



The Transformative Memoirs of the MeToo movement:
A Cognitive Perspective on Roxane Gay's *Hunger, a Memoir of (My) Body*
and Vanessa Springora's *Consent: A Memoir* as Transformative Readings

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Abstract

This thesis is a theoretical exploration of the transformative potential of MeToo memoirs from a cognitive perspective. Conceptualizing memoirs written by sexual abuse survivors as a medium of the MeToo movement, I showcase how *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* (2017) by Roxane Gay and *Consent: A Memoir* (2021) by Vanessa Springora could enact self-transformation in readers' understandings regarding sexual violence and spark social change. Theories of foregrounding, transformative reading, and second-generation cognitive approaches are used to analyse the two case studies. In doing so, I demonstrate how vivid embodied descriptions of abuse could enact mental imagery, how the interchange of the memoirists' past experiences and their present perspectives on sexual violence may afford identification, and lastly, how self-reflective narrative structures on the texts' purposes could foster sympathy in readers. Through those textual affordances, I conclude that the memoirs, as contributions to the MeToo movement, prompt readers to reflect upon the political conceptualization of personal experiences of sexual abuse and reconsider their self- and other understandings, a transformation from which further social change follows.

Keywords: MeToo movement, MeToo writings, rape memoir, sexual violence, transformative reading, foregrounding theory, imagery, identification, sympathy, 4E cognition

Trigger warning: this thesis contains descriptions of rape, sexual abuse, paedophilia and abusive/offensive language.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: From the #MeToo movement to the MeToo memoirs

The literary testimonies of sexual violence that have emerged in the MeToo era have grown into narratives that tackle rape culture. Characterized by scholar Tonya Serisier as personal narratives written by survivors of sexual violence, rape memoirs serve as a medium with testimonial empowerment for survivors to share their stories and are inherently connected with the politics of *speaking out* (44). 'Speaking out' refers to openly sharing personal experiences, especially those related to social and political issues, to raise awareness, challenge prevailing norms and advocate for change (4). It involves breaking the silence surrounding sexual violence and using one's voice to make a political statement or demand justice (11). Rape memoirs, or *MeToo memoirs*, are, therefore, literary rape testimonies that break the silence surrounding rape and contribute to the broader movement against sexual violence.

Tanya Serisier's book *Speaking Out* presents the political transformative potential of the experiential MeToo storytelling, providing a starting point for this thesis. In Serisier's words, "the politics produced by this new literature has a series of ambivalent and paradoxical effects, both for the survivors who tell their stories and in terms of its potential to enact social and cultural change" (44). In this thesis, I aim to explore the potentially transformative effects of MeToo memoirs on readers and to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how these memoirs can spark personal and social change, contributing to the ongoing movement.

In her article "Teaching the #MeToo Memoir: Creating Empathy in the First-Years College Classroom", Elif S. Armbruster offers an insight into the transformative results of her seminar on *experiencing* readings of #MeToo memoirs. The scholar reflects, "In fact, students were so

transformed by the knowledge they gained and the community we created that they decided to form a #MeToo campus support group, illustrating how academic work can extend beyond the classroom” (312). Armbruster’s teaching initiative shows that not just academic work but specifically experiencing literary reading of MeToo memoirs entails a *transformative possibility* that extends beyond the solar reading moment, fostering social change. Therefore, it is rather suitable for this thesis’ cause to explore the transformative possibility of MeToo memoirs implementing Olivia Fialho’s transformative reading theory. In her recent study, *Transformative Reading*, the scholar provides a theoretical-empirical model, grounded in phenomenology, cognitive studies and foregrounding theory, that unfolds the modalities of a transformative reading experience, which means a modification of readers’ familiar understandings enacted by evocative passages and the narrative techniques of a text. Using transformative reading theory, I hope to answer my research question: How could MeToo memoirs potentially enact self-transformation in readers’ understandings regarding sexual violence and spark social change?

In order to address my thesis question, I will analyse two case memoirs: *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* (2017) by American feminist writer Roxane Gay and *Consent: A Memoir* (2019 in French; 2021 translated in English) by French publishing director Vanessa Springora. I chose *Hunger* as a representative memoir that reflects the political discourse often found in MeToo testimonies, which emphasizes the interrelation between rape memoirs and the wider MeToo movement. The second case, *Consent*, was chosen to exemplify how a memoir can contribute to the movement’s efforts to prompt societal change and, in this instance, bring consequences to the sexual predator.

This introductory chapter will discuss the MeToo movement, focusing on its political dimension derived from its historical roots. The next section will introduce the scholarly discussion concerning memoirs of rape and sexual violence emerging within the MeToo era. This literature review will compose a body of questions regarding memoirs as media of the MeToo movement as a guide for analysing the two case studies. In the second chapter, I will present the theoretical framework of this thesis, the transformative reading theory (Fialho), according to which I will argue for memoirs' transformative potential. This last section will start with the long tradition of foregrounding (van Peer et al.); cognitive approaches and empirical findings that support the transformative reading model will follow; it will conclude with the concepts of mental imagery (Kuzmičová), personal identification (van Krieken et al.), and sympathy (Sklar), components of transformative reading (Fialho, "What is literature for?"), which will provide a methodology according to which, in the two following chapters, I will indicate textual strategies that could potentially prompt a transformative reading experience in readers.

The third and the fourth analytical chapters follow a common structure: the first sections are dedicated to detecting specific textual strategies that could enable readers to experience mental imagery, identification and sympathy. What follows is an examination of how each memoir is embedded in the MeToo movement through the participation of each memoirist in the MeToo storytelling. Lastly, I will present a hypothesis of the (extended) reflective possibilities that each memoir affords readers; in other words, what are the notions against sexual violence that the memoirs embark on, fostering self-modification of readers' understandings beyond the memoir. The last concluding chapter will compare the findings of

this thesis and conceptualize how MeToo memoirs can be transformative for readers and society in the context of the MeToo movement.

1.1 The origin and the globalization of the MeToo movement

In 2006, activist Tarana Burke shared the first MeToo story on her online platform, launching an empowering through empathy movement against sexual violence (“Tarana Burke, Founder”). Burke intended to create what previously did not exist: a community-based support system that encourages predominantly Black women and girls from disadvantaged backgrounds to speak out about their abuses (“History & Inception”). Burke’s initiative developed into a movement that addresses sexual violence as a system of oppression and aims for “individual and community healing and transformation, empowerment through empathy, shifting cultural narratives and practices and advancing a global survivor-led movement to end sexual violence” (“Vision & Theory of Change”).

However, it was not until October 2017 that the MeToo movement went viral as a hashtag on Twitter, amassing 12 million posts within the first 24 hours and soon enough reaching international visibility (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 3). This surge was initiated by actress Alyssa Milano’s #MeToo post against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, urging women who had experienced sexual assault to join her in sharing their own experiences under the MeToo hashtag (3). Celebrities like herself and ordinary women across the globe followed her paradigm, exposing powerful men and sharing everyday stories of sexual violence (3). Since then, MeToo has been shaped through different contexts, and it has been seen utilizing diverse forms and media and serving different political agendas; arguably, the decentralization of

Burke's initial movement can be noted, shaping MeToo storytelling into a global symbol against sexual violence.

Despite its decentralization, MeToo universally invites survivors to speak out, confronting the normalization of rape and the silencing of the victims. Fileborn and Loney-Howes assert that the recognition and widespread MeToo is a stark reaffirmation of the existence of rape culture within society (2). According to the authors, rape culture is a "highly contested term that refers to the social, cultural and political process that condones violence against women but also blames women (and all other victim-survivors) if and when violence is perpetrated against them" (1-2). Arguably, the global spread of #MeToo as a digital form of anti-sexual violence activism, its decentralization, and its long-lasting establishment have achieved creating a powerful space for rape survivors to speak out, shedding light on the widespread prevalence of rape culture as well as its long-lasting denial. In this thesis, I consider MeToo a multidimensional international movement of collective sharing of experiences of sexual violence that aims to expose and tackle rape culture and instigate societal change.

The international circulation of MeToo has brought countable changes, prompting scholars to evaluate it as a successful movement (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 5; Mendes and Ringrose 41; Gill and Orgad 1318). Specifically, numerous stories of people with marginalised identities have been brought to the foreground, and many of them, including Oprah Winfrey, Salma Hayek, and Tarana Burke, are considered significant contributors to the movement (Gill and Orgad 1318). The analysis of Roxane Gay's memoir will demonstrate how the author aims to represent minorities of Black women and women with fat bodies by sharing her story. On the other end, not only many powerful men accused of assault have been shamed and faced legal

consequences, but visible developments against harassment in the workplace have been established within the MeToo era (1318). The second memoir of my analysis by Vanessa Springora is an interesting example of the fall of an influential writer and the legal changes it has sparked, showing how those shifts are possible with publishing MeToo memoirs.

Significant is also MeToo's sociopolitical results. Feminist scholar Ashwini Tambe attributes an increasing public empathy toward rape survivors to the movement; according to the author, this is something that diverges from the usual scepticism survivors often encounter and brings attention to the pervasive nature of sexual coercion (198). Moreover, Gill and Orgad regard MeToo as promoting collectivity among survivors and highlighting the political dimension of anti-sexual violence activism, which challenges the individualised nature of current discussions about gender inequality, especially in the rise of confidence culture, postfeminism, popular feminism, and neoliberal feminism (1318). The analysis of the memoirs will explore the political dimension of the movement, asking how MeToo can present a collective experience with political implications in the two cases examined.

Despite its achievements, the MeToo movement has not escaped criticism. Gill and Orgad have pointed to its limited accessibility, which tends to prioritise the experiences of white and privileged women, potentially overlooking individuals from marginalised groups based on factors such as class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and disability (1319). This criticism gains credence when considering that the movement gained substantial attention only after Alyssa Milano's involvement, despite being established decades earlier by Tarana Burke to support disadvantaged African American survivors (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 6). Additional criticism

has focused on the movement's limited scope regarding sexual violence, particularly in specific workplace contexts (Gill and Orgad 1319).

Regarding MeToo's political implications, expressing an opposite view from Gill and Orgad, Loney-Howes criticises the movement for having a postfeminist identity (32). According to Loney-Howes, post-feminism has left capitalism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy largely intact while reducing the political dimension to the personal (32). This shift has led public attention to focus on individuals rather than addressing broader cultural issues (32). Loney-Howes instead argues that anti-rape activism should aim to make the personal political by exposing the systemic causes of violence (32). On their side, Gill and Orgad have also expressed concerns about the movement's failure to engage critically with broader discussions about the patriarchal, capitalist, and sexist systems, particularly given that sexual violence remains normalised and tolerated in some cultural contexts (1320).

Scholars' scepticism about the MeToo movement's limitations arguably shows that anti-sexual violence activism still has a lot to improve, especially toward inclusivity and its socio-political goals. The decentralization of MeToo has exposed the movement to diverse instrumentalization, even contradicting Burke's initial movement's vision, something that is underscored by scholars' (often contrary) criticism. Nevertheless, despite its contradictions and limitations, MeToo has sparked not only legal and political but also cultural improvements concerning sexual harassment; MeToo has prompted a shift in the perception of sexual violence, emphasizing its significance as a pressing sociopolitical issue that demands attention and action. Further, by participating in the MeToo movement, and specifically by writing a memoir, as I will show in my analysis, survivors have the space to politicize their personal experience and

collectively shift the established rape narrative, with the ultimate goal of achieving social change.

1.1.1 Making the Personal Political

Through the variable media where survivors may speak out about their experiences, they add their individual voices to the collective sharing of the MeToo movement. Loney-Howes argues that speaking out in online anti-rape spaces allows survivors to regain control over their experiences (33). She characterizes this testimonial process as “both therapeutic and political, giving voice to private suffering, bringing the private to the public sphere to be *witnessed*”. (33) This testimony can challenge the prevailing narrative surrounding rape (33). With their stories, they enter and shape a public conversation about sexual abuse in which they are active participants.

According to the author, the silence that shrouds rape and rape trauma in society constrains the definition of rape, demanding that an ‘authentic’ victim display signs of violence, victimization, coercion, and trauma while other experiences are often dismissed as ‘just sex’ (37). This hegemonic rape narrative shapes assumptions not only within the legal and societal realms but also in how individuals perceive their own experiences (38). Survivors who speak out in online spaces and challenge these narratives can inspire the revalidation of other survivors’ experiences (38). Bloggers on anti-rape platforms aspire to create spaces not only for themselves but for others as well, emphasizing the inherently political nature of coming forward (38). By sharing stories that transcend the boundaries of rape myths, survivors become “theorists of their own experiences”, breaking free from definitions of rape primarily established

by men (40). Therefore, when survivors participate in the movement, they not only reclaim their narratives but also contribute to a collective testimony addressing sexual violence and trying to reshape societal norms. In the following chapters of this thesis, I will examine Loney-Howes' conceptualization showcasing how Gay and Springora become "theorists" in a political discussion and challenge prevailing rape narratives surrounding sexual violence.

The notion of the political nature of sexual violence finds its roots within the history of anti-sexual activism. In the 1970s, second-wave feminists declared that sexual violence is "a product of women's social, cultural and legal subordination" (22). Radical feminists launched sessions at which women collectively shared personal experiences of sexual violence, through which they would conceptualize women's structural and cultural subordination (23-24). The sharing became wider with public speak-outs when individual stories were conveyed politically to educate society (24). Third-wave feminists expanded consciousness-raising by using popular culture to reach broader audiences, leading to a resurgence of activism (Gleeson and Turner 56).

Loney-Howes recognizes the historical roots that MeToo shares with the consciousness-raising approaches of the 1970s (21). As she points out, participation in the MeToo movement, similar to consciousness-raising, highlights the normalization and prevalence of sexual assault while recognizing the personal experiences of survivors and addressing institutional and structural dysfunctions (29). Gleeson and Turner agree that MeToo is a valuable contemporary way to raise consciousness and an effective form of feminist activism (58). They argue that MeToo allows filtering personal stories through a discussion of misogyny and sexism within a non-individualized testimony (58). The MeToo storytelling has inherited transforming individual

narratives of rape into a collective, political testimony of sexual violence that has systematic origins. The analytical chapters will probe this interplay between the personal and the political surrounding sexual violence through a comparative view of the MeToo theorists' analyses and each case memoir. Subsequently, I will indicate how the memoirists declare their purposeful participation in a collective testimony against sexual violence.

Gleeson and Turner further conceptualize this intentional participation in MeToo as an action of performance for consciousness-raising (54). They argue that participants "are conscious of a specific audience, the platform (or space) they perform it in, and the general script that is delivered" (54). Further, the audience is automatically invited to participate in the "chorus" of MeToo or to bear witness, which creates an interaction as a valid means of performance of consciousness-raising (54). According to performativity theory, Gleeson and Turner suggest that when individuals share their stories, "their performance is subsumed within performativity—the language they use to express themselves and share their experiences is both performative and a performance for a broader audience" (60). In the analytical chapters, I intend to explore how performativity is manifested within the memoirs, suggesting that they are crafted in a language that communicates with broader discussions of sexual abuse and is conscious of an audience affected by the MeToo era.

Hence, the authors conclude that survivors who share their MeToo stories are "*doing an action*" as "[t]hey are participating in political discourse, joining an ensemble of women and other victim/survivors, using an online (public) tool" (60). According to this rationale, it can be argued that participants of the MeToo movement are actively and consciously involved in the political reshaping that the movement aims to foster in society.

1.1.2 Participating in the MeToo Movement and its Transformative Effects

An empirical study by Mendes and Ringrose contributes to a better understanding of why survivors participate in the MeToo movement and the transformative effects this can spark. The researchers collected data from 117 qualitative surveys and six interviews with participants of the MeToo hashtag in digital spaces (38). Regarding participants' motivation to share their experiences, the data indicate that they felt "*compelled* to add their voice and often literally felt 'moved' into doing so from outrage, anger, and a desire to be heard and spark social change" (39). This shows that participants are consciously aware of the current disturbing socio-political situation concerning sexual violence and its political nature, which entails a rage that converts into a desire to contribute to the collective action of MeToo to prompt change.

More data demonstrated that participating in the MeToo movement is received as something broader than sharing a personal experience since they participate in a community of care that publicly discusses structural violence (41). Specifically, a participant's motivation was to counter the notions that resulted in her long-lasting silencing (41). Such answers reveal that, indeed, participants are consciously motivated to lend their stories to the political discussion that aims to reshape societal norms.

Mendes and Ringrose's research also examines the movement's transformative potential. According to the authors, MeToo "can contribute to dramatic personal changes, which are necessarily connected to the possibility of broader social transformations" (45). Participants point out the changes that MeToo has brought to their and other people's lives, namely in their beliefs, reactions to sexist behaviours, or conversations about sexual violence (46). However, it

is worth mentioning that some participants highlight their concern that these improvements will not be transformed into a broader and long-term socio-cultural change (47). Nevertheless, MeToo storytelling is more than its digital form; its presence in various media increases its potential transformative value for individuals and, by extension, in society. As I argue in this thesis, MeToo memoirs can potentially become transformative reading experiences, enacting the reader's familiar concepts regarding abuse, and circumstantially, they can spark further actions against systematic structures that tolerate sexual violence.

1.2 Formatting a Subgenre of MeToo Memoirs

This thesis considers the MeToo memoir a life-writing subgenre emerging from the MeToo movement. To define MeToo memoirs, I revisit Tanya Serisier's definition of rape memoirs as "autobiographical accounts of the experience of rape and its aftermath as the defining event of the story, as opposed to autobiographical works that include discussion of rape as one element in a life narrative" (47). It has already been mentioned that the author considers that the politics of speaking out enables the genre to develop political possibilities, fostering a potential sociocultural change (44). To examine the body of rape memoirs that have appeared since 2017 and highlight their direct communication with the ongoing movement, I prefer to use the term MeToo memoir.

Memoir is a particularly prominent form of MeToo storytelling. Memoirs are defined as "a depiction of an individual's life, or a 'memorable' part of it, within which the era in question and the effect an individual has had on a historically important political or public event is brought to the fore" (Lahusen 626). Its distinction from autobiography lies in the characteristic involvement

of an individual's story in a broader context (626). From the origins of the modern memoir in the eighteenth century, it represented a defence of "life stories in the context of a suppressive culture", with many memoirs narrating stories of 'scandalous' women (627). The memoir genre was seen as a "bearer of a social role" and written from the margins, bringing it to an inferior literary position than autobiography (628). Those characteristics persist, but the end of the twentieth century brought a memoir boom, signifying new public attention to the genre (629). A characteristic increase in memoirs written by 'ordinary people' without scandalous or politically significant stories was observed (630). Instead, "sadness, triumph, and therapy" were readers' most popular contexts in memoirs during the memoir boom in the US market (630). Arguably, the memoir's characteristics and historical presence make it most suitable for survivors to sculpt it into a sub-genre of rape and sexual abuse: it provides a medium in which an individual's story of sexual violence can be conceptualized into a broader context and addresses rape as a political issue; moreover, the popularity that the memoir boom has brought to the genre, can contribute to the visibility of MeToo stories from the margins.

The MeToo era has affected the way rape memoirs are produced. Leigh Gilmore, observing rape memoirs published within the year after the MeToo hashtag gained recognition, characterizes them as a "promise that sexual violence will be woven into complex narratives that extend the memoir boom's legacy of grappling formally with the representation of trauma" ("#MeToo and the Memoir Boom" 162). Gilmore argues that from blog posts and personal essays to "braided narratives and memoirs", MeToo has nurtured trauma writing, giving a new push to the memoir boom that emphasizes autobiographical agency and eruption of silencing (162). This thesis probes Gilmore's early assumption looking at how *Hunger* and *Consent*

become part of a collective testimony against the silencing of sexual violence and depict the political nature of rape towards a shift against rape culture.

1.2.1 Collective Testimonies toward a Shift in the Rape Culture

Rape memoirs published within the MeToo era share commonalities with the movement, allowing memoirists to politicize their personal experiences and challenge rape narratives. Tara Roeder refers to rape memoir as an “alternative testimony” (19) that provides “a different kind of evidence than the courtroom testimony” (22). She highlights that the memoir, with the provision that it does not force the survivor to adjust their narrative to acceptable scripts, can provide control over shaping their experience and exploration of the meaning of rape (22). Similarly, Amanda Spallacci suggests that memoir is “a creative medium for survivors to assemble their memories into a narrative ... and helps survivors to combat the ongoing problems that they encounter in the public sphere: conventions of legal testimony and rape myths” that may have silencing or re-traumatizing results to the survivor (81). Therefore, memoirs are becoming the literary vessel for survivors to regain agency and theorize their experiences as active participants in the MeToo movement.

However, as Serisier argues, according to Derrida’s ‘law of genre’, constructing rape memoir as a genre forces generic norms that are being settled by the politics of speaking out (46). She points out that “the genre of speaking out is primarily for and about white women”. Moreover, in disagreement with the scholars above, she criticizes the genre for having “enabled the kind of storytelling that has historically been most able to be heard and recognized as ‘real rape’ and which is most assimilable to criminal justice and other normative discourses” (48).

That means that the criticism against MeToo is also found in rape memoirs. Nevertheless, in the opposite direction, Gilmore argues that the memoir boom gave voice, particularly to marginalized writers, for whom life writing served as a form of “testimonial empowerment” and showed how “lives and life writing are rooted in shared experiences of oppression as well as forms of representational exclusion and silencing” (“#MeToo and the Memoir Boom” 162). Even if MeToo in its literary form also seems to favour privileged women, when writers of marginalized identities publish their memoirs, as I will point out in Gay’s case, they often use their authorial power to represent others with similar experiences.

The individual experience, in this way, is not only representative of the personal but contributes to a collective sharing of testimonies, making the personal political. As Gilmore demonstrates, “criticism of autobiography is often political” in the sense that life writers have “the opportunity to present themselves as representative subjects; that is, as subjects who stand for others” (“Limit Cases” 130). Aiyana Altrous, highlighting the act of speaking out in texts, states that “[w]hen victims speak publicly about their personal experiences which have hitherto been suppressed, they demonstrate both survival and resistance, and politicise the personal” (14). Speaking out for memoirists, according to Serisier, consists both of a personal aim, as they reclaim their experiences trying to overcome “desubjectifying violence”, but also a collective goal, “as they ‘bestow boons’ on their fellow survivors and on women generally by disrupting the political and social power of rape” (53). Rape memoirs can, therefore, be representative of collective experiences of sexual abuse, politicising the personal and aiming for societal shift.

Several scholars are particularly confident in conceptualising rape memoirs as a tool that could contribute to shifting rape culture. Serisier regards in memoirs “a tension between individual empowerment and collective politics that is largely unacknowledged within the texts [that] reflect a wider tension in the politics of speaking out” (52). Roeder agrees, highlighting that memoirs have the power “to unsettle preconceived notions about sexual violence” (19). The author views rape narratives as “a gesture with deep political resonance in a culture [of] ... blaming and doubt of rape victims” (25). Gilmore attributes resistant qualities to memoirs, arguing that they can evoke further testimonies, legal or otherwise (“Limit Cases” 130). Spallacci, in a similar line, claims that “memoirs can serve as sites of political activism in which women can expose the limits of legal testimony in situations of rape, they can debunk and refute rape myths that undermine women’s testimonies” (76). Aligning with those views, I agree that memoirs that address existing narratives surrounding sexual abuse and participate in ongoing political discussions can evoke cultural and even legal changes.

As discussed previously, feminist scholars criticize the personal turn that speaking-out policies may take; literary scholars express similar concerns about rape writings. Altrows, in her study about Young Adult rape fiction which can be implemented in the current discussion, finds that neoliberal ideologies that project the “individual pathological defect” of the rape experience have interrupted the feminist representation of rape, which was established by the second wave feminists (2). These narratives are considered problematic since they project “rape as personal rather than as a political problem and blame victims by suggesting that the problem with rape is the victim's traumatized pathology” (3). Gilmore emphasizes the neoliberal generic adaptation of the 1990s memoir boom, underlining “the shift from a politicized “I” of self-

representation ... to a type of the resilient and redeemed individual, including the post-racial nominee, the self-made man, and the empowered woman”, making the genre “to be ‘merely personal’ rather than critical or revelatory of the function of power” (“Neoliberal Life Narrative” 92).

However, Altrows argues that the MeToo movement has brought a “repoliticization of rape narratives”, which echoes the second wave's use of rape stories as a political weapon (3). According to the author, the massive production of sexual abuse narratives “fosters empowerment through solidarity and is politically effective because it demonstrates the scale of ... shared experience” (3). In a similar vein, Serisier argues that

the political potential of a new literature of rape is precisely in its ability to navigate the narrative different discourses and enable those who make use of it to produce ‘fully human’ subjectivities that incorporate the experience of rape without being defined by it or being restricted to a single discursive framing of themselves or their experience (66).

Serisier’s argument informs this thesis’ approach: rape memoirs are not only a narration of the memoirist’s personal story, but they advocate for a shared experience of sexual violence, reflecting on political discourses that MeToo has brought to the foreground. This way, they entail a political transformative potential.

I have presented so far rape memoirs as a MeToo medium, reflecting the movement’s principles and aims; The subgenre consists of a literary podium for survivors to transform their experiences into a political discussion of sexual abuse and contribute to a collective shifting of rape narratives, evoking changes in individuals and society. In the following chapter, I introduce

the notion of literariness, the distinctive characteristic of literature (Miall and Kuiken, "What is literariness?" 122), and the theory of transformative reading (Fialho). In this framework, I will argue that the two case studies of this thesis, as literary texts, can enact modification of readers' understandings regarding sexual violence and, therefore, achieve the movement's transformative aims.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework: The Transformative Reading Model

A MeToo memoir could become a reading experience that potentially changes the way readers view rape and sexual abuse. According to Fialho, the purpose of literature can lie in the experience itself, an experience that could be considered transformative (“What is literature for?” 2). Literary reading is a reciprocal relationship between the text and the reader, in which the reader modifies the text while they also get modified by the text (2). In the case of rape memoirs, readers’ individuality gets implicated in producing the meaning of the text while readers get modified by the text. Self-modification might include understanding the political aspect of personal stories of rape and reconsidering preexisting rape narratives. This could be a transformative reading experience that extends the memoir’s contexts, affecting readers’ understandings of sexual abuse in real-life situations, as well as their potential reactions (Kuiken et al. 173). Therefore, the self-transformative potential of literature could make memoirs an effective and valuable medium for the MeToo movement.

Fialho’s latest work, *Transformative Reading* (henceforth TR), is an interdisciplinary readers’ response theoretical and empirical model examining how literature can potentially transform readers’ lives. TR derives from the tradition of foregrounding; it is implemented in second-generation cognitive approaches and phenomenology and uses empirical methods to support its theoretical assumptions (Fialho 2). This thesis examines the transformative potential of MeToo memoirs in a theoretical approach. To support my argument, I will use the findings of neuroscientific and empirical studies on readers’ engagement with the texts, often conducted with fiction; however, in this thesis, I implement the studies’ results in an analysis of non-fiction

memoirs. I propose that reading a MeToo memoir entails the transformative possibilities of literary reading enhanced by the testimonial validity of MeToo storytelling and the movement's public presence.

In this section, I will place TR within the history of foregrounding (van Peer et al.; Miall and Kuiken) and review the cognitive approaches TR is grounded in (Fialho 37). This analysis will present the components of TR (imagery, identification, and sympathy) and possible textual strategies that could prompt self-transformation in readers, the frame in which the next chapters will present the transformative potential of *Hunger* and *Consent*.

2.1 Foregrounding and Defamiliarization-Refamiliarization Cycle

TR derives from a notion of literariness, as expressed in foregrounding theory (Miall and Kuiken; van Peer et al.). In general, foregrounding refers to aspects of the text, linguistic, narrative, or stylistic, that come to the fore through repetition or parallelism (van Peer et al. 145). According to foregrounding theory, TR involves cognitive and emotional responses that occur as readers engage with passages they consider striking or evocative (Fialho 34).

Foregrounding is a concept coming from a long tradition originated by Aristotle, who, in *Poetics*, discusses literature's virtue coming from the use of unfamiliar terms deviating from everyday language (van Peer et al. 148). The next major contributors were the Russian Formalists, who tried to determine "literariness", what makes texts literary (149). Viktor Shklovsky developed the notion of "ostranenie", meaning "making strange"; this is the effect that he believed literary devices were giving to the text, making it literary (149).

After the Russian Formalists, the concept of literariness passed to the Prague Structuralists. Jan Mukařovský invented the term “aktualisáce,” which translates to English into foregrounding, to describe the aesthetic function of literary texts in opposition to the communicative function of everyday language (150). Hence, foregrounding can be understood only in contrast to a background of ordinary language (150). From Aristotle to Mukařovský, theorists view literariness as an extraordinary use of language deviating from familiar contexts.

With the empirical turn in literary studies, scholars like van Peer, Miall, and Kuiken reconceptualized literariness, focusing on the text’s effects on readers and providing empirical findings that support their claims. According to Miall and Kuiken, literariness is the outcome of a distinct mode of reading, discernible through three key components of responding to literary works: the foregrounded stylistic or narrative features, readers’ defamiliarization of familiar concepts caused by foregrounded features, and the subsequent modification of readers’ feelings, or refamiliarization (“What is literariness?” 122-123).

The combination of these properties makes literary texts literary. Foregrounded features are identified by their striking and evocative nature, primarily due to their unfamiliar and unconventional presence within the literary context, which diverges from their ordinary usage in everyday language (124). These elements afford the reader an unsettling situation wherein they are confronted with an unfamiliar context, which they might not immediately interpret within their familiar settings (123). Readers must modify their conventional emotions and concepts to comprehend and navigate the inconvenience introduced by foregrounded features (123). This reinterpretation results in a conscious or unconscious interval during which the reader seeks familiar contexts to locate and construct their new comprehension of the text’s

meaning (123). In these terms, in rape memoirs, stylistic and narrative foregrounded features might activate the defamiliarization-refamiliarization process during reading, defamiliarizing readers' conceptual understandings and leading to refamiliarization of concepts regarding sexual abuse.

Miall and Kuiken elsewhere underscore the central role of feeling in initiating and directing this process. According to the authors, "the novelty of an unusual linguistic variation is defamiliarizing, defamiliarization evokes feelings, and feelings guide 'refamiliarizing' interpretative efforts" ("Foregrounding, defamiliarization" 392). They argue that emotions constitute a constructive aspect of readers' engagement with the text, first evoked in defamiliarization and subsequently driving the search for contexts in which the defamiliarized features can be situated (392). For familiar grounds to be found, feelings sensitize the reader to other passages within the same text or across different texts, personal memories, and worldly knowledge that carry similar affective connotations (395). A study by Mar and colleagues that reviews empirical findings shows that emotions that occur through literary reading influence readers' cognitive processes (829).

Foregrounded features do not influence all readers uniformly; on the contrary, each reader's conventional perspective interacts with a text's literariness. According to Miall and Kuiken, "The strikingness of literature occurs against a background of familiarity and habituation", meaning that the perspectives acquired by education, culture and personal experiences are to be questioned and reassessed ("What is literariness?" 127). Literature's adoptive value prompts readers to reflect and reshape their perspectives, conventions, and values (127). For Kuiken and colleagues, the transformative potential of literature extends

beyond its capacity to shape one's understanding of the self and the world, encompassing “its implications for the way we live, especially the way we reconcile ourselves into the real” (173). In that sense, feeling motivates the modifying potential of literature, and here specifically of rape memoirs, which results in the transformation of the readers’ personal beliefs and the adaptation of this transformation in their lives. Implementing this theory in my analytical chapters, I will indicate reflective possibilities regarding rape notions that the memoirs foster.

Fialho’s study provides empirical evidence on readers’ refamiliarizing strategies when affected by foregrounded features and the central role of feeling in the process (“Foregrounding and refamiliarization”). The author conceptualizes defamiliarization-refamiliarization as a linguistic-psychological-aesthetical cycle that emerges recursively during reading (106). The first comprehension of the texts occurs during the initial reading, where readers get affected by foregrounding features (linguistic perspective), evoking defamiliarization in its psychological¹ perspective. Feelings that emerge here sensitize readers to intra- and extra-textual contexts; a cognitive effort occurs then so readers refamiliarize themselves in a second comprehension of the text, accompanied by a new aesthetic perspective on the text (107). This model indicates that readers’ cognitive and affective engagement with the text that occurs repeatedly during reading might result in self-modification.

¹ ‘Psychological’ refers to any aspect that does not relate to the physical.

It apprehends both cognition and affect. The term ‘cognitive’ refers to the intellect, to perception, thought, knowledge, or memory, and has to do with mental construction (“Foregrounding and refamiliarization” 107).

2.2 4E Cognitive Approaches in Transformative Reading

TR is grounded in second-generation, or 4E, cognitive approaches in order to understand readers' cognitive and affective interactions with the texts (Fialho 22). 4E approaches diverge from previous models of the mind that confined it to information processing and reaction; instead, they conceive mental processes as part of a continuum with biologically evolutionary phenomena and cultural practices (Kukkonen and Caracciolo 261). This approach emphasizes the embodiment of mental processes and their extension into the world through artefacts and sociocultural practices; in other words, mental processes are viewed as enacted through sensorimotor patterns and embedded within sociocultural concepts (261). Implementing the 4E cognitive approach in transformative reading suggests that reading can be embodied in physical sensations, embedded in social contexts, extended into the environment, and enacted in our perception (Fialho 22).

In enactive theory, an organism interacts with the world in a pre-reflective mode in terms of *enactive affordances* (41). That is, in short, a form of emotional pre-disposition to know and act upon the world (43). According to this view, consciousness directs attention to items in the environment already deemed important for the organism's emotional needs (43). In the reading experience, the reader's engagement with the text occurs in a pre-reflective mode in which emotions "modulate, coordinate, shape and guide a given text's *action affordances*, prior to occipital processing" (43). Therefore, the reader possesses an active role instead of just reacting to the text: "In fact, saying that the reader enacts the text means that

the reader uses the text for his/her own emotional purposes, even though this reader may not be fully aware of these purposes" (46).

TR considers the body indispensable in understanding readers' pre-reflective engagement (47). Body contributes to language understanding, and as empirical evidence by Kuijpers and Miall shows, bodily feelings are actively engaged during literary reading: readers who found absorbed in reading were more likely to report bodily feelings (qtd. in Fialho 47). The phenomenological view of consciousness also holds the body as deeply and essentially implicated in our active relation with the world, others and self (53). Fialho proposes that the concept of the lived body broadens the enactive perspective by adding an experiential dimension to the enactive discussions of consciousness, emotion and the body (53). Particularly, based on empirical findings, the author suggests that as readers become more absorbed in the story, they might visualize themselves in the story world and sense more bodily feelings (54).

The transformative experience occurs in the reflective mode of the reading experience. Fialho discusses the possibility that readers reflect upon the enactive affordances, or the embodied self, when affected by foregrounded passages or as meeting literary characters, which she calls "reflective enactment" (60). This experiential reflection considers cognition and emotion as one entity (61). It is a mode of reflection that is an aesthetic experience in which "the reader lives through the text", focusing on the bodily sensing of the textual affordances rather than focusing on the plot, analysis, or traditional interpretation (63). That means that instead of attempting to compel conclusions and find a text's *meaning*, readers experience how it *feels*. According to Fialho, this mode of reflective enactment brings us closer to the notion of

literariness: experiential reflection enables the unfolding of readers' feelings, which leads to the self-modification of personal meanings (64).

Reading is *extended* into the material world and *embedded* in social contexts (22). This can be seen in the different social settings where transformative reading can be applied ("What is literature for?"). Empirical studies by Schrijvers and colleagues on adolescents in a classroom context have shown that literature education broadens students' self and social perceptions (28). Participants reported that they developed insight into their personalities and sympathy or empathy for other people's situations and learned "to imagine what it is like to be in the shoes of real other human beings and to feel for them" (28).

I suggest that reading MeToo memoirs is particularly embedded in the social context of the MeToo movement, and their transformative effects can be extended in real-life settings. As it becomes clear in the previous sections, rape memoirs published in the MeToo era cannot be seen independently from the ongoing movement and the changing social context regarding the perception of sexual violence. The memoirists tend to incorporate references between their stories and the movement, as discussed in the following analytical chapters. Consequently, readers' self-transformation could be extended beyond the reading experience. The textual affordances could prompt the reader to imagine the story world vividly, see themselves in the protagonist's shoes, or feel for the memoirists, broadening their self and social understandings and changing their attitudes towards sexual abuse. Building from this rationale, the following chapters provide hypotheses of how self-transformation regarding understanding sexual violence could extend the reading experience.

Working on a theoretical-empirical model of TR, Fialho identifies six underlying components:

Adult readers who participated in studies about reading experiences that had transformative impact on them, indicated that they vividly imagined the setting and characters in texts (imagery), recognized aspects of themselves or others in characters (identification), enacted and embodied the experiences of a character (experience-taking), evaluated characters positively or negatively (character evaluation), felt sympathy and compassion for characters (sympathy), and noticed which words, phrases or sentences were particularly striking or evocative to them (aesthetic awareness) (“What is literature for?” 8).

Such experiences were found to be accompanied by a broadening of insights into the self and others, or self-transformation. Therefore, Fialho argues that the six components consist of readers’ defamiliarizing transformative strategies (8). To probe MeToo memoirs’ transformative potential, I will first indicate textual affordances that could potentially prompt readers into three components of TR: imagery, identification, and sympathy. A narration centred on the experience of rape could provide possibilities for imagery; identification might occur by the memoirs’ depiction of abuse as a shared experience; lastly, I consider sympathy towards a rape survivor could result in self-transformation.

2.1.1 Mental Imagery

Imagery, the mental representation of what one reads, is a multimodal form of imagination in which readers report engaging different sensorimotor modalities, external –sight,

hearing, smell, taste or touch– and internal –pain, organ position, movement, etc. (Kuzmičová 275-276). Readers who experience mental imagery might visualize the characters, hear the characters' voices or feel the physical experiences of the characters in their bodies. Kuzmičová explores mental imagery through the framework of embodied cognition: neuroscientific findings show that in the processing of language that refers to sensorimotor contents (e.g. touch the wet grass), “our sensorimotor cortex becomes automatically activated in much the same way as if we were acting out the represented actions and perceptions ourselves” (276). During reading a rape memoir, embodied stimulation could become a distressing, triggering experience; however, this is exactly the point of experiential MeToo storytelling, to make the distressing experiences of rape survivors visible and understood. This could happen through the embodied experience of reading².

Mental imagery is a subjective experience that could vary significantly, depending on the reader's individuality, the text's properties and the reading situation (280). Kuzmičová classifies four varieties of imagery: *Enactment imagery* “amounts to vicarious experiencing proper of the referential contents of a given passage” (282). First-person fictional narratives activate the reader's perception to enact the narrator's experience as they transparently experience it themselves (283). In *description-imagery*, the reader imagines the scenery as an observer from an outer stance, which Kuzmičová considers a lack of experiential richness (284). That makes it a less effective experience as a defamiliarizing strategy than enactment imagery; however, it could

² For that reason, I chose not to omit the analysis of rape descriptions as potential affordances of mental imagery.

also prompt self-transformation. *Speech imagery* is experienced as verbal auditory images from a listener's perspective, while in *rehearsal imagery*, the reader imagines the speaking voice belongs to them (285-286). The following chapters will hypothesize how the text might prompt imagery in readers.

Specific textual properties are more likely to enact imagery than others. Based on neuroscientific findings, Brosch illustrates textual structures and narrative devices that influence readers' visualization during reading (140). According to the author, shifting the focus from the action to a particular object prompts visualization, directing readers' attention to certain imagistic information (140). Moreover, Brosch identifies features that enable visualization on descriptions of detail or static objects, the focus of a character on a specific object and the character's emotional perception of the image described (141). Following those approaches, in the next chapters, I will probe detailed and embodied/emotional descriptions of abuse that could prompt readers' sensorimotor modalities.

2.1.2 Personal Identification

The second component of transformative reading, identification, is an experience in which the reader stimulates a character's goals and plans as if they were their own (Oatley 445). According to Oatley, when readers identify with a character, they experience positive or negative emotions when the character's plans succeed or fail (445). Identification contains a feeling of 'participating' in the story, meaning readers resonate with a character's thoughts and emotions (Kotovych et al. 261-262). Therefore, narrative structures in which a character's perspective is transparent might prompt identification: as Oatley suggests, identification is

possible in narratives with a first-person narration that unfolds the character's stream of consciousness (445). Neuroscientific findings show that first-person narratives are processed neurologically differently than third-person narration and prove Oatley's claim (van Krieken et al. 4). The author also considers elements such as changes of view during the narration, metaphors, and metonym features that prompt the occurrence of autobiographical memories to the reader, emotions or reflective thoughts and, subsequently, identification (Oatley 446-447).

From an enactive perspective, van Krieken and colleagues characterize identification as "a multidimensional experience of mental enactment that evolves from processes in which the reader takes over the central narrative subject's perspective" (5). This cognitive view means that narratives that afford a clear subjective perspective might enact identification in readers. Based on neuroscientific findings, the authors distinguish possible textual affordances of identification as character-based factors and storytelling techniques (3). *Character-based factors* include the extent of similarity the readers consider sharing with the characters, which could be either demographic or psychological similarity (3). Psychological similarities, such as attitudes and personality traits, prompt identification more than demographic similarities, such as gender and age (3). In this category, the authors add likability toward the character; it seems that when the reader approves of the morality of the character's ideas, it is more likely "to consider the character's goals as desirable themselves and the actions needed for attaining these goals as justified" (3).

Storytelling techniques that prompt identification are those which afford access to a character's point of view, evaluations, feelings, and thoughts, enabling the reader to understand the character's perspective and take it as their own (4). Studies have shown (Leech and Short; Hoeken and Kijkers) that readers are more likely to identify with a character whose thoughts and emotions are represented, even if the character's opinion is opposed to theirs (qtd. in van Krieken et al. 4). Further, empirical studies by de Graaf et al. show that not only the perspective that is projected in a narrative is more significant in enacting identification than the similarity of readers' opinions, but also that identification can "reinforce and attenuate existing attitudes" (817). Working with those findings, in the memoirs' textual analysis, I will be focusing on the perspectives that the first-person narratives afford readers, conceptualizing how identification with the memoirists might occur in readers. It is my hypothesis that the MeToo memoir provides a deep double perspective –past experiences of sexual abuse and recent perspective on the political nature of rape– which might enact identification.

2.1.3 Sympathy

Sklar defines sympathy as a social and psychological phenomenon prompted by a judgment of someone's suffering as unfair, which causes "sympathetic distress" and a desire to help (35). Narrative sympathy is an emotional response combining cognition and affect (35). It is considered "to possess an inherently moral dimension" as it is a product of judgment based on ethical beliefs (35). In literary reading, readers feel sympathy towards characters, transferring, on an unconscious level, emotional responses about real-life people and situations (43). In the same way, sympathetic responses that readers might have in a reading experience can also be

extended beyond the text to the reader's life in similar situations (46). Such responses can be considered transformative.

Textual narrative structures prompt narrative sympathy. According to Sklar, "Sympathy by nature is a responsive emotion, and therefore, texts that elicit it provide structures that enable readers to intuit and interpret the appropriateness of sympathy at particular moments within the progression of a narrative" (53). Narrations that place the reader in the observer role prompt them to consider how unfair the character's situation might be (55-56). Observation is a response bearing aesthetic distance, enabling the reader to evaluate the situation and sympathize with the character (56).

Sklar argues that "narratives take readers through a series of emotional responses leading them to final judgments about the characters at the conclusion of a narrative" (56). That means readers' first impression of a character strengthens, modifies or reverses as the story unfolds (57). The rhetorical strategies of the text expose the reader to form impressions about the character; a sympathetic response could be emersed by a strong first impression that will not change with later information about the character or by powerful subsequently revealed information that leads readers to change their initial impressions and feel sympathy for the character (58). In analysing *Hunger* and *Consent*, the texts' rhetorical strategies will be examined to conceptualize how they could evoke sympathetic feelings in readers.

Moreover, narrative sympathy is related to an ethical reflection (59). Readers have their own moral principles according to which they evaluate the characters. However, as Sklar argues, the narrative exposes the reader to its own ethical standards that guide them to form particular

ethical judgments about the characters (59). “While readers may bring their own interpretive frames and experiences to the reading of a given text, the narrative itself provides its own counterweight to personal presumptions by ‘persuading’ readers to feel and to evaluate characters in particular ways” (59). As we show in the previous section, MeToo memoirs provide the space for survivors to theorize personal experiences and craft them into a broader discussion about sexual violence. I consider that this reflection can become a textual structure that affords the memoir’s “ethical standards”, persuading readers to judge it according to memoirists’ self-reflection. The following analysis will demonstrate this thinking.

To sum up, literariness provides literary texts with transformative possibilities for the reader. In transformative reading, the text’s meaning is modified, meeting the reader’s background, while the text’s foregrounding modifies the reader. As readers try to comprehend the text, they might shift their beliefs, concepts, or values and transfer those transformations into their lives (Fialho and van Zundert). Transformation occurs through readers’ cognitive, embodied, and emotional interaction with texts through several experiences, such as imagery, identification, and sympathy. Texts might enact one or more components of transformative reading, with affordances like detailed and embodied descriptions, characters’ perspectives, or reflections on ethical attitudes.

According to the above framework, the following chapters will showcase how reading *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* by Roxane Gay and *Consent: A Memoir* by Vanessa Springora could become transformative experiences, modifying readers’ understandings of sexual violence. I will hypothesize how the memoirs’ textual affordances could enact imagery,

identification and sympathy in readers. My analysis will also probe how reading experiences of the case of MeToo memoirs could evoke readers to reflect upon them and reinform their life beliefs and attitudes regarding the meaning of sexual violence.

Chapter 3 *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* by Roxane Gay: Toward a Shared Experience of Sexual Violence

Roxane Gay is a celebrated and prolific American writer and essayist. Since 2014, her books have gained popularity, reaching the New York Times and national bestsellers' lists, with works like *Bad Feminist* and *Difficult Women* ("About Roxane"). In 2017, when MeToo was at the pick of its global circulation, she published *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*, a memoir of rape, trauma and identity, which became another New York Times bestselling book ("About Roxane"). Considering Gay's establishment as an author and feminist, the publicity of *Hunger* echoes critics' characterization of MeToo as a predominantly privileged women's movement (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 6). However, Gay successfully conceptualizes her experience into a broader political discussion of sexual violence and rape culture, and she aims for her writing to be representative of women with similar identities. That is, those who have been abused, big bodies, black women.

The memoir explores Gay's relationship with the predator, referred to as Christopher (a pseudonym), and her harrowing experience of gang rape, as well as aspects of her life that played a part in her trauma after rape; it also delves into Gay's eating disorders that appeared as a traumatic response, and its implication in her life up to the present day. By intertwining her individual story with larger societal concepts, the text implements the MeToo movement's strategies: it challenges sociocultural norms and preexisting narratives around sexual abuse. Therefore, this MeToo memoir addresses women's structural subordination and the political aspect of rape.

As I argue in this thesis, the memoir can potentially modify readers' understandings and attitudes regarding sexual violence and shift rape culture; therefore, it can be considered a valuable medium of the MeToo movement. This chapter will attempt to showcase how a MeToo memoir, *Hunger*, can foster self-transformation in readers. Implementing the transformative reading theory, I will discuss passages of the memoir that I consider potentially transformative. In the first section, I will detect textual affordances that might enact readers' emotional engagement with the text, leading to a transformative experience. Specifically, I will show how the vivid emotional description of gang rape could prompt engage readers' sensorimotor modalities, prompting mental imagery. Afterwards, I will refer to the interchange of past and present perspectives as a mechanism for enacting identification. Finally, I will make a case for how self-reflection could mediate readers' engagement with the text, leading to sympathy. In the second section, based on Gay's intention as a writer and the memoir's MeToo content, I will make a case for how *Hunger* is embedded in the context of the movement. Lastly, I will hypothesize possibilities of reflective enactment that could be evoked from the interplay between the personal and the political, which could extend the memoir's context into real-life situations.

3.1 Components of Transformative Reading in *Hunger*

3.1.1 Mental Imagery in Roxane Gay's Experience of Rape

The memoir develops around the narrator being gang raped by her schoolmates when she was twelve. It is my argument that the narration of the rape scenes potentially enables the reader to experience enactment imagery, one of the components of transformative reading.

Acknowledging that not all readers experience (uniformly) imagery, in this section, I will expand upon textual properties that might enact imagery, immersing the reader in the distressing scene of gang rape. With first-person narration, the text provides a vivid description focusing on sensorimotor details and the narrator's emotional perception of them, features that prompt mental imagery in the reader (Brosch 140-141).

At the beginning of the rape scene, Gay sets the scene of the assault and reveals the emotions she experiences:

Christopher pushed me down in front of his laughing friends, so many bodies larger than mine. I was so scared and embarrassed and confused. I was hurt because I loved him and thought he loved me, and in a matter of moments, there I was, splayed out in front of his friends (Gay 40).

The passage engages the reader with a description coming from Gay's point of view ("bodies larger than mine") and combining tactile ("push me") and auditory ("laughing friends") modalities. As the action unfolds, the narrator expresses her fear, anguish, and intense emotional confusion as she places herself ("there I was") in the middle of the preparators, calling readers to imagine the scene. This vivid emotional description might engage the reader's sensorimotor modalities, prompting them to see, feel, and hear the scene.

The main part of the scene, and the most disturbing part of the memoir, follows in graphic detail:

When Christopher lay on top of me, he didn't take off his clothes. This little detail stays with me, that he had such little regard for what he was about to do to me. He just unzipped his jeans and knelt between my legs and stoved himself inside me. Those other

boys stared down at me, leered really, and egged Christopher on. I closed my eyes because I did not want to see them ... I barely understood what was happening. I did understand the pain, though, the sharpness and the immediacy of it (41).

Gay unfolds this vivid description, guiding readers' imagination to specific visual details: Christopher's clothes, his jeans unzipping, and his friends starrng. Pointing out that those details are still intense in her memory, along with the description of her bodily pain during the assault, might engage the readers' sensorimotor modalities, prompting them to visualize the scene or even sense unsettling, embodied feelings.

The rape scene resumes with other boys taking Christopher's role: "The friend held me down, his lips shiny, his beer breath in my face. To this day I cannot stand beer breath." (41). Guided by the description's detailed focus, the reader might also visualize the boy's lips being shiny and sense the smell of his beer breath. This sensorimotor modality of olfactory is further prompted by the comment of its long-lasting effect on the narrator's memory after the assault.

Gay writes about her assault, mentioning small details still present in her memory (Christopher's clothes, the beer breath) and describing her emotional perception of the attack and emerging bodily feelings. Such vivid emotional description immerses the reader in the scene of the gang rape; During the narration, the textual description refers to different senses – the visual scenery of the rape, the narrator's bodily pain, and the olfactory sense of the beer breath– which might engage respectively different sensorimotor modalities to the reader, prompting imagery.

3.1.2 The Personal Story into a Broader Context: Identification Process

In *Hunger*, Gay conceptualizes her story as a collective experience of sexual violence, creating textual affordances that might enact feelings of identification in readers. Identification, discussed in the theoretical chapter as a component of transformative reading, is a simulative process during which the reader feels that participates in the story, taking one character's goals and plans as theirs (Oatley 445). Textual affordances may evoke identification when readers are reminded of personal memories, as well as when they share similarities with the character or when a character's perspective is thoroughly expressed, especially by first-person narrations (van Krieken 3). Gay as a first-person narrator, I argue, approaches her experience of rape as a collective among survivors. At the same time, she provides opportunities for readers to delve into her emotions, thoughts and point of view. This way, readers might be reminded of their own memories, find themselves belonging to the shared experience and be influenced by the insight in Gay's perspective, resulting in identification.

From the beginning, the reader is guided to view the memoir as something broader than an individual account. Enclosing the word "my" in parentheses in the title *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* has a dual usage; it conveys the author's embodied sense of detachment from her own body while also serving as a mechanism that underscores the interconnectedness of her individual narrative with the collective experiences of women's bodies. This paratextual feature (Genette 1) might enact readers' embodied perception of Gay's memoir and guide them to read it not as isolated but as representative of a broader, shared experience among women and their

bodies. In this sense, the text invites the reader to experience the reading as personally relevant and potentially prompts identification.

The narrative is developed around the idea that one's body is deeply connected with one's life's experiences. Gay echoes the notion with her own story but also conceptualizes it as a shared experience. This idea is encapsulated in the text's opening phrase, "Every body has a story and a history" (Gay 8), introducing the concept of the embodied lived experience. Using the plural form indicates the collectiveness of this experience: Instead of saying *My body has a story and history*, Gay generalizes this opening phrase into one in which the reader's body is implied to participate. Readers might contemplate the intricate relationship between lived experiences and embodied feeling, not only within Gay's narration but also concerning their own past experiences or the experiences of others. This way, the text affords readers reflective opportunities regarding the intersection of personal history and bodily feelings. Consequently, subsequent thoughts and ideas presented in the memoir could evoke readers' memories, potentially stimulating readers' sense of shared experience with the narrator.

In *Hunger*, the narration of past experiences is often followed by their conceptualization in a wider discussion on rape culture. By interchanging her past and present perspectives, Gay becomes the theorist of her experience and provides deep insights into her present-day perspectives on those events:

Later, those boys told everyone at school what happened or, rather, a version of the story that made my name "Slut" for the rest of the school year. I immediately understood that my version of the story would never matter, so I kept the truth of what happened a secret and tried to live with this new name.

He said/she said is why so many victims ... don't come forward. All too often, what "he said" matters more, so we just swallow the truth. We swallow it, and more often than not, that truth turns rancid. It spreads through the body like an infection. It becomes depression or addiction or obsession or some other physical manifestation of the silence of what she would have said, needed to say, couldn't say (42).

This passage not only provides readers with an insight into the narrator as a teenager who was slut-shamed by her peers and therefore silenced; it also broadens the scope with Gay's present-day perspective of the inequality of the value between men's and women's voices. Gay goes further, offering an embodied perspective ("we swallow it", "it spreads through the body") on the physical traumatic responses that silencing victims of abuse causes that could enhance readers' engagement with the text. This exploration of past experiences and reciprocation with the narrator's present broader views is a textual affordance that provides Gay's thoughts, feelings and perspectives, past and present, and could enact identification in readers.

3.1.3 "This is a Memoir of (My) Body": Self-reflectivity Prompting Sympathy

The next component of transformative reading I am turning to is *sympathy*. Sympathy is an emotional response deriving from readers' judgment of a character's situation as unfair and, thus, is inherently correlated with morality (Sklar 35). Textual affordances that create an aesthetic distance are more likely to enact sympathy, including narrative structures and rhetorical strategies that place readers in an observing role (56). *Hunger* has a self-reflective rhetorical strategy –recurring moments where a narrative refers to its own artifice (Polvinen 3); there are multiple moments when Gay pauses the storytelling to reflect upon her motivation

and aims to write such a memoir: “This is a book about learning, however slowly, to allow myself to be seen and understood” (Gay 10). Self-reflection creates an aesthetic distant from the story, enabling readers to observe and evaluate it. Therefore, sympathy might be prompt.

To support my argument, I will briefly refer to Polvinen’s cognitive approach of self-reflectivity and its effect on readers’ engagement with fictional characters, which is implemented here on non-fictional characters. According to the author, readers can see fictional characters as a blend of if they were real people but also, within their artificial construction, their fictionality (132). Furthermore, readers can “use their capacities for social cognition to enact intersubjective relations that seem like they are with other individuals, yet they are not” (132). Fictional characters can be seen as verbal representations of some qualities of actual persons; hence, they can trigger readers into an emotional engagement, even if they are aware of their fictionality and lack of other qualities (133). This emotional engagement is particularly present within the frame of “joined attention”, a cognitive process in which readers focus on both the story’s content and the implied author’s cues, which guide the readers’ attention to the story (134). Polvinen argues that in this joined attention model, a narrative’s self-reflective awareness can affect readers’ engagement with characters (135). The narrative’s focus on its own artifice, instead of disrupting emotional engagement with the characters, is rather a framework, intermediate between the story and the reader, according to which the reader interacts with the story, and therefore, can work as a mechanism that guides and strengthens emotional engagement with the story world (137).

Hunger is a nonfiction self-reflective narrative that focuses on its own artifice: its aims, causes, and motivations. This is a communicative textual mechanism that intermediates the

story narrated and the reader; it frames the story, guiding readers in their emotional engagement with the whole text:

I buried the girl I had been because she ran into all kinds of trouble. I tried to erase every memory of her, but she is still there, somewhere. She is still small and scared and ashamed, and perhaps I am writing my way back to her trying to tell her everything she needs to hear (Gay 24).

Referring to her young self in the second person, Gay creates a double character: her authorial present-day self and her younger self, the memoir's protagonist. According to the passage, her young self is composed of memories she tried to erase and feelings of shame as she transformed after experiencing sexual assault and its aftermath. This is the memoir's framework that invites the reader to navigate the story knowing its aim, which is to provide a level of justice to her experience by allowing her old self to speak about her trauma and heal. The author-self is intermediate between the reader and the protagonist-self, providing the reader with an aesthetic distance to evaluate the narrative, a textual mechanism that could prompt sympathy.

Moreover, narratives that express their ethical frame are more likely to prompt sympathy in readers (Sklar 59). *Hunger*, I argue, affords readers its interpretive moral frame through its self-reflective rhetorical strategy. Self-reflectivity provides readers with the memoir's framework, composed of its moral principles, which will interact with readers' own beliefs for their ethical judgements. Self-reflective moments appear in the narration as a recurring theme throughout the memoir, each time adding a surface to the memoir's cause:

I hope that by sharing my story, by joining a chorus of women and men who share their stories too, more people can become appropriately horrified by how much suffering is born of sexual violence, how far-reaching the repercussions can be (Gay 38).

In this self-reflective moment, Gay refers to her aspiration as the author of the memoir to be part of the collective sharing of stories of sexual abuse, aiming to raise awareness about the extensive trauma caused by sexual violence. Such textual affordances provide an insight into the author's *why to write* and give the readers a direction on *how to read*.

Readers are provided with the moral discipline of the memoir, according to which they might judge the story: "I am weary of all our sad stories —not hearing them, but that we have these stories to tell, that there are so many" (211). By situating her story within the larger context of testimonies of sexual violence, as well as other forms of discrimination and suffering, Gay emphasizes the interrelation of these experiences with her own narrative, the memoir's ethical principle. The text guides readers to perceive it as one story that belongs between numerous stories of victims of sexual abuse. Therefore, they can transfer feelings of sympathy they might have experienced in their lives about incidents of sexual violence to Gay's story, and if they experience self-transformation, from Gay's story to others'.

3.2 *Hunger*, Embedded in the MeToo Movement

Literary reading is embedded in social contexts (Fialho 22), and reading MeToo memoirs is particularly embedded in the MeToo movement and the changes the movement has sparked in society. MeToo has brought the political nature of sexual abuse to the surface using individual stories as representative of a collective experience (Loney-Howes 33). MeToo memoirs echo

those principles. In this section, I will show how *Hunger* is embedded in the social context of MeToo, delving into the commonalities it shares with the movement, its content and purpose, and its potential impact on readers.

Despite its tendency to be dominated by privileged women, the MeToo movement has given voice to people of marginalized identities (Mendes and Ringrose 42). As in Gay's case, those participants are often motivated to share their stories intending to represent such marginalised experiences (42). *Hunger* expresses this intention explicitly: "This is a memoir of (my) body because, more often than not, stories of bodies like mine are ignored or dismissed or derided" (Gay 10).

MeToo storytelling has a political gravity inherent in anti-sexual violence activism (Loney-Howes 21). Gay, as a participant in the movement, shares her individual story, contributing to the collective testimony of experiences of sexual abuse MeToo has sparked. In the self-reflective passages analysed in the previous section, Gay shares her intentions with the readers. Moreover, she states: "I share parts of my story, and this sharing becomes part of something bigger, a collective testimony of people who have painful stories too. I make that choice" (Gay 38). *Choosing* to participate in this cause, Gay aims to unveil in front of her readers the prevalence of sexual abuse against women and expose sexual harassment and rape issues tied to patriarchal society. Just like Gay, participants in the MeToo movement feel compelled to share their stories due to an affective sense of inability to remain silent or an obligation to speak out and join the collective sharing, aiming to spark change (Mendes and Ringrose 44).

Additionally, participants in the MeToo movement consciously participate in the collective effort to shift the preexisting narratives surrounding rape. By sharing their story, they

regain control over it and counteract societal norms they have experienced as rape survivors, like silencing or victim- and self-blaming (41). Similarly, Gay declares that she wants to end her silencing and reclaim agency over her experience: “I don’t want to carry all the secrets I carried, alone, for too many years ... If I must share my story, I want to do so on my terms” (Gay 37). So, she shares her story, providing a well-considered analysis of it:

Throughout high school, I went through the motions, pretending to be the good student at school and the good daughter when I was talking to my parents, as my mind continued to splinter. With each passing year, I became more and more disgusted with myself. I was convinced that having been raped was my fault, that I deserved it, that what happened in the woods was all a pathetic girl like me could expect. I slept less and less because when I closed my eyes, I could feel boy bodies crushing my girl body, hurting my girl body. I smelled their sweet and beer breath and relived every terrible thing they did to me (75).

Gay creates a rationale for her silencing and self-loathing, deriving from feelings of self-blaming for being raped. She understands why, as a twelve-year-old girl, she thought herself responsible and deserving of being abused and hid it because of what was expected of her: to be the “good daughter”. However, she explains, not being able to hide from herself the embodied memories, she developed a traumatic loathing for herself and her “girl body”. Mixing her story with a retrospective examination, she theorizes her experience of blaming herself. Therefore, writing about her experience through the lens of critical analysis, she addresses prevailing societal narratives of victim-blaming.

3.3 Shaping Readers' Understandings: Reflective Possibilities

Transformative reading considers that readers could reflect on the enacted affordances and their embodied sensations (Fialho 61). This reflective mode of reading enables readers to unfold occurring feelings, leading to a transformation of familiar perceptions (64). This reflective enactment is extended beyond the text into the readers' environment. *Hunger* presents to the readers the narration of Gay's personal story blended into a discussion of rape narratives and women's subordination in a patriarchal society, within textual affordances, like vivid description, interchange of past-present perspective and literary self-reflection. In the previous sections, I presented those affordances as enacting mental imagery, identification and sympathy, components of transformative reading. Now, I will discuss the exact possibilities of reflection on notions regarding sexual abuse provided by the textual affordances or how readers could be transformed. Noting that transformative reading is extended means that those transformative possibilities extend *Hunger's* context, reaching similar contexts in readers' life situations. What I am pointing out with this discussion is that the importance of the transformative possibility of MeToo memoirs is that they can reshape readers' understanding of notions around rape, making memoirs a valuable contribution to the collective effort of shifting the pre-existing rape narrative.

One of the reflective possibilities that *Hunger* provides is the exploration of the responsibility of women's bodies in sexual abuse. Gay reflects on her attempt to make her body repulsive by making it bigger and thus protect herself from further abuse: "I understood that to be fat was to be undesirable to men, to be beneath their contempt, and I already knew too

much about their contempt. This is what most girls are taught –that we should be slender and small” (17). Her food addiction as a trauma response echoes societal norms that fat bodies are unappealing to men, while “slender and small” bodies are desirable and thus, prone to abuse. This belief system, which many young girls are exposed to, assigns responsibility to women for the assaults they endure based on their appearance. Consequently, the reader is prompted to re-evaluate the deeply fixed societal scripts surrounding women’s culpability for what happens to their bodies based on their behaviour and physicality. Such evaluation could shape their understanding that the only ones responsible are the abusers, an understanding that they could teach other young girls.

Moreover, the reader is invited to rethink the importance of boundaries, to be both expressed and respected. Gay unfolds the role boundaries played before and after being raped:

I was a thing to [Christopher], even before he and his friends raped me. He wanted to try things and I was extraordinarily pliable. I didn’t know how to say no. It never crossed my mind to say no. This was the piece I had to pay, I told myself, to be loved by him ... A girl like me, pliable and sheltered and unworthy and desperately craving his attention, did not dare hope for anything more ...

And I finally did say no. And it did not matter. That’s what has scarred me the most. My no did not matter ...

I was marked after that. Men could smell it on me, that I had lost my body, that they could avail themselves of my body, that I wouldn’t say no because I knew my no did not matter. They smelled it on me and took advantage, every chance they got (48-49).

This is a passage that coherently addresses the concept of expressing and respecting one's boundaries through the succession of events and time, prompting readers to reconsider their beliefs: Because of her feelings of unworthiness and inferiority, Gay explains that she declined her wants to meet Christopher's wishes; Christopher, exploiting her aggregable character, pushes her boundaries to the edges and even crosses them, in the most violating way possible, leaving Gay with feelings of self-repulsion; Other men, just like Christopher repeated his violative behaviour while she allowed it. Gay's narration, which shows that even if she eventually said "no", the abusers had already made their decision, may provoke readers to reconsider prevailing notions according to which a victim is considered responsible for being raped if she did not express her boundaries explicitly. An extension of such self-transformation could involve teaching young people to demand their boundaries to be respected and to respect other people's (explicit or not) boundaries.

Closing this chapter, I will present how readers could reflect on their understanding of what it means to be raped after reading *Hunger*. Gay asks herself whether it would be proper to "examine [her] flesh, the abundance of it, as a crime scene ... something that went terribly wrong" (23). What she means is whether she should view herself "as the victim of the crime that took place in [her] body" or keep blaming herself for being raped (23). After years, what she chooses is that there is no shame in admitting that she is indeed a victim:

[T]o this day, while I am also so many other things I am still a victim ...

I don't want to diminish the gravity of what happened. I don't want to pretend I'm on some triumphant, uplifting journey ... I'm living forward with what happened, moving forward without pretending I am unscared (23).

This is Gay's perspective on what it is to have been raped, a powerful reflective opportunity that conveys the simple yet difficult view that being raped is not one's fault, or it is shameful. Such reflection, extending the memoir, could be valuable in understanding others' trauma and educating children against victim-shaming.

Hunger is a memoir of Gay's *Body*, narrating her experience of rape and its long-lasting traumatic remains. At the same time, it is a political discussion about sexual violence and fat bodies; making the personal political, Gay participates in the MeToo movement using as a forum the memoir genre, aspiring to spark social change. Through its literariness, she aims to foster a change in the reader's self and societal concepts regarding rape, sexism, and fatphobia. *Hunger's* textual mechanisms (vivid embodied description, interchange of past and present perspectives and self-reflective structure) might engage the reader in an emotional response, fostering a transformative reading experience (through enactment imagery, identification and sympathy) that enables them to reflect on Gay's political discussion and potentially reconsider and reform their self and political understandings of rape.

Chapter 4 *Consent: A Memoir* by Vanessa Springora: Against an Era of Sexual Liberation (or Abuse)

Consent: A Memoir is French publishing director Vanessa Springora's debut book, published in French in 2019, in which she exposes the sexual abuse she endured at the hands of Gabriel Matzneff, a renowned French writer known for his paedophilic tendencies (Almog and Amar 135). The memoir narrates the publicly known abusive relationship between fourteen-year-old V. and fifty-year-old G. (as Springora refers to herself and Matzneff in the memoir) during the 1980s and the trauma of the abuse in V.'s life. By highlighting the unsettling tolerance of Parisian society towards Matzneff's well-known ephebophilic and paedophilic behaviour involving underage girls and boys, Springora condemns the broader acceptance of abusive behaviours exhibited by celebrated artists. Moreover, the MeToo memoir examines the real meaning of the notion of consent, inviting readers to reflect and reconsider their beliefs regarding sexual violence and paedophilia.

This chapter contributes to this thesis' argument that MeToo memoirs can be transformative readings shifting the rape culture. To show the transformative possibilities that *Consent* fosters in readers, I will focus on textual affordances that could prompt mental imagery, personal identification and sympathy in readers, components of transformative reading, which are, similarly to *Hunger*, the vivid embodied description of sexual abuse, the interchange of the memoirist' past and present perspectives and the memoir's structural strategy and self-reflectivity, respectively. The second section will analyse Springora's participation in the MeToo movement, showing how she composes her story into a political discussion about paedophilic tolerance in Parisian cultural cycles and beyond. The section will conclude by pointing out the

consequences Matzneff has faced after the publication of this MeToo memoir and what sociopolitical shifts it has sparked, showcasing its transformative effect on Parisian society. The last section will explore the reflective possibilities of the memoir that could enact self-transformation in readers regarding their understanding of the concepts the memoir embarks on, like the intersection between power relationships, consent, and verbal abuse.

4.1 Components of Transformative Reading in *Consent*

4.1.1 Mental Imagery in the 'Literary' Experience of Abuse

In *Consent*, core elements of the narration are vividly depicted in detailed descriptions that prompt enactment imagery on the reader, immersing them into a vicarious experience of the passages' referential content (Kuzmičová 282). As we examined in the previous chapter, the text's focus on specific objects, smells and sounds, and the character's emotional perception might engage readers' external and internal sensorimotor modalities, prompting them to experience mental imagery. *Consent* contains similar textual affordances.

In the opening setting of the memoir, Springora considers her father's absence during her childhood, playing a vital role in her yearning for paternal figures and in her vulnerability that later G. took advantage of. This absence is portrayed with a textual imagery:

Fathers are meant to be their daughters' protectors. Mine is no more than a current of air. More than his physical presence, I can summon up the scent of vetiver filling the bathroom in the morning; masculine belongings dotted the apartment: a tie, wristwatch, shirt, Dupont lighter; a way of holding his cigarette between the index and middle fingers, quite far from the filter (Springora 3).

The passage guides the reader to immerse in V.'s childhood apartment through a list-like description of V.'s reminiscences about her father in an emotionally distant way. This multilayer image consists of representations of masculine presence standing in contrast to his absence from V.'s life. The focus on visual objects (tie, wristwatch, shirt, Dupont lighter), the detailed description of her father holding a cigarette, and the smell of vetiver might engage the reader's sensorimotor modalities to visualize those objects and the father smoking, or the sensation of vetiver's smell. Enactment imagery is further prompted by the feeling of abandonment that those masculine reminders were giving to V., in contrast to the supposed protective role she expected her father to have in her life. This is demonstrated at the beginning of the description when V. expresses her feelings of detachment in a cold tone, caused by those reminders of his father's absence.

Another central element *Consent* brings to the foreground is V.'s experience of the power of G.'s manipulation of her vulnerability, which characterises their abusive relationship. The text could prompt enactment imagery, enabling the reader to enact V.'s experience of the power relation through V.'s embodied description of the dissociation from reality caused by long-lasting abuse by G. The portrayal of the abuse is conceptualized being both sexual and literary, with Matzneff trapping her in a relationship with him but also into his fictional world: "since G. had begun writing his novel, reality had swapped sides: I was gradually turning from a muse into a fictional character" (117). The following passage describes V. experiencing a psychotic episode of depersonalisation some months after her relationship with G. had ended:

I was walking along an empty street, an unsettling question going around and around in my head, a question that had wormed its way into my mind several days earlier that I

couldn't shake off: What proof did I have of my existence? Was I even real? ... My body was made of paper, ink flowed through my veins, my organs didn't exist. I was a fiction. After a few days of fasting, I began to feel the first euphoria replacing my hunger ... I was no longer walking; now I was gliding along the ground, and if I'd flapped my arms, I would surely have thrown away ... I was no longer part of the material world (155).

This embodied description affords readers V.'s somatic feeling of depersonalisation that G.'s manipulative tactic had caused. Readers might engage in internal sensorimotor modalities, enabling them to experience bodily feelings while reading this passage. Possible bodily sensations could include a sense of fragility, fading, and lightness, possibly through their arms, prompted by Springora's description of ink running in her veins and euphoria caused by fasting. Therefore, this embodied description could enact imagery in readers, enabling them to understand the extent of abuse V. had endured, making her feel that she is just a fictional character.

Like *Hunger*, Springora's memoir describes the experiences of abuse in a way that enables readers to visualize or feel internally and, therefore, understand how the memoirist experienced them, engaging them in mental imagery.

4.1.2 Young V. and author Springora's Perspectives: Identification Process

The next component of transformative reading I will discuss is personal identification. In the previous chapter, we saw that *Hunger's* textual affordances that could prompt identification are the interchanges of Gay's past and present perspectives, with which the reader is offered a deep insight into her viewpoint. *Consent* implements the same strategy; the text provides a

first-person narration of young V.'s perspective, depicting her past thoughts and emotions and author Springora's present perspectives, engaging the reader with a double point of view as exploring G.'s manipulative behaviour next to her vulnerability as a minor.

The beginning of their relationship is narrated by V.'s point of view, expressing how G.'s manipulating strategies made her think and feel:

I was in love. I felt adored as never before. And that was enough to efface all my sullenness, and to suspend any judgment about our relationship ... G. confessed to me that he had until recently led a rather dissolute life, as some of his books bore out. He knelt before me, his eyes misted with tears, and promised to break up with all his other mistresses, whispering that he had never in his whole life been so happy, that meeting me was a *miracle*, a veritable gift from the gods (45).

The reader is invited to follow V.'s perspective and see how G.'s extreme declarations of adoration toward her and lies about his other sexual relations made her feel unique and loved. This textual affordance enables them to step into her shoes, so they experience how G. took advantage of her yearning for love, making her vulnerable. Readers may be reminded of moments when someone deceived their own vulnerability, something that could enact identification.

The following passage comes from the end of their relationship when V. starts to realize that G. is manipulating her. Right after V. tries to confront G. about his multiple paedophilic sexual relations, which at this moment she is aware of, G. controls her with verbal misogynistic attacks like "You're mad. You don't know how to live in the present, just like every other

woman” (115). This switch in G.’s way of addressing her is explained with her present perspective:

I was no match for him when it came to verbal sparring. I was too young, too inexperienced. When I confronted him, the writer and intellectual, I found myself cruelly lacking the necessary vocabulary. I wasn’t familiar with the terms “narcissistic pervert” and “sexual predator”. I didn’t know there was such a thing as a person for whom the Other does not exist. I still believe that violence was only ever physical. And G. manipulated words like others manipulate swords (116).

The intervening of her present perspective in her narration provides the reader with a justification for her past inability to confront G., presenting her current knowledge that G.’s words were verbal violence and that he was a “narcissistic pervert” and “sexual predator”, which her young self was lacking. The text affords the reader Springora’s viewpoint into G.’s manipulative behaviour in contrast with her past inexperience, enabling them to understand how and why he abused her as a minor. Such understanding might evoke their own memories regarding instances when someone took advantage of their lack of knowledge and manipulated them with their expertise, engaging them in personal identification.

4.1.3 *Consent’s* Rhetorical and Self-reflective Strategy Prompting Sympathy

Consent is structured into five chapters, each encompassing elements of her experience with sexual abuse by G. The memoir commences in her early childhood, a time that rendered her vulnerable to G.’s manipulation and closes with the act of Springora reclaiming her story through the power of language. In my view, this narrative structure affords readers an

observation of relevant events based on which they evaluate V.; if, according to their moral values, they judge her situation as unfair, sympathy can be prompt (Sklar 56). This narrative structure could prompt sympathy by influencing the reader to form a powerful positive first impression of the character (58). The memoir's closing with Springora's self-reflection could be another effective affordance for sympathy, guiding the reader to judge V. according to the text's ethical frame (59).

Consent's rhetorical strategy is to place the reader in a witnessing position of V.'s formative years, marked by her father's absence and her parents' abusive relationship:

At night, buried beneath the covers, I hear my father yelling, calling my mother "whore" or a "slut", but I don't understand why ... One day, he almost strangles my mother when she spills a glass of wine on a white tablecloth he's just given her (Springora 4).

The reader can observe that such circumstances drove her to seek validation and affection from external paternal figures, developing vulnerability in manipulation, which G. later exploited.

With the narration of her childhood, depicted by noteworthy episodes showing V.'s traumatic childhood for which she could not be accounted for, Springora introduces V. to the reader, prompting them to evaluate her situation as unfair.

Springora employs a strategic narrative technique, foreshadowing G.'s entry into V.'s life in the concluding paragraph of the first chapter. In a detached and almost cynical tone, reminiscent of a list, she outlines the key elements that laid the foundation for subsequent events: "A father, conspicuous only by his absence, who left an unfathomable void in my life. A pronounced taste for reading. A certain sexual precocity. And, most of all, an enormous need to be seen" (24). By presenting these words as "all the necessary elements [that] were now in

place” (24), Springora sets the background for the forthcoming narrative of sexual abuse. This narrative choice allows the reader to witness V.’s past and recognize the source of her vulnerability, provoking sympathetic feelings toward her.

As we saw in the previous chapter, self-reflective elements on the writing purpose of the memoir could prompt sympathetic responses in readers, giving them a framework according to which they might evaluate the story. On a smaller than Gay scale, Springora reflects upon reasons she writes *Consent* in the closure of the memoir: “If I wanted to assuage my fury once and for all, and reclaim this chapter of my life, writing was without doubt the best way to do it” (183). This self-reflective element guides the reader’s attention to align with the author’s purpose: reclaiming her experience. Within the “joined attention” frame, the narrative’s self-reflective awareness affects the reader’s emotional engagement with the characters (Polvinen 135). It is a guideline provided by the author herself that directs readers to experience the memoir according to Springora’s aim as an empowering way of reclaiming her past publicly and facing Matzneff in the same way he entrapped her: taking back the power of language. That could be further enacted by the last chapter’s title, which is nothing but *writing* (163). This textual affordance might affect readers’ impression of Springora, prompting them to evaluate her positively, such as being brave enough to expose a powerful man and share a deeply personal story, and therefore develop a sympathetic response, a component of transformative reading.

4.2 Springora's Participation in the MeToo Movement: against Artists' Privileges

In *Consent*, V's personal story is depicted embedded in the broader context of Parisian society's acceptance and indifference towards artists' abusive and paedophilic behaviours, regardless of their impact on victims. As a memoir of sexual abuse, the narration surrounds Springora's experience with sexual abuse and the aftermath. Moreover, as a MeToo memoir, it portrays Matzneff not as an extraordinary or deviant case but as a symptom of a larger sociopolitical issue that demands resolution. Indeed, steps toward such a resolution were sparked by this memoir. In this section, I will show how the memoir moves from the personal story to the sociopolitical conceptualization of sexual abuse, depicting the MeToo movement's political nature. I will refer to the broader political discussions Springora embarks on and her purpose for writing a MeToo memoir. Subsequently, the extended transformative impact the MeToo memoir has brought on society will be discussed.

4.2.1 The critique of Parisian tolerance toward G.'s paedophilic behaviour

The narration of V's relationship with Gabriel Matzneff and his multiple sexual affairs with minors, along with their portrayal in his writings, is presented within the Parisian sociocultural context that nourishes abusive behaviours. Springora unequivocally reveals that such behaviour was not only tolerated but sometimes even endorsed by Parisian cultural circles under the guise of his artistic identity, something that had an influence even on her mother's acceptance of her relationship with G.:

To start with, my mother was not thrilled by the situation. But once she got over her surprise and shock, she consulted her friends and took advice from people around her; no one, apparently, was particularly disturbed ...

Ten years before I met G., toward the end of the 1970s, a large number of left-wing newspapers and intellectuals regardfully came to the defence of adults accused of having had “shameful” relationships with adolescents. In 1977, an open letter in support of the decriminalization of sexual relations between minors and adults, entitled “Regarding a Trial”, was published in the newspaper *Le Monde*, signed by a number of eminent intellectuals, psychoanalysts, well-known philosophers, and writers at the peak of their careers, largely from the left. They included Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, André Glucksmann, and Louis Aragon (49-50).

Springora, following the principles of the MeToo movement, conceptualizes her personal experience in the broader context of the liberal attitudes of the late 1970s, when “in the name of free love and the sexual revolution, everyone was supposed to be in favor of the liberation of physical pleasure” (51).

She names prominent intellectuals who were supportive of this “sexual liberation”, considering “repressive juvenile sexuality ... a form of social oppression” (51) to target the political context that supported paedophilic abusive relationships. Her story tells that there is no real consent between adults and minors: she condemns the political tendencies of the 1970s and the high-profile intellectuals who participated in them, showing that decriminalization of sexual relations between adults and minors was rather a political protection of paedophiles than sexual liberation.

Springora further criticises the privileges society has appointed to artists, still to this day, according to which they appear immune to legal consequences. Referring to Matzneff's recent award of the Prix Renaudot in 2013, she sharply turns to the tolerance of the cultural world:

If it is illegal for an adult to have a sexual relationship with a minor who is under the age of fifteen, why is it tolerated when it is perpetrated by a representative of the artistic elite—a photographer, writer, filmmaker, or painter? It seems that an artist is of a separate case, a being with superior virtues granted the ultimate authorization, in return for which he is required only to create an original piece of work. A sort of aristocrat in possession of exceptional privileges before whom we, in a state of blind stupefaction, suspend all judgment (175).

This exaggeration is a textual affordance with which the memoirist presents with sarcasm the reality of the artistic world, which seems to turn a blind eye to acts of abuse in exchange for art, and criticizes the hypocrisy of this stance, to treating them as if they were above the law. This way, Springora provides a sociopolitical understanding of her experience, which makes the memoir deeply embedded in those concepts.

Springora's motivation to write and publish *Consent*, as expressed in the memoir, aligns with the motivation of victims who share their stories online due to their outrage and desire to spark a shift in society (Menter and Ringrose 38). Springora reflects on her own motivation:

I am surprised that someone else, some other young girl from that time, hasn't already written her own book in an attempt to correct the interminable succession of marvellous sexual initiations that G. describes in his books I'd have loved someone else to do it instead of me ... It would certainly have unburdened me of a great weight. The silence

apparently collaborates what G. has always claimed, offering proof that no teenage girl has ever had reason to complain of having been in a relationship with him (183).

Similarly to other MeToo participants, Springora, moved by anger, aims to break the long-lasting silence that allowed Matzneff to abuse freely underage girls and boys and write paedophiliac books about it. She expresses that a sense of responsibility provoked her to write this MeToo memoir to expose Matzneff and the system that enabled his privileges and power so he could finally face the consequences of his crimes.

In addition, Springora acknowledges that by writing *Consent*, she joins the collective sharing of victims of sexual abuse: “What has changed today –something that men like he and his defenders complain about constantly ... – is that following the sexual revolution, it is now, at last, the turn of the victims to speak out” (184). Springora’s self-reflection places her memoir within the massive sharing of MeToo testimonies the movement has sparked, as she also acknowledges that this sharing is already a social change. With her memoir, she aims to participate in the movement to challenge the cultural climate of the late 1970s and disrupt the tolerance artists, including Matzneff, may still enjoy these days for their abusive behaviours.

4.2.2 The Extended Political Effects of the MeToo Memoir

Consent sparked an impressive impact on society that extends its pages, showing that Springora indeed “ensnare[d] the hunter in his own trap, ambush[ed] him within the pages of a book (viii). Even though Springora did not intend to press charges, the Paris Public Prosecutor’s office started an investigation against Matzneff for underage rape (“French prosecutors open rape inquiry”). Consequently, he was abandoned by three publishers, and he lost his financial

benefits from the French government and devoted supporters (Onishi, “Gabriel Matzneff”). Further, in a separate case, he was accused by the anti-paedophilia organization l’ Ange Bleu of propagating paedophilic ideas through his books, exacerbating his situation (Onishi, “Gabriel Matzneff”). The consequences extended from Matzneff to the literary prize Renaudot, which he had won in 2013, drawing attention to its previous support of Matzneff and its tendency to celebrate authors with morally questionable lifestyles (Onishi, “Pedophile Scandal”).

Springora’s memoir, along with other French MeToo testimonies³, contributed to shifts in society and law. A longtime and powerful Parisian deputy mayor, Christophe Girard, resigned after massive protests over his support for Matzneff and his affairs (Méheut, “Paris Deputy Mayor Quits”). Moreover, as a result of the collective sharing, The French National Assembly set the age of consent at fifteen, something that was not determined before, which means that sexual relationships with minors are now punishable by twenty years in prison (Méheut, “Children Are Off-Limits). Arguably, these shifts depict a change in society, for which the MeToo storytelling could be responsible, as a form of activism, highlighting the notion that transformative reading is extended in the material environment (Fialho 23).

4.3 Reconsidering Consent and Power-Relationships: Reflective Enactment in Readers

The last section of this chapter will return from the social change to the self-transformative change the memoir could enact in readers. *Consent* embarks on issues regarding

³ Namely, in 2021 Camille Kouchner published *The Familia Grande* in which she accuses her stepfather of abusing her brother, and the same year Francesca Gee also testified against Matzneff (Almog and Amar 140).

the notion of consent, verbal manipulation and society's tolerance over paedophilia, inviting the reader to reflect upon them towards a transformation of their familiar concepts. By examining the possibilities of reflective enactment fostered by the memoir, this section will show how readers could modify their understandings regarding sexual abuse; furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, how modified understandings could extend the memoir, transforming readers' lives.

The text invites readers to reconsider the notion of consent. The second chapter of the memoir, which introduces G. into V.'s life, commences with an epigram defining the memoir's title, "Consent," using dual definitions from moral philosophy and French law, thereby setting the stage for the forthcoming abusive relationship. In moral philosophy, consent is "an act of free thought in which a person fully commits to accepting or accomplishing something" (27), highlighting the importance of autonomy and independent decision-making. On the other hand, the legal definition of consent refers to the "authorization for marriage given by the parents or guardian of a minor" (27), which only refers to the legal dimension of a marriage with a minor⁴. By juxtaposing these two definitions side by side, Springora draws the reader's attention to the problematic grey area of the legal system that allows adults to abuse underage adolescents, who are not truly free to give actual consent. The convergence of the two definitions of consent with the title of the chapter, "The Prey," and the title of the memoir, "Consent," enables readers to reevaluate their understandings regarding consent. By employing the title "The Prey,"

⁴ It is important to remind here that up until 2021 there was not set age of consent for sexual relationships between adults and minors.

Springora foreshadows the abusive nature of V.'s relationship with G., implying that she was manipulated and taken advantage of, like a vulnerable prey. Together, these textual mechanisms challenge the reader to consider whether the possibility of a minor genuinely consenting to a relationship with an adult without manipulation or coercion exists. Her story shows that unequal power relationships can be both consensual in words and manipulative in essence.

The narration profoundly encourages the reader to reconsider and reevaluate the power of language and its impact on sexual relationships. Springora presents that after G. manipulated her into loving him, G. began to progressively take complete control of her mind. In their interactions, G. assumed the role of a "private tutor" (47), dedicated to her supposed cultural enlightenment, which deepened V.'s admiration for him. As Springora narrates, the cultural education G. imparted was centred exclusively around the "long history of illicit love affairs between young girls and middle-aged men" (47). G.'s examples of middle-aged men having affairs with underage girls were numerous:

Are you aware that in ancient times, the sexual initiation of young people by adults was not only encouraged, it was considered a duty? Even as late as the nineteenth century – little Virginia was only thirteen when she married Edgar Allan Poe, did you know that? And when I think about all those respectable parents reading *Alice in Wonderland* to their children before bed, without having the faintest idea of who Lewis Carrol was, it makes me want to bowl with laughter. He was obsessed with photography, it was quite compulsive, he took hundreds of photographs of little girls, including the real Alice, the love of his life, who inspired his masterpiece (47-48).

Providing more examples from contemporary times, such as Roman Polanski, V. started believing that it was righteous for her to love a middle-aged man and that it was a privilege to become his muse (48). With this same list of examples, Springora achieves the inverse effect on the reader that G. had on her; it allows the reader to perceive the numerous instances collectively, thereby facilitating an understanding of the widespread tolerance of sexual abuse, especially within the cultural domain. Furthermore, readers can form an understanding of how readily these men can manipulate their victims. Extending the memoir, understanding manipulation could be vital for protecting underage children or even themselves.

Furthermore, the notion of the power of verbal manipulation can be enacted by Springora's sceptical comments on the published letters G. was exchanging with many girls: they all seemed strangely familiar: in their style, their enthusiasm, and even in their vocabulary, it was as if they constituted a single body spread out across the years, in which the distant voice of a single idealized young girl, composed of all the others, could be heard (76).

Springora forthrightly accuses G. of dispossessing each young girl of her own words, implanting timeless and universal terms of epistolary love literature into their vocabulary. This allows readers to reflect upon the extent to which verbal manipulation could be hazardous, especially in unequal power relationships, like with Matzneff and underage girls. Such reflection can have transformative results on readers, prompting them to change their perspective on verbal manipulation and apply it in their lives by enabling them to recognize it and condemn it in various instances.

The societal tolerance toward artists is further substantiated by incidents drawn from Springora's experiences, the narration of which could potentially influence readers' reflective enactment. She narrates G.'s participation in a TV program in 1990 to discuss his literary work, known for detailing his relationships with underage girls. The program's overall tone was characterized by a lack of disapproval towards G.'s paedophilic behaviour, except for a dissenting voice from Canadian writer Denise Bombardier, whom G. dismissed: "There is not a single fourteen-year-old girl among them; a few are two or three years older, which is absolutely the appropriate age to discover love' (She can't argue, he knows his criminal code)" (94). This incident allows the reader to witness the prevalent societal tolerance towards artists like G., allowing him to appear easily on public television and promote his ephebophilic literature. At the same time, the few existing objections are silenced or ignored. A self-transformative reflection can occur: readers could realise that abusers are often protected by the system, which might push them to demand change. A change like the one *Consent* has sparked.

Consent is Springora's revenge book or a MeToo memoir that has caused Gabriel Matzneff legal consequences and sparked societal change, as this chapter explored. The memoir differs in style, tropes, and sociocultural context from *Hunger*. However, it employs detailed, somatic and emotional descriptions that prompt imagery, a deep exploration of Springora's past and present perspectives that enacts identification, and a self-reflection of the memoir's cause to 'trap' Matzneff, prompting sympathy. Such textual affordances engage readers to experience Springora's narration and could modify readers' life attitudes against sexual violence and foster reconsideration of the societal tolerance towards (artists') abusive behaviours.

Chapter 5 Conclusion: MeToo memoir, a Transformative Contribution to the MeToo Movement

This thesis was a theoretical cognitive analysis of MeToo memoirs as transformative readings. In the previous chapters, I analysed *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* by Roxane Gay and *Consent: A Memoir* by Vanessa Springora as literary MeToo testimonies, indicating textual affordances that could potentially enact a transformative reading experience, and underlying the reflective possibilities arising from the memoirists' political conceptualization of their experiences of sexual abuse. As this thesis is coming to an end, a comparative view of my findings in the two case studies will concern this concluding chapter, aiming to demonstrate that MeToo memoirs can engage readers in a transformative reading experience and potentially spark personal and social change against sexual violence.

Both Gay and Springora reflect upon their aims in writing their memoirs: to reclaim their experiences. Like many other practitioners of MeToo, who, by sharing their stories, "bring the private to the public sphere to be witnessed" (Loney-Howes 33), Gay wishes to tell "a story that demands to be told and deserves to be heard" (Gay 10); Similarly, for Springora, writing this memoir "meant becoming once more the subject of [her] own story" (Springora 183). The memoirists, to achieve their goal, create textual affordances of vivid and emotional descriptions in which they narrate scenes of sexual abuse and its traumatic impact from the viewpoints of the victims. As discussed in the previous chapters, vivid emotional descriptions might enact mental imagery on readers, prompting them to experience different sensorimotor modalities, such as to see or feel the content of the given passage (Kuzmičová 282). Gay's depiction of the gang rape is a graphic description that focuses on small sensor details, such as Christopher's

clothes still being on him as he “lay[ed] on top of [her]” or his friend’s “beer breath in [her] face” (Gay 40). This prompts readers to imagine her bodily sensations of Christopher’s clothes or the smell of the beer. In *Consent*, the deep psychological impact of sexual abuse is portrayed in the narration of V.’s depersonalisation, referring to V.’s embodied experience of feeling that she was turning “from a muse into a fictional character” in G.’s books (Springora 117). The text affords V.’s feeling that she “was made of paper” and “her organs didn’t exist” (155), prompting readers to sense the embodied dimension of Matzneff’s manipulation and abuse. Through the textual affordance of vivid and embodied emotional description, the texts enact mental imagery on readers, allowing them to *witness* the memoirists’ experiences.

Participating in the MeToo storytelling contains a political action as the survivors enter a collective testimony that underscores the structural and systematic nature of sexual abuse (Gleeson and Turner 60). Politicizing the personal, both for Gay and Springora, means that their experience of abuse is portrayed as shared among survivors, a product of a patriarchal society. Both memoirists interchange their past experiences with their current perspectives, a textual affordance that highlights the collective nature of their stories and enacts identification in readers. *Hunger*, more than *Consent*, invites readers to engage with Gay’s story as a story that could be theirs, especially by using the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘she’ to refer to a collective experience that prompts identification: “We shallow it ... it becomes depression or addiction or obsession ... manifestation of the silence of what she would have said” (Gay 42). In both cases, readers can access memoirists’ perceptions, evaluations, and emotions, elements that can enact the identification (van Krieken 13). Gay’s current perspective explains the trauma caused by the silencing she experienced in the past, a perspective with which readers could be familiar.

Similarly, Springora conceptualizes her experience of being manipulated by a significantly more powerful man than her, “the writer and intellectual”, who took advantage of her vulnerability and lack of knowledge of notions like “narcissistic pervert” or “sexual predator” (Springora 116). This is a past personal experience analysed by Springora’s current viewpoint, a collective experience between victims of verbal abuse that could enact identification in readers.

Both memoirs express their participation in the collective testimony of the MeToo movement in self-reflective textual affordances. *Hunger* is a self-reflective memoir as it reflects recurrently on its aims, motivations, and purposes as an artifice, which is evident from the outset and recurring throughout the narrative. Vanessa Springora, on the other hand, explicitly discusses her motivations and objectives primarily towards the end, even though her narrative consistently revolves around these themes. These narrative structures are textual affordances that place readers in the role of the spectator, enabling them to judge the characters’ situation based on the moral principles of the texts (Sklar 35) that the self-reflective elements communicate to them. Therefore, they prompt sympathy in readers. Gay provides readers with the moral principles of *Hunger* as such: it is an attempt to achieve justice, in a therapeutical sense, to her younger self, “trying to tell her everything she needs to hear” (Gay 24); it is a way to represent people with similar experiences who are often “ignored or dismissed or derided” (10). *Hunger* is part of “a collective testimony” and believes “in the importance of sharing histories of violence” (39). Analogously, Springora’s self-reflection on writing guides the reader to perceive V. as a “subject of [her] own story” (183); her MeToo sharing because it is “the turn of the victims to speak out”, aiming to tackle the “silence [that] means consent” (184). Springora understands the transformative power of literature. In her last chapter, she uses “Who owns

language owns power” as an epigram and aims to use this power to seek vengeance on Matzneff's abuse of power towards her (Springora 165). The memoirs' self-awareness influences how readers engage with them, strengthening and guiding their judgement of them based on their intention to participate in the movement against sexual violence.

We can also note that this textual strategy reflects the MeToo movement's characteristic as an action of performance of consciousness-raising (Gleeson and Turner 54). The memoirists, conscious of their audience, *perform* their stories in a specific script (54). They convey their narratives in a vocabulary used in MeToo, incorporating terms like 'collective testimony', 'speak out', and 'break the silence'. Therefore, Gay and Springora invite the readers to witness their MeToo stories, and they are involved consciously and actively in the movement's aim to shift the prevailing narrative surrounding sexual abuse. It becomes obvious that *Hunger* and *Consent* are embedded in the social context of the MeToo movement, aiming to spark personal and social change. As we saw, the texts' textual affordances, in which the collective experience of sexual abuse is portrayed, could foster mental imagery, personal identification and sympathy, components of transformative reading (Fialho, "What is literature for?" 8). A reading experience that becomes transformative means modification of readers' familiar understandings (Fialho, "Foregrounding and refamiliarization" 107) in notions regarding the political nature of rape. That is, the MeToo memoirs achieve their purpose.

Readers' self-transformation concerns hegemonic scripts regarding sexual abuse that the memoirists challenge through the conceptualization of their experiences as embedded into broader discussions about women's structural subordination (Loney-Howes 38). The memoirists reflect upon the systematic meaning of their experiences, inviting readers to reflect upon the

meaning of the text, engaging in a reflective enactment that affects readers' feelings and leads to modification of their understandings (Fialho 63). Gay uses her experience of gang rape to examine the sociocultural dimension of notions like victim- and self-blaming, silencing and trauma. Additionally, she embarks on an extensive discourse surrounding the experience of living with an overweight body within a fat-phobic society. Springora, on the other hand, illuminates how her own experience of abuse as a minor was not an isolated incident but rather the distressing consequence of an entire decade characterized by a deeply problematic notion of "sexual liberation" that protected powerful men. She exposes the troubling acceptance that characterized Parisian society, particularly within artistic circles, toward Matzneff's ephebophilic and abusive relationships and paedophilic writings. Beyond her own experience, Springora also presents the tolerance towards sexual abuse that continues to characterize the world of celebrated artists, even in contemporary times. The interplay between the personal and political dimensions of sexual abuse, as conceptualized by the memoirists, is a powerful opportunity for reflective enactment and self-transformation and enables the memoirists to participate in the collective effort to shift the rape narrative and spark social change.

It was discussed in *Consent's* case that transformative reading extends the specific reading experience and can impact the material environment (Fialho 23). Springora's MeToo memoir, mentioning a renowned Parisian writer, G.M., sparked the downfall of Gabriel Matzneff after years of his paedophilic crimes. Not only has Matzneff been accused of rape and paedophilic propaganda (Onishi, "A Pedophile Writer"), but also, the age of consent has been now set at fifteen in the French legal system (Méheut, "Children Are Off-Limits"). The memoir, along with many other MeToo testimonies of experiences of sexual abuse in France, is

considered responsible for such societal improvements (Méheut, "Children Are Off-Limits"). *Hunger* names the predator with a pseudonym; therefore, a similar impact could not be possible. However, both memoirs' transformative potential extends the reading experience in readers' lives. The reflective opportunities the memoirs afford readers extend each memoir's context, reaching numerous similar circumstances. A shift in readers' understandings regarding notions of victim-blaming, manipulation, silencing, long-lasting trauma, and systematic protection of powerful predators could influence readers' beliefs in future situations occurring in their lives. That can affect their stance towards victims and survivors, their tolerance toward predators or their self-understanding and healing of the past.

I hope that my thesis demonstrates that MeToo memoirs have significant transformative potential and can be used as a medium for anti-sexual violence activism to spark change in individual readers and, subsequently, in society. A future empirical study on actual readers would go further, testing the theoretical hypotheses of this thesis and providing evidence on how MeToo readings like *Hunger* and *Consent* could enact self-transformation. Such a study would benefit a variety of disciplines, including the empirical and cognitive study of literature, literary education, and feminist activism. For now, the theoretical approach of this study showcases that the two memoirs are deeply embedded in the politics of the MeToo movement, providing a literary testimony that reflects on the norms of society that enable sexual violence. They are prominent in influencing readers' feelings regarding sexual abuse and contribute to societal change against rape culture.

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