed description of the narrator's seemingly mundane movement through a seemingly irrelevant place:

I walked along the edge of the library parking lot, kicking magnolia pods out of my way. My black heels clicked. I turned the corner. Chemicals from the pool where I'd learned to swim freshened the air. I looked to my right. I sneered. The DMV. (107)

Following the stream-of-consciousness of an inner monologue, the story is then interrupted with the simple indication that "[h]ere comes a classic moment" (108) and the subsequent explanation that "[a] possessive part of me wants to hoard this story" (108). Throughout, however, more and more seemingly scattered statements, at times separated by dinkuses, move the narration closer to an autobiographical story of rape.

Further explaining the "classic moment" indicated, Gurba writes, "Stranger rape is like the *Mona Lisa*. It's exquisite, timeless, and archetypal. It's classic. I can't help but think of it as the Coca-Cola of sex crimes" (110). The narrative is then, again, interrupted by what is headlined as "A BOOK WITHIN A BOOK: THE SHORT, MEAN LIFE OF SOPHIA TORRES PROLOGUE" (112). Gurba prefaces this with the distancing statement, "I'm unqualified to tell the story of Sophia Torres, but since she's dead, so is she" (112). In this interlude, Gurba explains, "The man who's about to sexually assault me murdered Sophia Torres. That's how I sort of know her" (112). In a later chapter, Gurba then narrates the story of having been raped by the same perpetrator that murdered Sophia Torres.

This story is the catalyst for Gurba's experience of places. She writes,

I used to love the houses in that neighborhood. Covered in jasmine and ivy. They were so beautiful. *The Secret Garden*. My secret garden. After he touched me, it seemed like every fragrant bush might be holding him. He might be hiding inside that bougainvillea. He might be disguised as a butterfly or a hummingbird. Why hadn't I noticed him before?

Because he was everywhere.

I walked past the gray house where I was babysat in elementary school.

My feet crossed the street. Loaves hung in place of my arms. These limbs felt less mine than the rest of me, which also felt less mine. I was losing myself in degrees.

These sidewalks were so familiar. It amplified my horror that I'd spent much of my childhood walking them. (120)

Here, Gurba constructs the places through which she moves as somewhat stable. In the midst of pervasive anxiety forced upon her through having been raped, the places she narrates remain the same. Yet, her experience of these places changes. Mainly, her sense of safety is altered. The threat, Gurba describes, has always been present but gone unnoticed by her.

Now, however, the places that stand in connection to the assault are both seemingly unaltered and, at the same time, changed in their function. In Gurba's story, they function not merely as memories of a specific incidence of sexualized violence but primarily as symbols for the omnipresence of the threat of sexualized violence. With that, her memories prior to the assault also do not remain untouched by it.

In this narration, there is a notion of profound placelessness. Although the places remain the same and have always been the same, her changed experience, which is forced upon her by the perpetrator, renders her experience of walking through places entirely colored both by traumatic memories of the assault as well as the awareness that the threat of sexualized violence has been omnipresent, disallowing any possibility of autonomously experiencing a place. Gurba writes,

Since I wasn't me, I don't know who was walking.

I don't know who was walking along those pretty houses, down the streets lined with pepper trees. (120)

In an obvious paradox to the first-person narration of places, Gurba mirrors the affective removal from the places through which she walks that is constructed in the story by also removing herself as a narrator from the narration. This description of disassociation underscores that, in Gurba's narrative, there is no way to exist in places, including the ones that have connotated personal memories predating the assault, after having been sexually violated by a stranger in public. This is also mirrored in the dichotomy between the places as both unchanged and changed. Her drastically altered experience of these places holds no relevance for the narration of their occurrence. Having been victimized there, Gurba's writing about sites of abuse places her powerlessness.

While the places that, to her, are sites of abuse are constructed with a sense of stability, remaining untouched by the violence they have witnessed, Gurba describes that her experience of any place is now colored by her trauma.

You never predict that rapists are lurking in the sun, sky, and trees. In other words, humans are as they seem. Seeming is real. After a stranger ambushes you and assails your private parts, everything becomes new. Everything is reborn. Everything takes on a new hue, the color of rape. You look at the world through rape-tinted glasses. You understand that you live in a world where getting classically raped is possible and that classical rapists lurk everywhere, even in impossible places. Like, is that a moth or is that a rapist? Is there a rapist hiding in that fresh-cut bouquet of sunflowers? Is that a rapist in your pocket or are you just happy to see me? It's a nerve-racking proposition. (111)

Constructing an impossibility of safety entails an impossibility to belong. Gurba, as the narrator, concludes that rape is everywhere. So, the narration of the places that become sites of abuse like the park, the streets through which she walks, or (in earlier parts of the memoir) a classroom are indicated to be unreliable as she narrates her own experience of the world as increasingly unreliable. The description of the "beautiful" houses in her neighborhood is

relevant in their function as contrasting images to the assault narrated, reproducing the altered perspective of the story's narrator. Ultimately, this contrast and the unreliability indicated construct a holistic notion of a fallacious world, emphasizing that any promise or notion of safety is not only wrong but misleading. So, Gurba ends her memoir reiterating the observation that "[s]omewhere out there . . . a woman is getting touched to death" (175).

“[R]eplace the Dumpster with a Garden”: The Site of Abuse and (In)Alterability

In Miller's writing, the place where she was attacked is central. Miller narrates Stanford as her home. She was not a student there but grew up in Palo Alto, close to Stanford facilities. Because she was attacked and violated there, Miller writes of a home that was then taken from her, a place of identity and a place that stores memory:

I was born in Stanford hospital and when I was young I believed this automatically made me smart. I've biked through the palm and eucalyptus trees, beneath the red-tiled roofs. I still can't name most of the buildings, but I can provide a tour of my memories, can point to any place on campus and say, *This is where* ... This is where I sat at a foldout table selling Girl Scout cookies. In middle school I was self-conscious about my height, so Grandma Ann took me to the Stanford women's basketball meet and greets to show me what tall women become. . . . Stanford was made up of friends, idols, teachers. I may never have been a student, but it was my community before I knew it was a university. It was home. (*Know My Name* 293–96)

Here, Miller establishes a claim to the places that are part of the institution 'Stanford,' stressing her particular disappointment in the institution's handling of her case. It is because she connects personal memories to specific places on Stanford campus that she considers herself to be a part of a community, justifying an expectation of being granted support and protection by Stanford in the aftermath of the assault.

With that, it is established that the place where Miller was abused was not only rendered meaningful to her through the abuse but also through her previous experiences on Stanford campus, including profound and seemingly mundane childhood memories. The assault acutely changed Miller's "This is where ..." about the places on Stanford campus. Throughout Miller's memoir, Stanford is of particular relevance in its function as a place and as an institution. The institution's lack of engagement altered her role in it:

Stanford's absence became a constant presence as I drove around Palo Alto. The assault harmed me physically, but there were bigger things that got broken. Broken trust in institutions. Broken faith in the place I thought would protect me. Their apathy, their lack of apology I could live with, but what troubled me most was their failure to ask the single most important question: *How do we ensure this does not happen again?* They had treated my assault like a singular, isolated incident. After Brock voluntarily withdrew, they called me once, to inform me he was not allowed back on campus. Other than that, little seemed to be set in motion. My assault came and went. But nothing is ever that simple. (296)

Stanford becomes an integral part of Miller's site of abuse not merely because the location in which she was assaulted coincidentally happened to be a part of Stanford University's facilities. Rather, Miller writes about Stanford as another factor in the assault and, more specifically, her lasting trauma. So, as Miller narrates a continuous affective powerlessness, the places of her abuse are not merely symbolic of that powerlessness but foundational to it. Describing the loss of (a sense of) 'home' in the aftermath of her assault, Miller frames her lack of agency as a restriction on her movement.

In Miller's narrative, the humiliation and powerlessness she experiences in the aftermath of the assault in connection to Stanford are as much part of her rhetoric of pain, suffering, and trauma as the assault and judicial process. Throughout the second half of her book, Miller writes about her attempts at reconciliation with Stanford; their offer to pay for her therapy and her persistence in wanting to meet with Stanford officials to make demands that would hopefully inhibit another attack. Miller writes about her disappointment with the people at Stanford, one of which she calls Appleseed because "[e]ating one apple seed is harmless. But eat enough over time and they can be toxic, subtle and corrosive, impossible to break down" (*Know My Name* 298). Part of the attempted reconciliation with Stanford was a plan to "replace the dumpster with a garden accompanied by a plaque with a quote of my choosing" (298). Miller narrates the process of this changing of place as symbolic of her bottomless battle to regain a sense of control and agency.

In this process, the part of the Stanford campus where Turner assaulted her becomes a site of negotiations of power through Miller's narration. At the point in her story when the assault takes place, this negotiation is impossible, not only because the assault establishes the power dynamics clearly as Turner takes advantage of Miller's unconsciousness, unveiling the impossibility of resistance, but also because, in her memoir, Miller performs her lack of memory: she cannot and does not author the assault. Instead, she authors both her non-presence throughout as well as the profound traumatic impact the assault and its aftermath had on her not despite but also because of her non-presence and her inability to act as a subject during the assault, in the hospital, and throughout the judicial process.

However, the redesigning of the place brings a renegotiation of power back into question. It is a narration of an attempted performance of control in which she had none. The site of abuse then narrated is not merely the "settings of interaction" (Giddens 118) but, instead, a constituent of power relations. About Stanford's suggestion to alter the place where Miller was assaulted, she writes

Michele had an idea to replace the dumpsters with a garden accompanied by a plaque with a quote of my choosing. I thought this would be nice and agreed.

On September 2, 2016, I opened the news on my phone, watched Brock walk out of the glass doors of county jail in a button-down shirt, lit up with bulb flashes and budding microphones, before he was neatly tucked into an SUV. I knew it was coming. But that summer I felt I'd blinked, and he was out again. Online I found people posting lists of things that were longer than his sentence. *Average life span of a sea monkey. The time the Macarena stayed in the Top 100 (Odyssey). My leg hair in the winter (HerCampus). The amount of time I wait for a text back (conniethegoat). Moms [sic!] conversation when she runs into her friends (amy). (Know My Name 298–99)*

Although Miller writes about her approval of the idea, the immediate contrast with Turner's release paired with an emphasis on the short duration of his sentence with some accurate and some stylistically exaggerated comments already renders the whole process somewhat silly. In light of the little impact the assault had on Turner's life—the aftermath, for him, lasting as long as “*moms [sic!] conversation when she runs into her friends*”—emphasize Miller's continued involvement with (the place of her) assault. This is emblematic of her continued trauma. As she writes, “Brock was out and life kept moving and I was entering some kind of negotiation with Stanford” (299).

At this point in the story, the redesigning of her site of abuse is already not an autonomous performance of regained, reclaimed, or new-found control. Instead, it reads as a “nice” gesture that is, after all, insignificant in light of the traumatic assault, the traumatic process through the criminal justice system, and the unsatisfying result of it. Left, however, is Miller's renegotiation of power vis-à-vis Stanford, something she presents as her home and an institution that fails when it comes to the protection of victims of sexualized violence. With that, there seemingly is a sense of empowerment left to be gained through the redefining of a place. Practicing a place (the site of abuse) differently is, at this point, suggested to provide this redefinition.

While Miller writes little about the redesigning of the place behind a dumpster into a garden, she writes about the process of choosing a quote for a plaque that is supposed to be placed there.

I provided the lines from my statement about relearning my worth, which began: *You made me a victim I had to force myself to relearn my real name, my identity. To relearn that this is not all that I am I am a human being who has been irreversibly hurt, my life was put on hold for over a year, waiting to figure out if I was worth something.* Appleseed rejected the quote. My lawyer pushed back: *A pretty garden with a softer message that no one notices is actually less useful than the dumpster that preceded it.* Appleseed succumbed and agreed to have a mock-up made. For months I received numerous updates about the intricate site plans for the garden; *stone veneer seating wall, dark-colored river pebbles, topsoil, wood bench without armrest, stone color: Hillsborough and Willow Creek (50 percent of each color), flagstone mortar joint color to be determined, Swirl Fountain by Stone Forest, exact location of bench to be determined, batter exterior side of wall only, samples to be reviewed by landscape architect.* But there was still no Title IX investigation, no policy review. Still no plaque.

I received an email one evening informing me of their scheduled ceremony; it would open with the provost (five minutes), an announcement about support services (five minutes), a speech/letter from Emily Doe (five minutes), closing words, moment of silence in support of sexual violence survivors (five minutes). What do you do when

you're invited to your own rape garden ceremony, that's been scheduled to last twenty minutes? I wanted to give a speech, *Thanks for the stones*. For being so concerned with agency, they had taken it upon themselves to create a public display of support, inviting cameras, a tidy itinerary, the figurative ribbon cut. . . . [I]t was odd the plaque was still missing. . . .

One year after our meeting, a month after the garden installation, the plaque was still not there. When my lawyer inquired about it, Appleseed . . . said they would not be placing it on a plaque because they had to *prioritize the well-being of all of our students*. She proposed the following quote:

I'm right here, I'm okay, everything's okay, I'm right here.

There is a world in which this is funny, the irony and absurdity too clear. (307–09)

As Miller positions herself in the negotiation of the redesigning of her site of abuse, she ultimately makes clear that the power lies with Stanford's representatives to decide. With that, the narrative shifts from a performance of reclaiming the place to an outlining of Stanford's whitewashing of (a history with) sexual assault on campus. Miller describes not being involved in the actual design of the garden and points to a certain ridiculousness in the process. Ultimately, she also remains powerless in the part of the garden that is supposed to perform her empowerment: the words attached to the place.

Miller narrates the place as immutably remaining a site of trauma. The words she writes about suggesting a memorialization of it highlight the permanence of the place, unalterable regardless of its appearance. As the place remains her site of abuse, regardless of whether it is a batch of dirt behind a dumpster or a well-designed, newly planted garden, so does her identity remain "*irreversibly hurt*." Such a quote unveils the redesigning of the place as a façade, covering up the unalterability of the trauma, the assault, and the aftermath of the assault. Although the particular garden that Miller's retelling of the negotiation imagines never materialized, her narration does evoke this image, constructing the place literarily. In the reading of it, this thus constructs the permanence with which Miller describes her struggle for an identity post-assault.

The notion of covering this permanence is solidified by Appleseed's insistence on an "inspirational" quote. Further, Miller notes her lack of control in the situation, pointing to the irony of "being so concerned with agency, [that] they had taken it upon themselves to create a public display of support, inviting cameras, a tidy itinerary, the figurative ribbon cut." Clearly, in Miller's story, the redesignation is a public relations event for Stanford, rather than a process aimed to support a sense of empowerment for her. With that, she raises a complaint about institutional responses to sexualized violence. Miller rejects a notion of empowerment. As the site of abuse remains just that, so does the devastation of the trauma, not finding any redeemable, cathartic inspirational quality to it.

Yet, Miller's final suggestion, another evoking of a literary place that exists in her memoir, does perform a sense of empowerment and resolution. Miller is clear about the assault's devastation, rendering her entirely powerless: "You took away my worth, my privacy, my energy, my time, my safety, my intimacy, my confidence, my own voice, . . ." However, she resolves it, writing, ". . . until today." With that, the plaque renders the site of abuse as alterable into a place of empowerment. This stands in marked contrast to the art installations Miller imagines in this passage of her memoir:

I thought more about anger, about the art piece I would create. A more fitting tribute: a piece called *Construction*; each victim is given a nail for every day she has lived with what happened to her. There's a haphazard pile of wood in the center of campus. Victims can come as they please, hammering nails into the wood. All day people hear the banging, all the drilling and incessant interruption. This is a lot of what surviving is like, trying to carry on and get work done, while your past pounds into you, distracts you, makes it impossible. At the end there'd be an immense wooden structure, randomly nailed together, large, useless, pointy, and dangerous in the middle of everything, people forced to walk around it, interrupting the pretty view of the trees. This is also what assault feels like, what to do with this, where to put it, what is it.

Or maybe a light installation. I could come in the night and install living-room lamps with extension cords throughout campus, large paper lanterns to dangle from trees, littering the campus with bright bulbs until every dark corner was glowing. I'd called that piece *All I Wanted*.

Or something more disturbing; I'd make mops, attaching dark, long hairs at the end of wooden poles, dragging them through the pine needles and leaves. Mopping all the vegetation and debris, dragging trails throughout campus, a victim custodian. That performance piece would be called *We Wanted to Respect Your Agency, Anonymity*. (308–09)

The narration of this imagination underlines both Miller's lack of control over the garden installation as well as the installation's whitewashing of sexualized violence. Contrary to the garden, Miller does not envision a place associated with colorful nature, to be admired in quiet practices. Rather, the evoking of "hammering nails into the wood" disrupts quietness, embodying a disruption symbolic of the disruption the assault has presented in Miller's story. Miller lays out this symbolism and also indicates the pointlessness of such an installation regarding its aesthetic aspiration. It suggests neither purpose, pattern, nor beauty. Rather, both the practice of its creation as well as its material presence practice disruption. This imaginary place stands in marked contrast to the garden installation designed by Stanford as it not only converts the place aesthetically but also invites practices that present either simply no function, aesthetic, or sonic disruption or perhaps even present relaxation.

Similarly, the second place Miller evokes presents a visual disruption. While the installation's title suggests the added notion of safety that supposedly comes with well-lit public places, her description of it as "littering the campus with bright bulbs" underscores its disruptive qualities. While not auditorily disturbing, it remains aesthetically loud, drastically altering the quiet, dark, and, with that, unsafe place(s) of abuse. While both Miller's imagined art installations *Construction* and *All I Wanted* specifically address the

ubiquity of sexualized violence, presenting it as a collective albeit concealed experience, the latter place moves more toward her individual experience not only through its title but also through its allusion to her specific site of abuse.

The final installation she imagines furthers this trajectory, highlighting more of the specificities of her experience. At this point in her memoir, pine needles have been established as a clear theme, first introduced when she writes about discovering them on and around her while she was in the hospital. The installation's envisioned name goes back to Miller's first meeting with Stanford's representative, Appleseed, which also included Michele Dauber, a Stanford professor who had expressed support for Miller and disappointment about Stanford's handling of sexual assault on campus. About that conversation, Miller writes, "Michele confronted her, lambasting Stanford for failing to reach out in the aftermath of the assault. They had my number and name, they knew how to find me. Appleseed apologized. . . . She said they wanted to respect my *agency and anonymity* (301).

In the image and movement Miller narrates, the materials ("pine needles and leaves") make up the place. This brings Stanford campus into the foreground of the imagined art installation. Simultaneously, the movement she describes, being dragged through the debris, foregrounds the institution's failure to adequately support Miller. With the literal description of 'dragging through the mud,' Miller's evoking of this imagined movement through place critiques the role she, as a victim, was made to play in the 'cleaning up' of the (place of her) assault. The installation's pointed, ironic title indicates that both Stanford's explanation for its lack of involvement as well as the suggestion that Miller could exercise agency there or have full control over her anonymity (the necessity of which already questions agency) is absurd and demonstrated by the clearly personified 'mop' being dragged through dirt.

Implying an impossibility of materializing these imaginations of art installations, Miller does construct them in her writing. Thus, she practices an alteration to her site of abuse, reclaiming some control over it. This control, however, is practiced to underline the permanence of the site of abuse, utilizing it to highlight the deviation and trauma of sexualized violence as well as the ubiquity of unsafety for (potential) victims. In these constructions, Miller pointedly does not perform empowerment but rather constructs a place-based depiction of the grievances she attaches to her experience.

This stands against the backdrop of Miller's previous narration of this site of abuse as constructed by her lack of memory. Her memoir starts with a narration of the night of the assault, how she went out to a party on Stanford campus,

sipped a lukewarm beer, said it tasted like pee, and handed it to my sister. I was bored, at ease, drunk, and extremely tired, less than ten minutes away from home. I had outgrown everything around me. And that is where my memory goes black, where the reel cuts off.
(4)

Her story picks up again when she wakes up in a hospital bed, is examined, and confronted with possibly having been sexually assaulted. She writes about the sensations in her body: “Everything felt wrong, but inside my gut I felt a deadened calm. A still, dark ocean, flat and vast. Horror was present, I could feel it moving, shifting my insides, wet and murky and weighted, but on the surface, I saw only a ripple” (7); the medical exam: “That morning, I would watch silver needles puncture my skin, bloody Q-tips emerge from between my legs, yet nothing would elicit a flinch or wince or intake of breath. My senses had shut off, my body a nerveless mannequin” (8); and the process of piecing together information about the time about which she does not have any memory:

I stood up, noticed tiny pine cones and pine needles scattered across the cushions. Where the hell was this coming from? As I bent to pick them up, my hair unraveled over my shoulder, releasing more onto the clean tiles. I got on my knees, beneath my blankets, started pushing the dead pieces into a neat pile. . . .

According to the transcripts, all he said that morning was that a couple people saw me passed out, deputies arrived, but I remained unresponsive. . . .

CHANEL: Um, do you know where it was exactly that they found me?

OFFICER: Okay. In between there and the house, there’s a little area, um, I believe it’s a dumpster. Not in the dumpster.

CHANEL: Yeah, no.

OFFICER: No, but the area behind. (10–17)

Miller narrates her (bodily) experience in the hospital in detail. Her attempt to make sense of it, however, hinges on reports and transcripts. The pine needles she describes finding on and around her, here, connect the narration she positions as remembered and the outside reports she draws on to frame this performance of memory. Emblematic of her not only having been there but involuntarily having taken parts of this place with her, the pine needles establish Miller’s access to the place despite her lack of memory about the assault.

Eventually, Miller writes about seeing the place for the first time. She deliberately takes this trip to see it before it is altered:

Since the location would soon be converted to a garden, Michele took me to see it in the daylight for the first time since the assault. The stomach cramping returned. What struck me was how uninspiring, how underwhelming all of it was, this patchwork dirt lawn, saggy-limbed trees, a slope of dead pine needles, shit and beer cans, plastic spoons and broken glass, a ketchup packet and two black dumpsters. This? This is it? This is where my whole life was defined, the place that led to sacrificed relationships, unemployment, loss of identity, everything reduced and stolen by this pathetic shitty fraternity yard. How had the years passed with me still not free of this place, negotiating with Stanford over something as simple as a fucking light. A light! All my life and all my pain, standing there, felt like a joke, I wanted to laugh, to dig my fists into the ground, rip out clumps of the earth, to smash the glass patio doors with the wooden chairs I remember dancing on. Instead I said nothing, stood blinking in the sun, and after a few minutes, turned and walked back to Michele’s car. (302)

Miller foregrounds the contrast between the profound impact the events that took place there had on her life with the mundaneness of its appearance. As she writes about not being “free of this place,” she attaches the trauma of her abuse to the place on an affective level, highlighting its importance as more than merely a setting. Instead, the place itself as it is narrated in her revisiting of it is part of her abuse. After all, she writes about the *place* leading to “sacrificed relationships, unemployment, loss of identity.” It is against this backdrop that Miller’s final reimagining of an art installation renders the narration of the site of abuse as a central practice in expressing unresolved and, in Miller’s story, unresolvable anger. The description of its mundaneness here highlights the affective dimension that, in contrast to “this patchwork dirt lawn,” stands out. The material presentation of the place does not reflect the profound disturbance it means for Miller. However, the narration of her imagined alternations of it do construct this disturbance in relation to an attachment to the place.

Miller constructs a place in which and through which affects are expressed. While she rejects a performance of empowerment here, she does resist a cultural expectation or desire to cathartically resolve the trauma (something exemplified by ‘Stanford’ and its desire to reconfigure the site of abuse through an “inspirational” text). She does so by continuously narrating her anger through the narration of the place in which she was abused.

I encourage you to sit in that garden, but when you do, close your eyes, and I’ll tell you about the real garden, the sacred place. Ninety feet away from where you sit there is a spot, where Brock’s knees hit the dirt, where the Swedes tackled him to the ground, yelling, *What the fuck are you doing? Do you think this is okay?* Put their words on a plaque. Mark that spot, because in my mind I’ve erected a monument. (313)

Writing the narrative and having it read creates a certain place and preserves the existence of a certain place that is symbolic and accessible through its rhetorical function and its sociocultural meaning.

At this point, however, Miller does return to a rhetoric of hope. She continues, “The place to be remembered is not where I was assaulted, but where he fell, where I was saved, where two men declared stop, no more, not here, not now, not ever” (313). While practicing a particular memorizing of the place, she then rewrites the place. Miller positions the moral courage that interrupted the assault as worthy of being remembered. In this narration, this “sacred place” is separate from the site of abuse, as the “tackl[ing] . . . , yelling, *What the fuck are you doing? . . .*” stopped the abuse, temporarily transforming the place into a site of moral courage. So, Miller’s narrative grants a certain dynamic to the site of abuse, a narration that disrupts the otherwise supposed permanence with which this site is constructed, mirroring the narrated permanence of the trauma suffered. In an effort to somewhat alter the site of abuse in a story about its inalterability, Miller explicitly addresses a desire to change

the way this particular place is remembered. However, despite this moment of constructing a cathartic linearity in which the site of abuse dissolves, much of her memoir documents the place in which she was assaulted as a demonstration of profound powerlessness and the ubiquity of danger, permanent within the diegesis in that it returns to be that place each time it is read. This place is as much “real” as “the real garden, the scared place” Miller evokes in the resolution to the previously narratively established site of abuse, the dumpster.

5. Conclusion: Place(lessness) and Feminist Rage

In promotion of her memoir, Chanel Miller gave an interview in which she explained her desire to write about her experience:

I felt like I was assaulted multiple times. Every time you are reliving this. . . . I remember, in court, the defense attorney always said, 'Chanel has no memory, Chanel has no memory.' And I remember sitting there and thinking, 'I will remember everything, I will remember every remark, I will remember the lighting inside this courtroom, I will remember the texture of the defense attorney's hair, I will remember the depth of the pain you made me feel. I will remember it and I will record it and I will write it so that it will not be lost.' (60 Minutes)

Here, Miller positions the practice of writing and publicly sharing that writing, allowing for a particular kind of witnessing, as granting a certain permanence to her affective experience. The performance of memory in her autobiographical writing, which crucially counters her placelessness throughout the legal process as based on an inability to participate in the struggle for narrative power, constructs a 'here' that holds the trauma she experienced. With this practice, Miller ascribes a certain permanence to an otherwise dissolved place. In her narrative, the negotiation of her loss of agency, shame, and possible performances of shame rejection hinge on this place.

The #MeToo movement crucially laments the ubiquity of sexualized violence and the subsequent gendered displacement (and, more so, de-placing and, with that, placelessness), as essentially all places are constructed as safer for some (bodies) more than others. Every place is a (potential) site of abuse as the #MeToo movement is notably comprehensive in its collectivization of sexualized violence, encompassing stories about domestic violence, workplace sexual harassment, stranger and acquaintance rape, and everything beyond and in between, positioning that these forms of sexualized violence are ultimately traceable to the same root. Taking up the feminist tradition of 'speaking out' as a distinct narrative practice through the autobiographical mode, the #MeToo movement does, however, also construct these places in particular as sites of resistance, most crucially resistance to being (a)shamed, de-placed through the silencing properties of shame, and the power dynamics that render victims without agency. The place of resistance emerges, I argue, in the tension between authoring placelessness and performing replacing through this particular autobiographical narrative practice (granting a certain permanence to this new 'here' that Miller's interview statement suggests).

Making clear that there is no (safe) private realm to protect and that the relief to shame lies in the possibility of being placed in public, the narratives of the #MeToo movement, collectivized, position that there is nothing personal about experiences of sexualized

violence and, with that, reemphasize that there is no tenable dichotomy between private and public spheres. Instead, the desire for permeating publicness in which a replacement of shame through the claim to discursive power is possible not from the place of ‘privacy’ to ‘publicness’ but from a ‘nowhere’ (an affective and effective placelessness) to a ‘somewhere.’ So, the #MeToo movement’s claim to publicness is also already a ‘counter,’ building its narrative struggle on the resistance to the hegemonial denial of this narrative struggle (or its positioning as already settled in the dominating dynamics of patriarchy). To conclusively encompass much of this tension-filled resistance I have laid out so far, I shall now turn to an affect and rhetoric that, in a #MeToo movement context, necessarily constructs a counterpublic: anger. This starts with the recognition that the public performance of anger for victims of sexualized violence is always already a ‘counter,’ as the expression of anger is not culturally granted to everybody in the same manner.

“[T]his tension, it’s yours”: Anger and Feminist Rage

In June 2018, Netflix released a recording of a live comedy²³ show by Tasmanian comedian Hannah Gadsby titled *Nanette*, which quickly became not only Gadsby’s biggest success but also a symbol for the #MeToo-infused sense that there is an “increased registering and visibility of women’s anger” (Kay, “Celebritised Anger” 75) not least because #MeToo operates in a digital media landscape (Wood 5). Premised on the proclamation that she needs to “quit comedy” because “I need to tell my story properly,” Gadsby utilizes anger in her performance that combines a social commentary on misogyny, rape culture, and the narration of her own experiences of gendered violence. Gadsby speaks intensely, loudly, and heatedly, performing her rage at the force of misogyny, misogynistic violence, and how these dynamics have shamed, isolated, and endangered her. Emily Winderman contends that *Nanette* shows “how the volume amplification of sonically resonant, visceral anger modulates the emotional range of #MeToo” (72).

²³ Although presented on Netflix as a stand-up comedy special, Gadsby’s performance is not as neatly classifiable in terms of its genre. While following some conventions of a comedy show, Gadsby’s performance abandons the comedic tone in large parts of the performance (Day). Even further, the performance explicitly questions the use of comedy and humor in the serious and, as Gadsby states, traumatic stories addressed. For Jenny Sundén and Susanna Paasonen *Nanette* is, first and foremost, “a plea to be taken seriously in a way that is incompatible with laughter” (4). Journalist Luise Checchin sees *Nanette* as an argument that humor is not the best or even a way to negotiate trauma. Humor is certainly not central in the #MeToo movement and, going against the grain of its framing, it also is not central in *Nanette*. Rather, *Nanette* tells a story about the inadequacies and harm of comedy for (marginalized) victims of sexualized violence. While humorous statements surround it, this core is presented without comedic (under)tones.

To explain why she “must quit comedy,” Gadsby demonstrates the mechanisms of (her) comedy: “I make you all feel tense and then I make you laugh and you’re like ‘Thanks for that. I was feeling a bit tense.’ I made you tense” (30:23). This, for Gadsby, means, “[freezing] an incredibly formative experience at its trauma point” (40:29). Further performing the refusal to participate in what she positions as the only way to (publicly) tell her story, Gadsby returns to a story toward the end of her performance that she, in the beginning, tells as a joke, relieving the tension. She first tells a story about being mistaken for a man and then angrily confronted by a man who accuses her of “cracking on to his girlfriend” (10:10). At first shoving and threatening her, he stops upon realizing that Gadsby is a woman. Gadsby concludes this story with a joke about the man’s moral compass: “He said, ‘Oh, I’m so sorry. I don’t hit women,’ he said. What a guy!” (10:46). Toward the end of her performance, Gadsby returns to the story:

Do you remember that story about that young man who almost beat me up? . . . I made a lot of people laugh about his ignorance, and the reason I could do that is because I’m very good at this job. I actually am pretty good at controlling the tension. . . . But in order to balance the tension in the room with that story, I couldn’t tell that story as it actually happened. Because I couldn’t tell the part of the story where that man realized his mistake. And he came back. And he said, ‘Oh, no, I get it. You’re a lady faggot. I’m allowed to beat the shit out of you,’ and he did! He beat the shit out of me and nobody stopped him. (59:05)

So, Gadsby completes the story she previously framed as a funny anecdote that left the critique of (the man’s) misogyny and the dangers of a gender non-conforming presentation implied enough to still generate laughter and, in this retelling, reframes it as a traumatic experience of violence directed at a queer woman. She continues with the same fury in her (raised) voice:

. . . I’m afraid of men. If I’m the only woman in a room full of men, I am afraid. . . . Because it was a man who sexually abused me when I was a child. It was a man who beat the shit out of me when I was 17 . . . It was two men who raped me when I was barely in my twenties. . . . It would have been more humane to just take me out to the back paddock and put a bullet in my head if it is that much of a crime to be different! (01:01:59)

Unapologetic about her performance of rage, Gadsby proclaims in the middle of the crucially autobiographical part of this performance, “And this tension, it’s yours. I am not helping you anymore. You need to learn what this feels like . . .” (01:00:17). Jilly Boyce Kay reads this as a “gesture of *refusal*” (“Celebrity Anger” 77) that signals not a retraction but is, in fact, productive, “help[ing] to generate the cultural space in which this particular story could be told and, most crucially, listened to” (82). Here, Kay considers Gadsby’s gesture of refusal along the lines of Sara Ahmed’s notion of a ‘feminist snap’ (83). Feminist snap, for Ahmed, is “the refusal to put up with what women have been expected to endure” (*Living a Feminist*

Life 206), something she positions as collective and forward-looking, imagining and seeking new possibilities.²⁴

Throughout, Gadsby makes unmistakably clear that her performance of rage is an act of resistance, resisting not only the rules of a comedy show or the cultural constraints put on women's expressions of affect, particularly anger, but, more comprehensively, the constraints that have rendered her able to (publicly) speak only from a profoundly disempowered position. She states,

I build a career out of self-deprecating humor. . . . And I don't want to do that anymore. . . . [D]o you understand what self-deprecation means when it comes from somebody who already exists in the margins? It's not humility. It's humiliation. I put myself down in order to speak; in order to seek permission to speak. (Gadsby 17:40)

This is a response to a pointed assessment Gadsby puts forth and that runs as a theme throughout her performance: "I understand the world I live in and my place in it. And I don't have one" (46:42). So, performing a pointed resistance to the dynamics she narrates, which have dictated her placelessness in the world, Gadsby demands a place because she explicitly and performatively demands her story to be heard. Further, she firmly places the performance of her rage in the social commentary of her comedy, rejecting the notion of a depoliticized, individualized anger:

They're all cut from the same cloth. Donald Trump, Pablo Picasso, Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, Woody Allen, Roman Polanski. These men are not exceptions, they are the rule. And they are not individuals, they are our stories. . . . These men control our stories! And yet they have a diminishing connection to their own humanity, and we don't seem to mind so long as they get to hold onto their precious reputation. Fuck reputation. Hindsight is a gift. Stop wasting my time! (56:51)

It is ragefully delivered proclamations like these throughout the performance that lead journalist Rebecca Traister to assess *Nanette* as among "the angry art of the new era . . . [which] captures the furious female energy of contemporary America" (qtd. in Kay, "Celebritised Anger" 86).²⁵ Indeed, "[t]he demand to be heard, the assertion of one's right to be recognised, to be listened to and believed constitutes one of the most potentially transformative aspects of #MeToo" (87).

²⁴ Bonnie Honig makes a similar argument in *A Feminist Theory of Refusal*. Viewing feminism as "enacting sex-gender equality, . . . in the face of governing powers that insist on . . . heteronormative sphere separatism, patriarchal kinship, and the instrumentalities and inequalities they secure," (3) she positions a notion of 'feminist refusal,' the political potency of which lies in the radical rejection of the governing powers that stand in the way of feminism's objective.

²⁵ Although Gadsby is Australian and explores her upbringing in Tasmania in *Nanette*, her performance also heavily leans on US-American-centric social commentary—as the quote about the famous men accused of sexualized violence she brings up may indicate—and, more crucially, has struck a nerve particularly in US-American (popular) culture, surely not least because of the program's coinciding with the #MeToo movement (Kay "Celebritised Anger 86).

Yet, Gadsby expresses an ambiguous relationship to anger. While she comedically alerts to and laments a cultural double standard that allows men (in comedy) to be angry while women's affective expressions are constrained and while she stresses her "right to be angry!", Gadsby ultimately concludes that "just because I can position myself as a victim, does not make my anger constructive. It never is constructive" (01:06:40). Jilly Boyce Kay sees here an example of Amia Srinivasan's notion of 'affective injustice,' referring to "the injustice of having to negotiate between one's apt emotional response to the injustice of one's situation and one's desire to better one's situation" (135). Emily Winderman argues that "Gadsby's move to diminish the volume of audience anger ultimately downplays an extensive history of politically potent anger that has fueled social change. By 'transforming justified queer rage . . . into a fault within herself,' Gadsby deftly individuates her anger" (74). This follows after Gadsby situates her anger in a political context, "refigur[ing] sexual violators as appropriate objects of collective anger" (73). More so, Gadsby's ambiguity signals that such a performance of anger would be too threatening or uncomfortable without an appropriate amount of restraint—in this case, the restraint that leads Gadsby to ensure her audience that she does not want to "spread anger" (01:06:10), retracting the political potency of her rageful performance and relieving its tension after all. Indeed, despite angrily proclaiming that ". . . this tension, it's yours. I am not helping you anymore," she resolves it moments later with a joke: "[T]o the men in the room, I speak to you now, particularly the white men, especially the straight white men. Pull your fucking socks up! How humiliating! Fashion advice from a lesbian. That is your last joke" (01:00:40). Even in what reads as a performance of feminist rage, anger remains "tightly policed" (Kay, "Celebritised Anger" 79).

Gadsby's position on the destructiveness of anger is reminiscent of the notion that anger is unavoidably retributivist, a position extensively laid out by Martha Nussbaum, who argues that ". . . anger is always normatively problematic, whether in the personal or in the public realm" (5). Nussbaum arrives at this position because she contends that anger, as a reaction to a (perceived) injustice, is aimed at the person made responsible for the injustice. So, any reaction arising out of anger would potentially do more harm and, most importantly, not reverse the harm done that evoked anger. However, Nussbaum also views a potential for a forward-looking as a result of anger, which she positions as a transition away from anger (36). In scenarios through which Nussbaum explains that any productive response requires a move away from anger, she essentially creates a non-falsifiable, circular argument. If a productive response is considered as a transition away from the (initial) anger, then, of

course, there is no (political) productivity to anger. Nussbaum does not explain why any productive reaction preceding anger necessarily requires the full transformation of that anger other than the (ancient) claim that anger is always accompanied by a desire to harm the one made responsible for the injustice that evoked anger in some way. Amia Srinivasan calls this understanding a “*pure disjunctivist* view of anger” (136), which does not differentiate between anger as an emotion and anger as an expression. Further, I add the unsubstantiated claim that anger necessitates the desire to harm to this “disjunctivist view of anger.”

The anger expressions in #MeToo narratives also call this claim into question. While the #MeToo movement presents ambiguous negotiations of anger/rage, narratives of (violent) revenge are scarce. As the movement overall is less concerned with perpetrators (at least considering ‘perpetrators’ as individuals), #MeToo’s narrative of anger or performances of rage are more concerned with the (access to) emplaced, public explorations of one’s rage. These performances, collectively, signal a grip on destabilizing the power dynamics that render sexualized violence ubiquitous to some (bodies), shame seemingly inevitable, and (feminist) rage ostracized.

In a theorization of the role of anger in feminism, Sara Ahmed crucially acknowledges that anger, like other emotions, although always mediated, is also always about “what moves us” (“Feminist Futures” 239). With that, she evokes an important notion in feminist works on anger or rage (which, I argue, are rather interchangeable in this context): It can be productive because it has political potency. Rage is, first and foremost, an appropriate reaction to systemic perpetual violence and injustice. Or, as Alison Bailey writes, it is “the emotion of injustice” (93). In this light, feminist rage is a resistant response to “widespread cultural gaslighting that would have us believe that gender injustice is not real” (Kay, “Introduction: Anger, Media, and Feminism” 595), that the roots of the ubiquity of sexualized violence are not entangled with patriarchal power dynamics. Audre Lorde has rather famously proclaimed the political potency of anger (about racism): “Anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification . . . Anger is loaded with information and energy” (“The Uses of Anger” 8). Notably, Lorde does not assess anger as debilitating or blindly reactive but as a productive affect when utilized in a forward-facing manner. Ahmed uses Lorde’s theorization here to conclude that “[f]eminism, as a response to pain and as a form of anger directed against that pain, is dependent then on acts of translation that are moving” (“Feminist Futures” 247).

This movement through anger requires, according to Ahmed, naming and imagining—both, as I argue, narrative practices that require narrative power to be situated in public and collectively mobilized. Helen Wood considers what she writes about as ‘irreverent rage’ as productive because it turns outward, demanding expression and recognition (611). Irreverent rage is, for Wood, a radical rejection of ‘respectability politics’ that govern which rhetorical or aesthetic forms of protest remain broadly acceptable. Because the political grievances of a feminist movement require a radical upheaval, so does its rhetoric require the same irreverence. So, the rejection of “histories of subordination through which working-class, black and (we should add) queer bodies, are seen to be ‘in place’ as long as they show the required deference to authority . . .” (613) requires the ridding of shame and the expression of rage at these outrageous histories of subordination. Demonstrating the irreverent rage as something “intellectually performative,” Wood concludes her article with the forceful assertion that, “. . . we need a different kind of intersectional feminist politics to cut through the crap, and sort this fucking shit out,” (614) herself performing the potent rage she calls for.

Anger can only be considered as containing (the potential for) political potency when it is expressed, thus, when it constructs the necessary discursive space to be expressed. To identify this process, I write specifically about feminist rage, which I consider as anger translated into a generative political instrument. Dianna Taylor regards feminist rage vis-à-vis sexualized violence as “a necessary component of countering [this] violation and the conditions for [its] possibility” (“Feminist Rage” 82). There is a crucial differentiation here between an individualized notion of anger, which might carry the potential for (individual) cathartic relief, and collectivized expressions (which I consider to always be performances) of feminist rage vis-à-vis what is considered to be a patriarchal injustice (Kay, “Introduction: Anger, Media, and Feminism” 594). Alison Bailey writes about this as a “*knowing resistant anger*,” which “offers marginalized knowers a powerful resource for countering epistemic injustices” (94).

About unexpressed anger, Lorde writes, “anger has eaten clefts into my living only when it remained unspoken, useless to anyone” (“The Uses of Anger” 9). Of course, feminist rage necessarily goes along with notions of reclaiming because any (collectivized) expression of it stands in a cultural context in which female-coded anger has been stigmatized, ostracized, and, consequently, silenced. This dynamic is, evidently, not only heavily gendered but also raced. I am particularly referring to the “pernicious stereotype of

the ‘angry Black woman’” (Nash and Pinto 885). Dianna Taylor summarizes the dynamic of this stereotype:

Reducing Black women to their rage in effect redoubles the disabling of its intentionality: the inward direction of their rage effectively erases it socially, which in turn magnifies it within the self-relation. This reductive individuation to the stereotype of the angry Black woman constitutes a second-level injustice . . . that treats the embodied self-relations of women of color as ‘affective waste disposal sites.’ . . . Black women’s embodied capacity for self-transformation—their freedom—is turned back against itself as a source of humiliation. (“Feminist Rage” 95–96)

There are several considerations about the cultural (power) dynamics that construct and uphold the silencing of feminist (and, before that, female) rage. Looking at contemporary American Drama, Davida Bloom, for instance, identifies four principal manners in which female rage is contained in relation to rape narratives: it is turned inward, pathologized, appropriated, or denied through the conflation of rape with seduction (65–75). When not forthrightly contained, female rage is, according to Bloom, demonized (83). Outside of the space of rape fictionalizations, Dianna Taylor considers the same gendered power relations that warrant and render acceptable gendered sexualized violence to regulate and, principally, suppress rageful reactions to it (“Feminist Rage” 82). “This suppression occurs in part through the framing of women’s rage as at least unfeminine and at worst pathological, characterizations that result in women viewing rage as a purely negative affect we ought not experience . . .” (82).

For Lauren Berlant, female rage is contained through its displacement from the political realm. Female rage, according to Berlant, has been contained through the construction of a notion of collectivity that “[makes] an aesthetic and spiritual scene that generates *relief from the political*” (*The Female Complaint* 10). So, Berlant argues that women are granted the space to express rage but this space remains contained, so that “some fidelity to the world of distinction and desire that produced such disappointment in the first place” (2) remains. Berlant explores these dynamics through a genre she terms ‘The Female Complaint,’ which is, essentially,

an aesthetic ‘witnessing’ of injury. Situated precisely in the space between a sexual politics that threatens structures of patriarchal authority and a sentimentality that confirms the inevitability of the speaker’s powerlessness, the female complaint registers the speaker’s frustration, rage, abjection, and heroic self-sacrifice, in an oppositional utterance that declares its limits in its very saying. (243–44)

Put simply, female rage is culturally permitted where it remains unthreatening.

Resisting this displacement, feminist rage is thus beholden to demand and construct the (political) public places through which a discourse is possible that affectively laments patriarchal power dynamics and effectively destabilizes them. Feminist rage is thus only the potent force Audre Lorde theorizes when it can resist the displacement Berlant lays out.

Ironically the fear of expressing anger and rage also plays into the patriarchal framing of public space and of female identities; that we should be rational and calm, unemotional and disembodied, that as women we care for others but not ourselves. So where amongst these contradictory thoughts and emotions do I/we find a place and a space for a feminist rage? (Picksley et al. 306)

With the advent of the #MeToo movement, the questions about where to place anger and how to utilize feminist rage have returned (again). Jennifer C. Nash and Samantha Pinto consider rage “the celebrated feminist affect of the day, a political response to ongoing misogynistic and racist violence” (886).²⁶ Heather Savigny sees #MeToo as an example of “how rage, and . . . ‘fuck you’ moments can be mobilized as collective movements” (133). The joint expressions of anger and the collectivization as based on a shared affective experience, for Savigny, are part of what moves #MeToo. However, she also contends that this movement needs to be more forceful or, in other words, rageful. As such, she suggests to stop thinking about feminism as coming in ‘waves’ but rather, “as offering the opportunity for a tsunami. Tsunamis are linked to loss and fundamental devastation of society; maybe it is about time we talked about feminism as a tsunami that eradicates white masculinized structures of power, rather than a gradual shift in our seascape” (134). With the imagery of total destruction, Savigny situates the properties of rage in its radical non-conformity, underlying that the demand ought not to be reformed but an entirely rethought makeup of society. So, to reposition this argument, the potential of rage lies not in the continued construction of counterpublics but in the construction of an entirely new public.

In this moment of feminist outrage still, the silencing of feminist rage remains. It is for this reason that Savigny considers anger a symptom of patriarchal power dynamics and a tool for its dismantling (129). These power dynamics are the object of feminist rage, the reason for its suppression, and, consequently, what renders its expression a political tool of resistance. The feminist refusal to act within the bounds of the power structures it laments is politically generative and not merely an act of surrender in the light of that and under the premise that the expression of rage, because of the vigor it requires, is always moving and demanding. Crucially, however, the possibility of this expression remains uneven. This inequality persists on the level of, certainly, class, and race as well as queerness or disability and through the power dynamics that heteronomously uphold these categories, among which the regulation of rage falls (Orgad and Gill 596). And as the dynamics of shame, as antithetical to a public expression of feminist rage, persists, there is a tension in the #MeToo

²⁶ About this, Nash and Pinto also bring up the particular magnitude of digital media that seems to productively coincide with a rediscovering of (feminist) rage. Because affect is currency on social media platforms, rage can become a tool in digital feminism (887–88).

movement narrative about possibilities and comfortabilities in performing rage. So, the #MeToo movement narrativizes a demand and struggle to place their anger.

The anthology *Burn It Down: Women Writing about Anger* (Dancyger) collectivizes autobiographical narratives that negotiate rage in relation to the themes of the #MeToo movement. So, the book proclaims that “[o]ur collective silence-breaking will make us larger, expansive, like fire, ready to burn it all down” (Dancyger, “Introduction” 6). It thus contends that the collectivization of rage, in its positioning as being publicly written about/performed, has the political potency to “burn it all down.” Many of the included essays follow a similar rhetoric of merging the narration of their seemingly individual rage into a rallying cry about its activist potential. Leslie Jamison, for instance, concludes her essay “Lungs Full of Burning” with the hopeful assertion that rage is “what needs to burn in our voices, glowing and fearsome, fully aware of its own heat” (24). Keah Brown similarly concludes her essay:

Anger is necessary when it propels us toward equality, justice, righting historical wrongs, and action. We marginalized people deserve to be angry with so much at stake . . . [N]ow, we fight and use our anger as a tool to remember who and what we are fighting for. Let your anger change the world for the better, because we can’t wait for other people to be angry for us—we would be waiting our entire lives for that. I, for one, am excited to burn it all down . . . (232)

Here, Brown confirms not only the appropriateness but also the necessity to feel (en)ragged as well as the generative power of its expression. This hinges on the collectivity expressed and constructed throughout the essay. In the same collection, Samantha Riedel rhetorically asks in her essay “On Transfeminine Anger,” “When our anger has both power and temperance, what barriers may we yet demolish?” (79). The positioning of the productivity of power in the anthology as a whole on these exemplary essays presupposes that the underlying affect behind the construction of a rhetoric of feminist rage is collectively experienced. With that and despite the autobiographical mode in these essays, neither the sexualized violence experienced nor the rage at the cultural dynamics that render this violence unrecognized, unsanctioned, or even acceptable appear individual anymore.

A poem published in *#MeToo: Rallying Against Sexual Assault and Harassment: A Women’s Poetry Anthology* (Alma) titled “Spartaca” also envisions a liberating, collective feminist rage:

in the room/ in the street/ on the stair/ where some men make free
in plain sight or in secret as if we were sweetmeat/ to dip
fingers in and then forget—it is the being alone
afterwards that numbs and maims, utterly
alone in the silence of it/ where shame creeps in/
stuns dead/ but now we rise, all women
fondled and hurt and licked in acid jokery and in hate,
pets, sweethearts, loves, darlings, humourless bitches—

we stand together, each one a Spartaca
 no longer silent or alone: each voice stronger
 massing, alive, a wild murmur
 of me too/ me too/ me too (Little)

The poem's title is an allusion to Spartacus, a figure oftentimes symbolic for not only strength and (violent) uprising but the liberation of oppressed or enslaved people specifically. With a name now altered to suggest both a feminine and a pluralistic version of this figure, the title frames a narration of women's liberation. This liberation hinges on the collectivity of previously isolated and (a)shamed women who resist the forces that have rendered them objects of perpetual sexualized violence. The figure of 'Spartaca' here suggests a certain determination and aggressiveness. Because the poem begins with the narration of the ubiquity and devastation of gendered sexualized violence, these dynamics are positioned as the root of the rage evident in the notion of a collectivized uprising. This uprising is not strategic. Rather, it is affective, first and foremost. As Pippa Little writes in her poem, the collection of "me too," which signals the end of silence, a place "where shame creeps in," is not only plentiful but "wild." This wildness, as a result of the anger present in the explanation of the meaning of sexualized violence—as something that is ubiquitous for women and isolates and shames its victims to the point of (near) death—is narrated as a source of empowerment for previously unprotected, objectified, abused women. Further, with the allusion to Spartacus imagery, it reads as a threat to perpetrators (who are, as the first line of the poem makes unmistakably clear, men) and a culture that legitimizes the sexual abuse of women either "in plain sight or in secret." In the poem, the rage that is a resource for collective resistance is framed as self-evident in light of the violence women face "in the room/ in the street/ on the stair," so, as suggested, everywhere.

The first essay in *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture* (Gay), titled "Fragments" and written by Aubrey Hirsch, charts the trajectory of seemingly minor instances of, as the book title suggests, rape culture that feeds into the narrator's anger and, with the last story, their angry response to another one of these instances. The essay chronicles stories about being regulated or subtly threatened by men, written in second-person singular perspective, scenarios that are specific enough to signal their autobiographicalness but phrased to indicate their universality. Hirsch interjects these stories with proclamations about rape culture—"If rape culture had a downtown, it would smell like Axe body spray and that perfume they put on tampons to make your vagina smell like laundry detergent" (1)—and a commentary on the symbolicalness of the vignettes:

These stories aren't worth telling. There's no arc to them, no dramatic climax. There's nothing at stake, not really. You imagine your listener, leaning in, 'And then what

happened?’ And you have to say, ‘Nothing. That’s the whole story.’ ‘Oh,’ she says, her mouth a firm line.

These are little bits of things that happened, or things you think about. They’re light on tension, you know that. There’s no real peril. There’s no resolution. (4)

The last story, then, narrates being approached by a (male) stranger on the street. Hirsch positions that “[y]ou are tired of gluing your eyes to the sidewalk in shame. You are tired of taking it, of treating it like a tax you must pay for the privilege of being a woman in public spaces” (11). So, Hirsch narrates a scenario in which a woman, upon being harassed, tries to explain to the offender why his behavior makes her feel not “flattered [but] . . . angry, honestly. I feel afraid” (12). The man remains incomprehensive and precedes to “[follow] you the whole way, shouting ‘Now I’m scaring you, huh? Now you’re afraid of me!’” (12). Indeed, this behavior provokes fear. However,

. . . now there’s anger, too. So much anger that it bokes out some of your fear. The next time you yell back to the man yelling at you, it’s easier. And the time after that is easier still.

. . . Your prize for all this effort is a small thing, but you cherish it. It is the astonishment on your harasser’s face.

. . . Next time, you tell yourself when it’s done, this man won’t shout so readily. Next time he will see the woman coming, open his mouth to speak, and for one second, one perfect second, he will be afraid of her. (12–13)

Unlike Little’s poem which envisions an abstract collective uprising sourced on accumulated rage, Hirsch’s story rather presents a seemingly individual, seemingly mundane act of resistance born out of a sense of accumulated rage. As the last story of several incidents that ultimately describes the daily occurrences that ‘put women in their place,’ the weariness with which, as Hirsch writes, “you” respond to being de-placed once again—de-placed through being reminded of the constant threat of sexual objectification and, with that, sexualized violence—reads as a result of the accumulation of experiences. The second-person narration here positions this response as somewhat natural or surely self-evident. It also dissolves the individuality of the narrated act of resistance.

Unlike the previous vignettes, this last one does, in fact, find some resolution. Albeit there is some looming danger to the individual angry resistance vis-à-vis a potential perpetrator, Hirsch’s story describes finding a sense of empowerment in the expression of anger. Although no comprehensive change to the dynamics of rape culture lamented throughout the story is suggested, the short moment of “astonishment on your harasser’s face” reverses the dynamics in which only the harasser is empowered to control the victim’s emotion enough so to narrate a certain satisfaction that reminds the reader, following the second-person perspective, of their sovereignty. The narrated imagination of the harasser being afraid himself underlines this. However, this last sentence also undermines the little change possible with such an individual act of resistance (fueled by anger) as the prospect

of the harasser harassing another woman is not merely possible or probable but rather obvious, taken for granted. So, while there is a narration of a collectivized rage in Hirsch's story, its self-positioned forcefulness remains quite negligible. The #MeToo movement does, however, also include more forthright or perhaps even violent narrations of (collective) rage.

Medusa, Rage, and Survival

In 2008, Argentinian artist Luciano Garbati created the sculpture *Medusa with the Head of Perseus*, an inversion of the 16th-century sculpture *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* by Benvenuto Cellini. Of course, both sculptures draw from Greek mythology. In the mythological story of Medusa, Perseus beheads her. Before that, Medusa had been punished for her sexual relation with Poseidon by Minerva, who transformed Medusa's hair into snakes and ensured that whoever gazed into her eyes turned to stone—at least so the dominant Medusa myth. Overtime, Medusa's story came to be invoked as a classic, perhaps symbolic, rape narrative. In this interpretation, Medusa is raped by Poseidon and then shamed for it, punished by being turned into a monstrous creature. Artist Judy Takács tells the Medusa tale along these lines:

Long before the Perseus beheading story, Medusa was a beautiful young woman. Medusa was raped by the God Poseidon in Athena's Temple. Athena, angered that her temple had been desecrated, took vengeance on the *victim* Medusa...not the *rapist*, Poseidon. Blaming Medusa's beauty, Athena made it so no man could ever look at her again. She cursed innocent and lovely Medusa to become a snake-headed gorgon whose glance turns those who look at her into stone.

Through her paintings, Takács has, as she writes, “restored Medusa's youthful beauty and innocence.” Multiple pictures of two paintings published on her blog, announcing the exhibition of these artworks, show a young, naked woman with long, flowing black hairs, the strands of which slightly morph into snakes from the roots to the hair ends. Her skin is pale, her bare chest prominently occupies the center of the first painting, her lower body is wrapped in a green blanket with black tangled streaks on it that resemble her thick strands of hair. The pale skin and dark hair stand out against the textured light purple background while the dark green blanket flows into a green border around the bottom half of the painting. Painted from a head-on view, Medusa sensually looks away toward her left, both hands carefully touching her hair. Her left hand is close to her hip, her right hand is brought up, the palm facing the front. In another close-up picture, the palm is revealed to have a stigmata of a hashtag symbol. The paintings are titled “‘Me(dusa)too,” positioning the reimagined feminist Medusa myth and the reimagined, returned beauty in the context of the #MeToo

movement. Medusa's equivalence to (youthful) feminine beauty ideals and the presentation of her nudity are presented as defiance against the power dynamics that render her shamed for her sexuality (and at fault for the abuse of this sexuality).

Takács' paintings, too, cannot detach Medusa from a sexualized portrayal. While not using the depiction of her sexuality as a demonstration of deviance à la femme fatale aesthetic, Takács' Medusa centers her sexuality, in this case on the depiction of her innocence. Curiously, Takács presents a #MeToo-inspired reimagining of a figure now positioned as a resilient heroine through the pointed centering of her normative beauty. The inversion of what was weaponized against her still renders her without agency, returning to being a desired and abused body. The stigmata on her hand that places the paintings in a #MeToo context, then, reads not as a demonstration of resilient bravery to claim and speak out about her experience of being raped but rather as a signal of her (body's) vulnerability.

This is not the only time that the Medusa myth (and its feminist imagining) has been placed within a #MeToo context, attempting to morph Medusa into both a symbol of victim-blaming/shaming as well as (the possibility of) empowered defiance. In 2020, Luciano Garbati's statue that retells the classic myth so that Medusa now beheads Perseus was positioned and unveiled in New York City and advertised as presenting an "icon of justice" (Jacobs). Specifically, the statue was placed in Collect Pond Park, across the street from the New York County Supreme Court in Lower Manhattan. This courthouse happens to be one of the places in which Harvey Weinstein was convicted. Garbati's approximately two-meter-high, bronze statue shows Medusa, sculpted as a slim, naked woman, identifiable clearly through the snake-like, textured hair lying across her shoulder, holding a sword in her left and Perseus' head in the right hand. The look on her face is stern, as is Perseus', whose decapitated head Medusa holds by his hair. Medusa and Perseus face in the same direction, a notable resemblance to Benvenuto Cellini's famous statue.

The unveiling of *Medusa with the Head of Perseus* as a memorialization of the #MeToo movement did not come without criticism. The press release announced the statue as a demonstration of "soberly empowered self-defense" and a "symbol of resistance" (*Medusa With The Head Project*). Some lamented that Medusa ought to behead her rapist, Poseidon, not Perseus (Jacobs). Principal criticism, however, focused on the statue's artist, a man, or the presentation of Medusa as "a lithe, classically beautiful nude figure" (Jacobs). Valeria Spacciante, for instance, writes, "Medusa is sculpted as slender, athletic, and, of course, naked. Even her gaze, supposedly resolute, feels sexualized. Rather than a woman fighting for her life, Garbati's Medusa looks like a femme fatale searching for her next

victim.” Indeed, the femme fatale aesthetic is hard to overlook in an artwork that centers on a figure conforming to normative feminine beauty ideals while displaying (violent) triumph over a man. The role reversal from the original statute is almost clichéd and obvious enough to resist any profound readings about the role of (feminist) anger (Ahmed, “Feminist Futures” 246–249; Ahmed, *Complaint!*; Kay and Banet-Weiser), the reprocessing of vigilantism in light of the fraught relationship between (female) victims of sexualized violence and the criminal justice system (A. Powell), or the role of revenge fantasies in movements against sexualized violence²⁷ (Pâquet; Spallacci).

More curiously, however, is the narrativization of a dynamic not centered in the #MeToo movement: justice through the downfall of a perpetrator. Rather, the narratives of the #MeToo movement reveal a process of resisting shame in a way that does not center (or, at times, even include) the perpetrator. So, *Medusa with the Head of Perseus* only stands in accordance with many of the dominant #MeToo narrative practices when regarded as an attempt in the search for performances of shame resistance and empowerment rather than the conclusion of a triumph. A demonstration of a claimed victory that ends both the violence of sexualized violence and the desubjectification that these narratives place in the courtroom, a statement surely made by the placing of *Medusa with the Head of Perseus* vis-à-vis the place now symbolic of the downfall of Harvey Weinstein, is ill-fitted to encapsulate the movement. Rather, the re-emergence of this statue as a supposed #MeToo symbol illustrates yet again that a certain performance or iconography of rage is culturally permitted only when it remains entirely unthreatening to the makeup of the public. So, the #MeToo narratives that write about rage in a way to threaten this structural foundation remain to be explored.

Staying with, for now, the *Medusa with the Head of Perseus*’ position across from a courthouse brings up the #MeToo movement’s productive narrative struggle in the construction of this particular place. While it is evoked to situate narratives of placelessness, continuous trauma, and profound shame, the #MeToo movement also elicits the discursively upheld authority of the courtroom to reject and publicly replace the shame of sexualized violence there, constructing performances of empowerment. Throughout, the (potential) harm to a perpetrator—the beheading of Perseus (or Poseidon, for that matter)—is not in focus. Rather, #MeToo narratives that are performed in or construct a courtroom center the affective experience of the victim. This experience, in many cases, is a narrative of being, once again, disempowered. Here, it becomes clear that what constitutes the courtroom is the

²⁷ In and since the #MeToo movement, the genre of ‘rape-revenge narratives’ is largely restricted to the fictional realm (see, for instance, L. Wilson).

struggle for narrative control that takes place and becomes placed. Thus, the inability to agentically participate in this struggle for narrative control unveils the placelessness of victims of sexualized violence. Conversely, the narrative practice of placing (courtroom) narratives in public, to regain different practices of witnessing, destabilizes the processes of the struggle for narrative control as they take place in the courtroom during the legal process. In the 'here' in literature, in which victims of sexualized violence place themselves in their autobiographical narratives, the courtroom thus may become a site of resistance and, principally, a site of struggle for (re-)claiming agency.

So, the simple presentation of the #MeToo movement that the story of the reimagined *Medusa with the Head of Perseus* suggests when it was used and placed as a symbol for the victory of victims of sexualized violence appears hollow. However, the implied rage symbolized by this specific Medusa (a rage implied by the violence depicted), gets closer to encapsulating the affective focal points of the #MeToo movement. The solo performance “#Me Too Medusa. Ein feministischer Wutausbruch,” written and directed by Birgitta Linde, reimagines Medusa as a figure of feminist rage. In this retelling, Medusa (played by Sabine Fischmann) is confronted with being blamed for Poseidon's abuse. Rejecting the blaming and shaming processes she finds herself up against, Medusa expresses her rage, at times through a perhaps cathartic and surely demonstratively unpleasant hammering on a drum set. While this new Medusa also reckons with remarkably sexist lyrics from recent music history, her rage finds itself unmistakably explained in the insistent, uncomfortable, detailed enumeration of femicides (in Germany). Resisting the urge to restore Medusa as a *beautiful* figure (of victory), Linde's play, instead, positions Medusa as the figure of feminist rage particularly because, “. . . Wut macht ja bekanntlich hässlich” (*Stalburg Theater*).

Linde's play ends with Fischmann's Medusa performing a rendition of the song “Survivor” by Destiny's Child, loudly proclaiming, “Ich überlebe!”. In light of the previous enraged enumeration of cases of femicide, this appears hardly empowered though. After all, many victims, in fact, do not survive gendered (sexualized) violence. Rather, Medusa's forceful declaration in this context reads as lamenting the demand to survive in the light of the realities of sexualized violence thematized in the play. More than an empowered statement of resilience, it becomes a performance of demanding to recognize the achievement of simply surviving against (the threat of) this violence. Resisting or agentically existing appear out of reach when mere survival is not self-evident and, consequently, in need of occasional celebratory acknowledgment. But Medusa's unapologetic rage, unmistakable in her screaming that adds an undeniable auditory dimension to her demand to

be on stage and be heard, resists, at least, the shaming mechanism that demands victims of sexualized violence not only to endure but to endure in silence.

Screaming, Yelling, and Writing: Negotiations of Anger

In her memoir, Chanel Miller explicitly addresses the containment of (her) anger in the legal process: “This time I wondered what behavior was acceptable for a victim. What tone? She warned me not to get angry. I learned that if you’re angry, you’re defensive. . . . *Calm*, I told myself. *Collected*” (*Know My Name* 149). However, Miller does narrate her rage. Upon getting a sense of her sister’s emotional harm as a result of Turner’s defense attorney’s legal strategy, Miller imagines,

I was ready to grab my keys, walk straight out the door. I wanted to pull up to the defense attorney’s house, run up the carpeted stairs, and rustle him awake in his stupid pajamas, his glasses on the bedside table. . . . I’d ask him if he knew how he was disturbing my little sister, couldn’t he figure out a goddamn way to do this decently, to keep it between me and Brock, . . . do you want to destroy my sister in the process, because I will end you. (186)

As the aggression in this fantasy is obvious, Miller ultimately narrates a sense of empowerment through the rage released by her protectiveness over her sister.

His mistake was that he was going after someone I would go to the ends of the earth for. . . . What happens when a person gets in between a mother bear and her cub, have you read about the maulings, faces ripped clean.

Fuck what you sipped, how you sipped, when you sipped with whom, fuck if I danced on the table, fuck if I danced on the chair. You want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? . . . [O]n a cool January evening, I went out, while that guy, that guy there, had decided that yes or no, moving or motionless, he wanted to fuck someone, intended to fuck someone, and it happened to be me. This did not make me deficient.

This did not make me inadequate. . . . He believed he could break us, but from this day forward, I would begin to build. (187)

In her story, this is the catalyst for writing anger into her victim impact statement. Here, Miller is empowered by her rage and concludes the restraint narrated earlier with profound rejection. The self-blame Miller narrates earlier in her memoir gives way to her rage now directed at Turner and the narrative reframing of Turner’s assault. Through productive rage, Miller intends to take back control over this narrative in the realms of the courtroom. About the now-rejected restraint of victims’ anger in the legal process—or any overly expressed affect, for that matter—Miller later identifies, “Maybe it is not calm they wanted all along, but suppressed, quiet, contained” (220). She states, “. . . why shouldn’t we be enraged” (220), leaving no question mark to this open invitation into generative feminist rage that rejects the script of calmness in the courtroom.

Opposing this narrated feminist rage is, however, Miller’s narration of harmful anger, harmful only to herself. She writes,

What I never say out loud is that rape makes you want to turn into wood, hard and impenetrable. The opposite of a body that is meant to be tender, porous, soft. Sometimes I'm too angry, seething after reading a rape story, *I need to slice a dick off*. (263)

Miller crucially gives her anger a sense of collectivity, kept alive by reading someone else's story, signaling that her rage is not (merely) a result of a particular trauma but the extension of that trauma into a grievance about the ubiquity of sexualized violence. However, she also returns to the language of containment. While she unapologetically shares her imagined rather aggressive impulse, she does so in a part of the text that explains not the productivity of her rage but the devastation of her trauma. After all, as she writes, she is harmed by feeling "the opposite of" how a body is "meant to be." Her vengeful aggression, with its vividness, remains undoubtedly unthreatening.

In her statement, anger also remains constrained. While she evokes an imagery of having "yelled half of my statement" (C. Miller, "Stanford Sexual Assault Case Survivor Emily Doe Speaks Out"), something reading rather as desperation than the earlier narrated empowered feminist rage, she also positions (her) anger as antithetical to not being destroyed by the assault and her trauma: "We can let this destroy us, I can remain angry and hurt and you can be in denial, or we can face it head on, I accept the pain, you accept the punishment, and we move on" (K. J. M. Baker). So, there is a tension between the (feminist) rage Miller narrates as being fueled by for the writing of her statement, rejecting the containment of a victim's affect in the courtroom or the notion that a lenient sentence is not something to be enraged by, and the positioning of her anger as a signal of trauma rather than resistance.

There is a similar tension in the narrativization of the Larry Nassar trial. Katie Gibson argues that "... the survivors' statements in Lansing, Michigan, mobilized a rhetoric of collective anger to disrupt courtroom norms, hegemonic scripts, and generic expectations that contain and diminish testimony of sexual violence" (519). Indeed, many of the televised victim impact statements narrate and vocally express rage. Rachel Haines, however, who published her victim impact statement as part of her memoir after having it previously anonymously presented in court in her absence, describes writing her anger out of her statement draft by draft, only feeling relieved after expressing forgiveness for Nassar. Denhollander similarly rids herself of expressions of anger toward Nassar, neither narrating nor performing (a sense of) rage. Yet, she expresses a vengeful triumph over Nassar specifically in the absence of anger, which is then framed as an affect of a lack of control. Not the performance of rage, then, is empowering or empowered but rather the performance of control over one's emotions, constructing a performance of agency.

This display of agency stands in contrast to Jessica Mann's evoking of "uncontrollable screams" at the beginning of her victim impact statements. With that, she makes clear that her screams are not performances of rage but indicative of her debilitating trauma. As Mann's statement is centered on a process of justification, nearly begging for the court's (and, crucially, the public's) recognition of her believability as a victim, it is clear that the courtroom in her case not only constraints an expression of her anger but renders it entirely impossible. The same is true for Laurie Katz's memoir, in which the courtroom remains a place of desubjectification for victims (of sexualized violence). Laurie Halse Anderson's poem "if it please the court" and V.L. Seek's essay "Law and the Queer Woman or How I Sat in a Classroom and Listened to My Male Classmates Debate How to Define Force and Consent" express rage over this desubjectification but render this rage only possible in the writing about the courtroom, a place victims remain displaced from. Katie Rose Guest Pryal's essay "Nightmare Rooms" restricts a narration of anger to subtle signals vis-à-vis the perpetrator(s). Tanya Selvaratnam's memoir *Assume Nothing: A Story of Intimate Violence* constructs anger as something to overcome in the interest of personal 'healing' and political change. Conversely, Donna J.A. Olson's poem "Not Guilty" rather constructs a sober defeatedness about her powerlessness in achieving something akin to 'justice.' Similarly, Myriam Gurba's memoir *Mean* comes to the sober conclusion that, seemingly inescapably, "[s]omewhere out there . . . a woman is getting touched to death" (175).

Rage is undeniable throughout Rose McGowan's memoir *Brave*. Towards the end, she explicitly addresses this: "We women have historically been trained to be pleasant at all times. We need to stop that and be authentic; justifiable anger is a part of that. Being angry is okay; no one is going to die if we women let our anger out in healthy ways" (214). Although McGowan leaves these "healthy ways" open, her statement nevertheless renders anger as something ultimately without effect. Not only is "no one going to die if we women let our anger out," McGowan positions anger as, albeit justified, non-threatening to the dynamics that incite this anger. What incites this anger is precisely being the object of (men's) rage which, as McGowan's memoir makes clear, may kill and, in fact, does kill (women). In light of this, the anger McGowan writes of here is non-threatening. Its ("healthy") expression is, then, merely advisable for one's peace of mind, not a political tool. Throughout her memoir, however, anger is a tool. The performance of rage is a central part of her construction of a self, the process that resists the containment she narrates being regulated by, as a woman specifically, and the desubjectification of the sexualized violence narrated.

Anger and, specifically, the gendered regulation of its public expression is picked up in a story titled *All the Angry Women* by Lyz Lenz, published as part of *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture* (Gay). In this story, Lenz writes about the placelessness of her anger and her attempt to find it in a writing class, “[b]ecause I needed to find a place to feel angry” (157). So, she writes about finding herself in a position in which she now

facilitate[s] that class on Tuesday nights, listening as women bring their own anger. It follows them in through the door. *Where can I put this?* they want to know. *Where can I set it down?* I pat the cushions next to me. *Put it here.*

The Proverbs in the Old Testament advise that it is better to live in a desert or on a roof than in the same home with an angry and contentious woman. My mother recited this verse to my sisters and me when we would yell and scream against injustices . . . The words were used to silence us. (157)

In Lenz’s narrative, anger is an affect not only principally silenced and sanctioned for women but especially prevalent for women because of the ubiquity of sexualized violence and the inability to express anger about it. As Lenz writes, this inability is achieved through a (threat of) displacement. The notion of the placelessness of anger or the absence of a place to voice anger becomes, through Lenz’s narrative, not only metaphorical. Because Lenz positions voicing anger, which requires finding a place where it can be voiced, as the resistance to the shaming and silencing that regulate women’s affective expressions, the practice she describes here and simultaneously practices—the (collective) writing about one’s anger—construct this place. In light of its principal resistant predicate, this narrated place emerges as a counterpublic.

Lenz establishes in her narrative that dominant culture silences women(’s anger):

Every woman in my class walks into the room with a heavy load. They have learned the same lessons as my mother and I. . . . They heft their bag of contraband emotion into their lap. *Where can I put this?*

Our society has a place for actual abusers: jail. There are systems and processes in place to handle them and rehabilitate them. . . . [A]ngry women? They must be silent.

Abusers have a pathology. They have a system. They have restraining orders and court-mandated anger management classes. Once, I heard a new story about sex offenders who had been driven out of their homes by laws mandating that they stray away from schools. A hotel had opened its doors to them so that they wouldn’t be homeless. Even they had a place to lay their heads.

My anger was still homeless. (159)

For Lenz, women (who react to the realities of sexualized violence with anger) are not granted a place (to express anger). This dynamic alone already reflects the cultural power dynamics Lenz implicitly addresses here, given that this place cannot simply be claimed or created but the construction of which has been permitted and sanctioned by those empowered. Further, however, Lenz contends that this placelessness is worse than confinement. So, the notion of placelessness is crucially symbolic of gendered processes of desubjectification. At the root of these processes stand, of course, power dynamics that continuously reconstruct the access to discursive power and, with that, places.

In Lenz's narrative, the voicing of this anger alone, however, does not simply destabilize the power dynamics that inhibit its placing. She points to the necessity of justification:

An angry woman must answer for herself. The reasons for her anger must be picked over, examined, and debated. My anger must stand the scrutiny of the court of law, of evidentiary procedures. I must prove it comes from somewhere justified and not just because one time some man touched my sister. Or because at one time some man touched some woman and he will continue on and on. (162–163)

With the assessment that the ruling about the validity of women's anger (toward sexualized violence) is a process from which women are excluded, their agentic placing becomes impossible. Yet, Lenz does construct a 'here' to place her anger as she writes about the collective writing process that evokes the construction of a place to hold collective anger. So, she asserts the possibility of a counterpublic in which gendered anger expression is possible and limitless. Lenz concludes her narrative by imagining this boundlessness in a way that reemphasizes the collective properties of her (seemingly personal) anger:

Sometimes I wonder if the Proverbs weren't an admonishment of an angry woman, but a warning about the depth and breadth and scope of her wrath. A woman's anger needs the whole house; go somewhere else. Anywhere else. Her anger is not going away. (166)

This also positions that it requires resistance—a counter—to renegotiate the power dynamics that construct publicness. It is not the process of publicness alone that comprises the possibility of alternative practices of power. As a counterpublic emerges once the power dynamics of a hegemonic public are (aimed to be) destabilized within a resistant collective, the meaning of this hegemonic public remains discursively upheld. Evidently, the concept of counterpublic necessarily implies a hegemonic public (in resistance to which a counter can emerge). So, the possibility of the places of a counterpublic permeating toward comprehensive agency or (political) empowerment remains unstable. However, the rage that demands publicness ensures sexualized violence is not rendered solved in the cultural catharsis of the downfall of some previously powerful perpetrators and the collective performance of a replacing of shame seductively provokes. It ensures that sexualized is not rendered individual, as it was never individual in the first place. While a counterpublic does not threaten the hegemonic public, rather re-establishing its existence as hegemonic, collective public expressions of rage do threaten this integrity.

This is perhaps most evident in So Mayer's essay "Floccinaucinihilipilification." So Mayer concludes the text with the rallying cry, "It's time to pull out the scalpel and turn it around. Slash vents in the paper walls of this master's house of heteropatriarchal colonialist mass hallucination that claims to be our reality. Give vent to our rage. Be bad. Dare to survive" (142), positioning that it may be, in fact, the master's tool with which to dismantle

the master's house (which, of course, disagrees with Audre Lorde's famous speech alluded to). As this rage is framed as an act of resistance and as rage is regulated, denied to some in certain places—as it is places through which discursive power is practiced—, it is clear that the ability to express rage is a practice of power. Demanding the ability and place to express rage, thus, engages with the power dynamics that regulate the distribution of this ability. The performance of rage that constructs the place to enable its expression is thus a practice of resistance.

Mayer's essay questions the dichotomy between writing rage and conceptualizing the (cultural) context that enabled the abuse at the root of this rage.

'He has sometimes likened his style of writing to that of a medic performing a post-mortem on a raped child—whose job is to analyse the injuries, not to give vent to the rage that is felt.'—SUSIE MACKENZIE ON J. G. BALLARD, *GUARDIAN*, SEPT. 6TH, 2003

If Ballard's is the model for the experimental, political novel, how is the (un)dead raped child supposed to write, even if she survives?

1. Perform a postmortem on herself.

2. Give vent to the rage that is felt.

They are impossible, apparently. (129–130)

As Mayer's essay starts with this allusion and ends with a proclamation of situating (writing) rage while analyzing their rape throughout the essay, they perform a rejection of the notion that, for a victim writing about their trauma, analysis is antithetical to a political expression of affect. The essay crucially positions that it is the "(un)dead raped child" who is supposed to write about rape and that their rage is not only forceful—after all, Mayer starts the essay with the proclamation that "[r]aped children are supposed to die . . . so our rage doesn't tear down all their [white cisgender male straight geniuses'] certificates and awards and case files, trash their analysis and ram their face in the privilege that allows them to side with our abuser in silencing and killing us" (129)—but productive.

The forcefulness of this collective rage is also narrated in the poem "We Too" by Victoria Richards, published in *#MeToo: Rallying Against Sexual Assault and Harassment: A Women's Poetry Anthology* (Alma). Reconfiguring the 'me' in #MeToo into 'we,' the poem's title already frames its narration of rage as shared and forceful through this collectivity. In the first stanza, Richards affirms the power of this particular 'we'—a 'we' indicating the solidarity between victims of sexualized violence. This group is, in Richards' poem, not only forceful but disruptive. The poem's fragmented form mirrors this provoked, desired disruption:

We are Eve, we are forked
tongue, we are the silky,
sex-scent of petrol, slippery
on your fingers, the fizzing *hiss*
crack as you strike a match.

We are nails scratching
harder, fuck
me
harder on black velvet. We
 are 'QUEEN' shouted from
 scaffold-smashed rubble. We
 are that burning fire emoji,
 ammonia's arid stink. In
 our boxing ring we wear split-
 lip rust—and
 our hands bleed iron.
 We are extra heavy flow, we
 pour out of ourselves, and we
 wash away. (125)

Here, the poem narrates not only assertions of a certain forcefulness but also a particular danger. Starting with the biblical imagery that, connecting Eve and the snake, evokes the power to entirely alter the course of humanity, Richards' narration is unapologetic about the properties of deceit, discomfort, and violence this 'we'—victims of sexualized violence—holds. Connecting (the acrid smell of) petrol with fire through the description and allocation of the sudden, undeniable energy the strike of a match signals constructs an imagery of destruction. Further, the explosive combination of petrol and a struck match are what introduces the reclaiming of sexuality in these verses. Then, as unapologetic loudness is personified in the poem's 'we,' and this 'we' is ascribed to a seemingly indestructible body with hands that "bleed iron," Richards also frames menstruation (here, a symbol of femininity and something historically stigmatized, hidden, shamed) as a demonstration of forcefulness. With this metaphor, the poem signals the inexorability of women's performances of power.

The poem's second stanza, however, introduces the forces this power is compelled to push up against.

You put your hands up our skirts as
 we walk through Leicester Square,
 grab our breasts in the back of taxis,
 stand too close to us on the tube,
 pressed against our bottoms.
 You whistle as we push buggies
 to nursery, as we run, hot sweat
 metal in the park.
Alright, darlin'? Fucking bitch—
fucking cold, fucking frigid bitch. (125)

Establishing the ubiquity of sexualized violence, the poem's structure makes clear that these dynamics persist even in light of the seemingly unstoppable feminist power. The tension between these narrations is at the core of the poem's position of (feminist) rage. As the ubiquity and self-evidence of sexualized violence remain stable, rage appears as the source of the unapologetic, violent, destructive energy Richards' poem envisions victims of

sexualized violence to hold collectively. Clearly, the poem positions both a dangerous performance of rage and the experience of inescapable sexualized violence as indisputably collective. So, in its last lines, Richards' poem returns to a narration not of the danger victims of sexualized experience but to the danger they may become:

We are tetanus kisses
 —shout 'fire', nobody comes
 if you shout 'rape'—
 and we are our mothers' cries.
 . . .
 We explode with our blue skin,
 and we are coming for you.
 We too. (125–126)

Acknowledging a cultural unconcern about sexualized violence, Richards positions that the practice of power remains in finding alternative ways to cause disruption nonetheless. Surely, the prompt to "shout 'fire'" suggests the mayhem needed to disrupt the dynamics that allow for sexualized violence to occur, as the poem's second stanza makes clear, everywhere and all the time. So, Richards concludes the poem not with a rallying cry but with a warning that reemphasizes the continued danger and, with that, the power victims of sexualized violence continue to hold even in the light of the inescapability of sexualized violence. At least in Richards' poem, this inescapability is shaking, as the forceful—indeed, explosive—collective threatens the perpetrators that engender the rage distinct in this narration.

With its last assertion, the poem reiterates the ubiquity of sexualized violence. Turning "me too," a short autobiographical narrative to signal the experience of having been sexually harassed or abused, into an even clearer collective practice and experience, this assertion underlines that sexualized violence is ubiquitous and pervasive enough to not require the specificities each story's 'me' holds. And even in the light of the destructive power of the collective formed through the devastation of sexualized violence, the culture that requires alternative ways to be heard—to shout 'fire' instead of 'rape'—also remains in the midst of it. However, it is the broadness of the collective, a broadness only possible because of the prevalence of sexualized violence, that even engenders the forcefulness that the poem establishes. So, without resolving this tension, "We Too" asserts its productivity, indicating that this tension is the reason that cultural adjustments will no longer suffice and, instead, imagines total destruction. Here, feminist rage emerges as the presence of petrol that holds dangerous implications for striking a match.

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