Writing, Reading and Reproducing #MeToo Accounts

An Institutional Ethnography Approach to Researching the Feminist Hashtag

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ABSTRACT

On 15 October 2017 actress Alyssa Milano posted the following on her Twitter account: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet”. After Milano’s tweet, the hashtag #MeToo is said to have gone viral overnight. Suddenly, the stories of survivors and victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse seemed to be everywhere—although, it may be argued, that they have always been the lived reality for many of us. Activists and those who research feminist hashtags like #MeToo tend to view the hashtag as a personalized tool for storytelling that enables survivors and victims to re-claim agency over the production of their own stories. This thesis deals with how survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse tell their stories and reproduce their experiences in the context of #MeToo movement. Through an analysis within the framework of institutional ethnography, the process of constructing a #MeToo account will be recovered. The analysis focuses on investigating what informs and shapes the way in which survivors/victims tell their story and how their #MeToo accounts interact with the reader. It will be argued that institutional processes of handling cases of sexual violence significantly influence the way survivors and victims share their experiences in the context of the movement. It will be suggested that being critical and mindful of the institutional processes that affect the way survivors and victims share their experiences, means to disrupt the oppression and the violence that criminal justice systems and retributive models of justice perpetrate. As it is then that we can open up to more transformative, sustainable approaches to justice and survivor/victim support. The project contributes to the current body of feminist hashtag activism scholarship with an institutional ethnography perspective.

Keywords: #MeToo, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual violence, survivors, victims, feminist hashtags, feminist hashtag activism, institutional ethnography, justice
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## BIBLIOGRAPHY
Introduction

On 15 October actress Alyssa Milano (2017b) posted the following on her Twitter account, after accusations of sexual harassment and assault were levelled against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein (Garcia 2017):

Initiated by Alyssa Milano, the hashtag #MeToo is said to have gone viral overnight when people adopted the hashtag and not “only” wrote the words “Me too” as their status but used the hashtag to share their stories of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse.

The origins of the Me Too movement go back to two decades ago when Me Too founder Tarana Burke, in her function as a youth-camp director at the time, was approached by a girl and her story of sexual abuse (Adetiba & Burke 2018). Ten years later, Tarana Burke started the “Me Too” campaign, and has since continued her work at a non-profit organization called Girls for Gender Equity.

When discussing her work, Burke speaks of “survivors” and how she came to realize that the phrase “Me too” could help “survivors” of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse to release them from the shame they felt. The phrase, so Burke, can serve to empower “survivors”, especially women of colour and “survivors” from other marginalized communities.

In an interview for The Nation with Elizabeth Adetiba, Burke admits that she did worry that when “white Hollywood” (Adetiba & Burke 2018, p.19) had taken up #MeToo, the intent behind her work would be whitewashed. Burke criticizes the focus on individuals like Harvey Weinstein and other “individual bogeymen” (Adetiba & Burke 2018, p.20), moving further
away from a discussion about power and privilege. Burke commits her campaign to marginalized communities and centres “black and brown girls”, as well as “queer folks” (Adetiba & Burke 2018, p.20). She points out that it is in particular problematic how people have been socialized to view black women and girls. She refers to nuances in the black community around sexual violence that are informed by centuries of oppression and white supremacy that need to be confronted (Adetiba & Burke 2018, p.21). Further, a distrust of law enforcement amongst marginalized communities requires non-traditional methods to pursuing justice, such as transformative justice and community accountability (Adetiba & Burke 2018, p.22; INCITE! 2014). In her interview with Adetiba, she also criticizes how there is no conversation about “transgender folks” (Adetiba & Burke 2018, p.20) and sexual violence, or people with disability and sexual violence, or Native Americans and sexual violence¹.

Alyssa Milano (2017a), failing to credit Tarana Burke in her initial #MeToo tweet, posted the following on her Twitter account on 16 October:

With her tweet Milano shared a link to the website of Just Be (Burke 2013), an organization founded by Tarana Burke, that shares the origin story of the Me Too campaign. The youth organization focuses on the health and well-being of young women of colour.

¹ The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” (World Health Organization 2002, p.149)
A couple of months before the #MeToo movement kicked off on Twitter, a dear friend of mine shared her experience of street harassment with me. I sat there and listened as she recounted what had happened to her. Telling me her story seemed not only a way to seek support and solidarity, but also a way to unpack the incident, to define the incident as sexual harassment—not just for me, but for herself. Her story and her way of conceptualizing what she had experienced stuck with me for several months. And then, in October 2017, #MeToo seemed to be everywhere. It was then that I decided to dedicate my thesis to investigating how survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse tell their stories in the context of #MeToo.

When I think of #MeToo, I think of seemingly countless accounts of sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual abuse from survivors/victims all over my Facebook Feed, all over the news, all over the place. I think of the many countless times activists have protested sexual violence, the many countless times feminists have made efforts to raise consciousness about sexual violence. And I ask myself—who are these people who weren’t aware of the magnitude of the problem and the omnipresence of sexual violence in our everyday lives before #MeToo?

When I think of #MeToo, I think about the countless times feminists of colour have called for a more intersectional mobilization against sexual violence and the creation of safer spaces for those most vulnerable to it. But when survivors/victims of sexual violence speak up, who is being heard? Who is being left out of the discussion?

When I think of #MeToo, I think of my own history as a survivor of sexual violence and I feel triggered. How many more times do survivors/victims of sexual violence need to tell their stories to be heard?

When I think of #MeToo, I wonder what it takes for survivors/victims to come to terms with what they have experienced. I wonder what it takes for survivors/victims to share their stories with others. I wonder how survivors/victims need to tell their stories to be believed, to affect people.

Most of the previous research done on feminist hashtag movements like #MeToo focuses on the impact of the feminist hashtag and its capability to promote transnational feminist solidarity, survivor/victim support and change. Recent studies have argued that feminist hashtag movements can serve to demonstrate a collective experience of structural inequality, while functioning as collective consciousness for those who participate in them (Baer 2016; Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer 2017). It has also been pointed out how the feminist hashtag can
function as a public protest or an agenda-building event that has an impact beyond Twitter and other social media platforms (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer 2017; Rentschler 2017). Previous research on the topic also emphasizes the need for intersectional solidarity among feminist activists and the creation of safer spaces for mobilizing against sexual violence (Rentschler 2017; Rodino-Colocino 2014). Especially research on the black feminist hashtag underlines how the use of the feminist hashtag can become a way of bearing responsibility for sexual violence through means of witnessing. This is particularly true for communities who cannot or do not want to rely on law enforcement and retributive models of justice (Clark 2016; Conley 2017). Further, the black feminist hashtag works as an intervention where, for example, victim-blaming narratives seem to dominate the public textual discourse surrounding sexual violence (Clark 2016).

However, existing research does not provide deeper insights on how survivors/victims of sexual violence are reproducing their experience within the framework of the movement. How exactly do survivors/victims construct their stories in the context of #MeToo? How do their #MeToo accounts interact with those who read them, with those who reproduce them, for example, in the form of articles? Activists and those who research feminist hashtags tend to view the hashtag as a personalized tool for storytelling (Clark 2016; Pazzanese & Walsh 2017). They attest the feminist hashtag an ability to disrupt and challenge, amongst others, the dominant discourse on sexual violence (Clark 2016). And while in the case of #MeToo, first-person narratives may enable survivors/victims to re-claim agency over the production of their own stories, I wonder—what influences and shapes the way they tell their stories?

Aims and Research Questions
The overarching aim of this thesis is to examine how survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse tell their stories and reproduce their experiences in #MeToo accounts, and how these accounts interact with those who read them in return. I will look at how #MeToo accounts come to be accepted as factual accounts by the reader, and how #MeToo accounts actively organize relations within the public textual discourse. My interest hereby is not to investigate what “actually” happened with regards to the original events. My interest is rather to examine how survivors/victims tell their stories in a way for them to be recognized as accounts of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse by any member of the relevant cultural community.
As outlined above, researchers and activists usually tend to view the feminist hashtag as a tool for personalized storytelling, a device that enables survivors/victims to re-claim agency over the production of their stories (Clark 2016). I am therefore interested to investigate what informs and shapes the way in which survivors/victims tell their story in the context of #MeToo, when the hashtag itself does not explicitly prescribe the way in which a story should be told. I want to explore how the process of constructing a #MeToo account can be recovered through an analysis within the framework of institutional ethnography. With this in mind, the research questions of this thesis will be:

- How does a person’s behaviour come to be defined as sexually harassing, assaultive and/or sexually abusive type behaviour in #MeToo accounts?
- How is the acceptability of a #MeToo account as a factual account provided for?
- How do texts actively organize relations within the public textual discourse surrounding #MeToo?

With this thesis, I hope to contribute to the body of feminist hashtag activism scholarship with an institutional ethnography perspective. I aim to demonstrate how an institutional ethnography approach to researching feminist hashtags like #MeToo can be a valuable addition to the field.

**Thesis Outline**

In line with these aims and research questions, my analysis will be twofold. For the first part of my analysis, I will examine two selected #MeToo accounts within the framework of institutional ethnography. I will look at their social organization by examining the structure of the accounts, which relates the experience(s) described in the accounts to the present of the reader. This also includes the identification of “authorization rules” (Smith 2005b, p.38) that instruct the reader on which criteria to use in order to determine the adequacy of the respective account. I will then conduct an analysis of “contrast structures” (Smith 2005b, p.27) with the aim to recover a procedure for constructing an account of behaviour, so that it can be recognized by any member of the relevant cultural community as sexually harassing/assaultive/abusive.

For the second part of my analysis, in line with Smith’s institutional ethnography approach, I will think of texts as “active” in the sense that the texts themselves have their own structuring effect (Smith 2005b, p.91). By analysing two articles on the #MeToo accounts that I have selected for the first part of my analysis, I will investigate the active ways in which texts organize relations within public textual discourse. This entails the assumption that texts intend
methods and schemata of interpretation, which I aim to recover through analysis. Finally, I will offer my own theorisations about the “textually-mediated social organization” (Smith 2005b) of the #MeToo movement.

Previous Research

Yes, All Women?

Since the hashtag #MeToo is a rather recent phenomenon, there are no studies on the movement and its impact available yet. However, the #MeToo movement is not the first of its kind. A feminist hashtag that seems particularly close to #MeToo in its intention and mode of operating is the U.S. American hashtag #YesAllWomen.

On 23 May, 2014, twenty-two-year old Elliott Rodger killed six undergraduate students near the University of California-Santa Barbara campus. Rodger had posted a misogynist video on YouTube in which he expressed his intention to punish women for refusing to have sex with him. He then embarked on his killing spree, before shooting himself (Baer 2016, p.28). A day after this episode of misogynist violence, an apologist hashtag, #NotAllMen, emerged on Twitter, in an attempt to distance other men from Rodger’s violence (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer 2017, p.94). #YesAllWomen evolved in response to this attempt, aiming to draw attention to omnipresence of sexism, misogyny, and violence against women. Using #YesAllWomen women shared their individual stories of discrimination and harassment, underscoring the fact that all women are subject to sexual violence (Baer 2016, p.17). In this regard, #YesAllWomen is very much in line with the intention behind the hashtag #MeToo, as initiated by actress Alyssa Milano (2017b) on Twitter, namely “to give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem” that is sexual harassment and assault.

Bernadette and David Barker-Plummer (2017) analyse #YesAllWomen by drawing on content and discourse analysis, and by tracing the interaction of #YesAllWomen with other discourses such as news and blogs. Based on their findings, Bernadette and David Barker-Plummer conclude their essay by arguing that #YesAllWomen’s discursive activism took two forms. First, for example through the sharing of personal experiences and stories of misogyny and sexual violence, the hashtag functioned as a site of “collective identity/collective consciousness” (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer 2017, p.92). Second, through its links and recirculation by other platforms and media, #YesAllWomen functioned as a “public protest” that had an impact on the public discourse beyond Twitter (Barker-Plummer & Barker-
Plummer 2017, p.93). Those two processes, the building of a collective identity/collective consciousness and the public protest, they argue, took place simultaneously. With regards to my own analysis, another aspect of Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer’s case study stands out. When analysing strategies of collective identity/collective consciousness, Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer point out how typically personal #YesAllWomen accounts described an incident but did not include an explanation or critique as to why the incident was problematic. Readers were assumed to know why an incident was problematic based on the hashtag. Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer (2017, p.103) found that the hashtag provided the context from which the readers were able to connect the described incident to, for example, a “patriarchal contexts of threat”.

Since #YesAllWomen has been a rather large and visible Twitter event within the recent years, a range of literature is available on the hashtag. Another essay that I would like to address here is Hester Baer’s *Redoing feminism: digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism* (2016) that investigates the feminist hashtag within a neoliberal framework. Baer’s essay provides an approach for examining feminist hashtags in the context of neoliberal societies, such as the United States (the context from which the #MeToo movement originated). Using #YesAllWomen as an example, Baer (2016) investigates the renewed feminist politics that emerge from the interface of digital media. She examines how “digital feminisms” affect the ways contemporary feminist protests make meaning and are understood transnationally, nationally, and locally. Baer argues that feminist Twitter movements “redo feminism” in a public context and revisit longstanding debates about male and white privilege. By emphasizing how individual stories of oppression demonstrate collective experiences of structural inequality, so Baer, feminist hashtag movements highlight the interplay of the individual and the collective (Baer 2016, p.29). The feminist hashtag becomes a way of connecting the experience of the individual with the experiences of the collective not only on a national, but on a transnational scale as well. Baer problematizes how in the context of neoliberalism, discourses of individual choice and personal responsibility, especially in Western societies, have led to the belief that feminism is “not necessary” anymore (Baer 2016, p.20). As a consequence of this development, structural inequalities are increasingly viewed as personal problems to be overcome by the individual. Baer draws on Angela McRobbie (2009, p.2) who describes this phenomenon as an active “undoing of feminism” in neoliberal societies that instead offer women “a notional form of equality” through access to education and employment and through participation in consumer culture and civil society. Baer emphasizes the paradox
of neoliberalism, when arguing that neoliberal policies on the one hand create permanent insecurities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. On the other hand, the neoliberal discourse of individual choice offers opportunities for the destabilization of normative roles and the eradication of traditional social formations. “Digital feminisms” that operate in the context of neoliberalism, according to Baer, allow to identify a system of gender oppression that facilitates male domination by normalizing gender violence and sexual entitlement. This effect is achieved by collecting the stories and experiences of individuals under feminist hashtags like #YesAllWomen that demonstrate a collective experience of structural inequality (Baer 2016, p.29). Here, to Baer, lies the potential of the feminist hashtag.

It is from Michelle Rodino-Colocino’s #YesAllWomen: Intersectional Mobilization Against Sexual Assault is Radical (Again) (2014) that we learn that the woman who introduced the hashtag #YesAllWomen and wants to remain anonymous, has pulled back from the movement. She did so, not only because people whitewashed the movement by erasing the fact that she is a Muslim woman of colour, but also because she received death threats. In her interview with Elizabeth Adetiba, Tarana Burke admits that she too did worry that when “white Hollywood” took over #MeToo, the intent behind her Me Too campaign—to centre marginalized communities—would be whitewashed (Adetiba & Burke 2018, p.19). And according to Burke, to some degree, this is exactly what’s happening. Tweets and hashtags, Rodino-Colocino argues, highlight an enduring mobilizing issue—sexual violence—and problematize the grounding of feminist solidarity in white, middle-class, US-centric, heteronormative privilege, rather than signifying a new “wave” of feminism (Rodino-Colocino 2014, p.1114). She therefore advocates for feminist activism that creates intersectional solidarity and safer spaces for those who mobilize against sexual violence.

The Black Feminist Hashtag
Literature on black feminist hashtags, such as #YouOkSis and #WhylIStayed, yet offers a different angle of looking at feminist hashtag activism. In Bystander intervention, feminist hashtag activism, and the anti-carceral politics of care Carrie A. Rentschler (2017) analyses practices of bystander intervention in Black and indigenous feminist activism that are explicitly anti-carceral and transformative in their approach to achieving justice. Rentschler (2017, p.567) argues that a particularly visible site of feminist transformative justice critique and activism occurs on social media platforms via black feminist hashtags such as #YouOkSis and #BlackLivesMatter.
#YouOKSis was introduced by two black women, Feminista Jones and @BlackGirlIDanger during a conversation about black women’s experiences of street harassment and bystander intervention on Twitter in 2014 (Conley 2017, p.22). The hashtag soon became an outcry for women of colour to share their experiences and their witnessing of sexual violence in public. For her analysis, Rentschler (2017, p.566) draws on cultural studies approaches to articulation and assemblage to analyse the hashtag #YouOkSis. In doing so, she demonstrates how the black feminist hashtag is “a process of creating connections” (Slack 1996, p.114) and explores the networked structures that are formed through these connections. She assesses the communication practices and the “curated and citationally-linked assemblages” (Rentschler 2017, p.568) through which feminist Twitter users connect with each other. She goes on to conclude that hashtagged conversations provide a platform for knowledge production about feminist bystander intervention (Rentschler 2017, p.578). This knowledge serves to support processes of community accountability and survivor/victim support.

Of particular interest for this thesis is Rentschler’s finding that, by using the hashtag #YouOkSis, posters testify to street harassment and other forms of gender and racial violence. In doing so, they are linking the individual to the collective (Rentschler 2017, p.573). Not only do they validate their own and other’s experiences of violence, but they also call on others to share responsibility for addressing the issue. In the context of #YouOkSis paying witness is a form of bearing responsibility. Twitter becomes an activist tool that participants of #YouOkSis can use to disclose and report incidents of, for example, street harassment. Other forms of media production around the hashtag may, in addition, contribute to a consciousness-raising effect.

An example for bearing responsibility by paying witness through #YouOkSis and one of the many examples where the hashtag #YouOkSis opened up a conversation beyond Twitter, is Tara L. Conley’s essay Decoding Black Feminist Hashtags as Becoming (Conley 2017). Conley starts her essay on the black feminist hashtag with a non-fiction encounter of witnessing street harassment, which she shared in a tweet in 2015, adding #YouOkSis. In her article, she “decodes” black feminist hashtags by substituting Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage (1987), a conceptual tool and vocabulary for understanding encounters among social formations and complex systems, with Alexander G. Weheliye’s Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human (2014). Weheliye draws on black feminist theory to preserve gendered and racialized specificity in theories of social organization. According to Conley, racializing assemblage does fill the conceptual gap that is left by Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage. By racializing assemblage, race is translated as a set of socio-political
processes that discipline humanity into “full humans, not-quite humans, and non-humans” (Conley 2017, p.22). Conley thus analyses black feminist hashtags as strategic processes and interventions, as “becoming”. “Becoming” here describes the ways in which black feminist hashtags disrupt dominant systems that keep the experiences of black women and their bodies “demarcated” among “socio-political, institutional and juridical processes” (Conley 2017, p.23). Conley’s analysis demonstrates how black feminist hashtags, such as #YouOkSis and #WhyISStayed, work as intervention strategies and as forms of storytelling. It also demonstrates, how the black feminist hashtag disrupts fragmented perspectives about gender and sexual violence by (re)presenting an intersectional frame of logic into popular discourse (Conley 2017, p.28). The black feminist hashtag intervenes, where law enforcement and retributive models of justice are not an option.

Through a case study of #WhyISStayed, Rosemary Clark (2016) identifies those features of a black feminist hashtag that allow tweets to extend beyond online personal expression to online collective action. Clark argues that a hashtag’s ability to produce and connect individual stories fuels it’s political and empowering qualities. She draws on concepts of social drama (Turner 1982), discursive activism (Shaw 2012; Young 1997) and connective action (Bennett & Segerberg 2013) to capture what she calls the “dramatic features” of the feminist hashtag. #WhyISStayed was initiated by activist, writer and domestic violence “survivor” Beverly Gooden in September 2014 in an effort to complicate the victim-blaming discourse that dominated the media coverage surrounding the domestic violence case of NFL player Ray Rice and is then-fiancée, now wife, Janay Palmer. The debate about why Palmer and other survivors/victims of abuse are choosing to stay in abusive relationships had been sparked by the release of security camera footage showing Rice punching Palmer, knocking her unconscious on an elevator, a couple of months prior to their wedding day (Clark 2016, p.794–5). Using #WhyISStayed, Gooden and others had been sharing their stories of domestic abuse to challenge the dominant discourse on domestic violence characterised by victim-blaming.

Clark draws on Susan Gal’s definition of “domination through language”, when arguing that the power of the victim-blaming narrative leads to the “symbolic domination” of the media representation of survivors/victims as responsible for their own abuse (Gal 1995, p.175). This in turn, shapes the way survivors/victims of domestic violence conceptualize their experience of abuse. Survivors/victims may internalize this dominant victim-blaming discourse that is perpetrated by mainstream media or other sociocultural institutions, which can lead them to feel responsible for their own abuse and may, in addition, cause them to be too ashamed to seek
support. A feminist hashtag like #WhyIStayed then, by co-constructing first-person narratives via Twitter, allows survivors/victims to re-claim agency over the production of their own stories. The feminist hashtag thus empowers its users to take control of the sociocultural narratives associated with their identities and subjective experiences (Clark 2016, p.798). In the case of #WhyIStayed this dynamic enabled not only an alternative to the dominant public discourse on domestic violence, but it also offered direct support for and solidarity with survivors/victims of domestic violence. Clark also draws attention to the risks and limitations of the feminist hashtag (2016, p.800). While the feminist hashtag has the potential to promote more intersectional and open feminist movements, Clark reminds us that we need to be aware of the omnipresence of online trolls, online abuse and bullying, the overexposure of individuals and the barrier of digital access.

The studies on feminist hashtag activism as introduced above do provide useful approaches to analyse and understand how the feminist hashtag contributes to the building of a collective identity/collective consciousness by connecting the experiences of individuals with the experiences of the collective, not only on a national, but on a transnational level. Following research approaches such as assemblage, content and discourse analysis, the studies were also able to demonstrate how the feminist hashtag expands beyond Twitter and other social media platforms. However, these research approaches are insufficient when trying to investigate how survivors/victims construct their #MeToo accounts and how #MeToo accounts interact with the reader. Previous research on feminist hashtags has not yet been able to answer the following research questions

- How does a person’s behaviour come to be defined as sexually harassing, assaultive and/or sexually abusive type behaviour in #MeToo accounts?
- How is the acceptability of a #MeToo account as a factual account provided for?
- How do texts actively organize relations within the public textual discourse surrounding #MeToo?

Aiming to answer these questions, this thesis will build on institutional ethnography, a feminist approach to investigating the social that focuses on “textually-mediated social organization”. The term was coined by Dorothy E. Smith (2005b) to express how texts coordinate people’s actions across, for example geographically or temporally, distant sites. I will expand on institutional ethnography in the Theory in Everyday Life: Institutional Ethnography as a Feminist Methodology chapter of this thesis.
In February 2018, Verso (Burke et. al 2018) has published a collection of new and previously published writings by feminist activists, such as Me Too founder Tarana Burke, scholars and writers, called Where Freedom Starts- Sex, Power, Violence, #MeToo. The collection provides useful background information on Tarana Burke’s Me Too campaign and discusses the sexual violence leveraged against marginalized communities. It also features critical voices on the hashtag #MeToo. All those aspects are crucial to this thesis and cannot be left out when discussing or analysing #MeToo.

In the collection’s introduction, Jessie Kindig (2018) draws on Harriet Jacobs’ Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl- Written By Herself (2005) first published in 1861 and American political activist and academic Angela Davis’ Women, Race & Class (2001), first published in 1981. In her book Jacobs, who was born into slavery in 1813 in North Carolina, tells her own story, an account of the many violences endured by enslaved black women. From Jacobs’ story Kindig fast forwards to one hundred and twenty years later when Davis writes about how the rising public concern about rape in the United States has inspired countless women to come forward with their stories of sexual harassment and sexual violence. The “awesome fact” (Kindig 2018, p.14) that only very few women can claim that they have not been “victims” of either attempted or accomplished sexual attacks was revealed (Davis 2001). Kindig claims that it is the same “awesome fact” described by Davis in 1981 that “continues to shock mainstream commentators” in the wake of #MeToo today (Kindig 2018, p.14). Davis and Kindig question how anyone can be shocked about the extent of sexual harassment and sexual violence at all, given its continual presence, especially amongst marginalized communities. Collective organizing and protesting sexual violence has always been an ongoing process for those communities. Kindig argues that from a historical point of view, it is not surprising that the hashtag #MeToo, which began decades ago, as part of the activist campaign led by Tarana Burke to support marginalized women of colour who experienced sexual assault, only went viral when spread by “the white and the wealthy” (Kindig 2018, p.14). Women have always, Kindig concludes, told and written about and fought against sexual violence (Kindig 2018, p.15). The crucial question that remains is: when survivors/victims of sexual violence speak up, who is being heard?

The collection also offers writings on the binary language that is often used when stories of sexual violence are being told such as consent/rape, victim/perpetrator, abuser/survivor,
trauma/pleasure, man/women, sex/power, yes/no, resistant/complicit (Kindig 2018, p.15). However, the reality of sexual harassment, assault and abuse is usually much more complex than reflected in those binaries. Thus, talking or writing about one’s experience not only requires a significant amount of contextual work, but finding the “right” words for an experience that is neither black nor white poses a major challenge for those who have experienced sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse.

In Notes on a Rape Story, Larissa Pham shares her “rape story” and in a very powerful way makes explicit the contextual work she had to do to be able to define what had happened to her as rape, for herself and others. For example, she talks about how she felt and sometimes still feels complicit:

“Was it my fault? Did I put myself in that position, and am I responsible? Is it rape if I know the person who did it? Is it rape if I didn’t say no, but I didn’t say yes, and I cried after?” (Pham 2018, p.144)

It is this contextual work, this classification of an incident as sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse that is also present in the #MeToo accounts under investigation in this thesis. In her essay, Pham talks about how, when writing down her story, she had to engage with the poverty and binary of language surrounding sexual violence. Her essay makes explicit the contextual work that has to be done by the survivors/victims themselves and the people around them. Pham (2018, p.151) emphasizes how writing about sexual violence can become a way to unpack an incident, a way of starting a process of healing—a feature that resembles in the #MeToo accounts analysed for this thesis.

Yet another essay of the collection is of interest for my analysis. In The Unsexy Truth About Harassment Melissa Gira Grant discusses how, when mainstream media writes about the stories women have shared under the #MeToo banner, editing down sexual harassment to a “vaguer behavior” of “sexual misconduct” (Grant 2018, p.170), is problematic. Grant argues that “misconduct” can be a misleading term, as it implies that the “offense” is a purely interpersonal problem, an “offense” that is no one’s fault in particular. It leaves out how harassment is enabled by a system, for example a workplace’s culture of disregard. This is an important aspect to pay attention to when analysing the ways in which texts on the #MeToo accounts reproduce those exact accounts or incidents. Since sexual harassment in the workplace itself is a very prominent and reoccurring motif of the #MeToo debate, it seems important to critically examine the effect that is achieved by turning sexual harassment in the workplace into cases of “sexual misconduct”.

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Since I am investigating the “textually-mediated social organization” (Smith 2005b) of the hashtag #MeToo movement and the active ways in which texts organize relations within public textual discourse, language, and the language used when writing about sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse are key to my analysis.

**Theory in Everyday Life: Institutional Ethnography as a Feminist Methodology**

This thesis will build on institutional ethnography, a feminist approach to investigating the social, pioneered by Canadian sociologist and standpoint feminist Dorothy E. Smith in the early 1980s. Institutional ethnography focuses on “textually-mediated social organization”, a term coined by Smith (2005) to express how texts coordinate people’s actions across different, for example geographically or temporally distant, sites. In her approach to sociological inquiry, inspired by ethnomethodology and feminist methodology, Smith challenges standard or mainstream forms of sociology. Her critique points to the tendency of traditional sociology to favour the constructed realities of privileged experts over the lived realities of its subjects. Her aim is therefore to create a sociology for rather than of people (Smith 2001, p.161). Institutional ethnography emphasizes the presence of active subjects, who are knowers of their everyday life and uses the experience of the individual as an entry point for inquiry— just as I consider the authors of #MeToo accounts as active subjects, who are knowers of their everyday life.

Smith (1987) further critiques the way in which conventional sociology turns the everyday world into an object of study, and the kind of strategies that assemble the everyday world as an object of investigation by isolating it from its context, making it appear self-contained. Instead of isolating the everyday world from its context, Smith suggests that the researcher opens up to the “problematic” of the everyday world by considering how scenes of everyday life are determined by an extended set of social relations. Following Smith’s suggestion, I therefore aim to investigate from a standpoint of theory in everyday life rather than of everyday life in this thesis.

**Social Organization and Social Relations**

To the institutional ethnographer, the world is invariably social. The “social” arises through people’s activities and through the coordination of those activities. People’s actions and decisions and how they are coordinated with outside events are part of social relations. The term “social organization” describes the (purposeful) coordination of those activities (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.27). The institutional ethnographer uses the “socially-organized” character
of everyday life to inquire how things are coordinated and organized. Smith coined the term “textually-mediated organization” to express how texts coordinate people’s actions (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.29). Institutional ethnography’s focus on texts derives from the empirical observation that means of social control are increasingly textual and discursive, coordinating activity across many different sites. Institutional ethnography thus aims to reveal the organizing power of texts by making visible how activities in local settings are coordinated and managed extralocally (Devault 2006, p.294–5). Smith speaks of “ruling relations” when addressing the concept of the socially-organized exercise of power through texts.

The Relations of Ruling

Smith understands texts as components of social relations. People who process the same texts may find their actions coordinated by those texts. This way, texts have the power to coordinate, and the ability to influence people to act in particular ways. When people meet face-to-face and consider themselves as relating to each other as individuals, they may not recognize how their actions are also shaped by the (same) texts. This concept of the socially-organized exercise of power through texts is what Smith calls “ruling” or “relations of ruling” (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.32; McCoy 1998, p.395; Smith 1987, p.3, 2001, p.161, 2005b, p.4). The notion of “ruling” describes a way of understanding how power is exercised in local settings to achieve extra-local interests. Smith speaks of “ruling” when the interest of those who rule dominate the actions of those in the local setting. In the context of institutional ethnography, attention to textual practices contributes to a better understanding of how power is organized in contemporary society.

Activating Texts: The Text-Reader Conversation

People, for example, perform their work tasks through texts, forms and reports on a regular basis. Texts are important instruments for work, yet often taken for granted. To have an effect, texts need to be “activated” by the people who handle and use them. The aspect of “activation” emphasizes the human involvement when it comes to a text’s capacity to coordinate action or get things done a certain way (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.33). Activated through the human, the respective text is capable of ruling and coordinating the activities of multiple actors across different (geographically or temporally distant) sites.

As I have already introduced above, institutional ethnography centres on “textually-mediated social organization” (Smith 2005b) and inquires how texts coordinate people’s actions across
multiple sites. Texts are of central importance for institutional ethnography, since they create a connection between the local and the translocal organization of the ruling relations (Smith 2005a). Smith introduces the notion of the “text-reader conversation”, that describes reading a text as a special kind of conversation that takes place between the text and the reader (Smith 2005a, p.71). The “text-reader conversation” enables the institutional ethnographer to recognize the reading of a particular text as something that is done in a particular local setting by a particular person. The reader activates the text, and in activating it, becomes the text’s agent. The reader also responds to the text by “operating” it. The text, activated by the reader, can be recognized as participating and playing part in organizing actions (Smith 2005a, p.79). Through the notion of the “text-reader conversation” Smith makes the reader and the reader’s active engagement with the text visible.

**Theorizing Discourse**

As outlined in the previous sections, Smith’s approach to analysing everyday life and how it is organized and ruled centres the experience of the individual. The inquiry is about how the experience of the individual is organized. Smith’s institutional ethnography largely roots in ethnomethodology as pioneered by Harold Garfinkel (1967). Ethnomethodology, much like institutional ethnography, adopts a focus on everyday practices and the ongoing production of social reality, challenging “conventional” sociology (Vom Lehn 2014, p.79). Within the framework of ethnomethodology, Rodney Watson (1997) developed an “ethnomethodological” research approach to texts that addresses their “active” nature and situates them in people’s local courses of action. Watson collected research data in street settings. For example, he observed a group of people waiting at a bus stop for their bus to arrive. While observing the people who were waiting at the bus stop, he noticed how, as busses approached, the busses’ numbers led some people to stand back and others to move forward. The different numbers sorted the group into people who wanted and people who did not want to take a certain bus route that the number identified (Smith 2005a, p.70). Watson called this phenomenon “duplex-action” of the text, in this case the number of the bus. First people monitored the sign(s) on the bus, then they “incorporated” the sign, which then led to “further” action (Watson 1997, p.93). Either people would stand back and wait, or move forward and eventually board the bus. Watson offers an “ethnomethodological” method to explore how texts are taken up in the local context. Yet, his method does not explore extralocal dimensions of textually mediated forms of coordination like institutional ethnography does. Inspired by ethnomethodology, institutional ethnography is oriented by a “problematic”, the everyday experience of people active in an
institutional context (Smith 2005a, p.70). Watson’s interest lies in people’s activities that can be observed and recorded. His work of observation for the purpose of a description thus produces an objectified account, a standpoint implicit in the description is that of academic discourses (Smith 2005a, p.70). Institutional ethnography however works from a standpoint within institutional relations, thus, focusing on how texts coordinate people’s activities locally and institutionally, across different, for example geographically or temporally distant, sites. The institutional ethnographer works with a theory of contemporary social organization that focuses on ruling practices and their associated text-based discourses and objectified forms of knowledge (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.40). Institutional ethnography thus inquires how discourse organizes experiences.

While Smith’s approach to discourse shares Foucault’s interest in texts, power and governance, her notion of discourse differs from Foucault’s use of the term (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.40). In Foucault’s work the notion of discourse characterises a kind of large-scale conversation in and through texts (Foucault 1970, 1979). His focus lies on how discourses define the reality of the social world. Foucault thinks of the discourse as an institutionalized way of writing about reality. The discourse defines what can be thought and said about the world. Discourses, according to Foucault, do not discover a pre-existing truth about human identity, but are creating it through practices of power/knowledge (Foucault 1984). To Foucault, knowledge is always an exercise of power, and power always a function of knowledge (Routledge 2016). In that sense, knowledge and power are always inseparably bound together. For Smith, discourse describes a field of relations that includes texts and their intertextual conversations, and the activities of people who produce and use those texts and take up the conceptual frames that these texts circulate (Devault & McCoy 2002, p.772). To discover how ideas and conceptual frames carried in texts affect people’s lives, Smith emphasizes that one must first understand that people actively participate in discourse as they carry out their everyday lives.

What Foucault (1984) conceptualized as knowledge/power, for Smith is the active participation of people and their contribution of their knowledge on how to go about things, that bring them into line with ruling ideas (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.41). An analysis within the framework of institutional ethnography relies on a theorized way of exploring power and knowledge— as people’s organized activities (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.43). The analysis attempts to describe how people’s everyday lives may be organized without their explicit awareness but still with their active involvement. Discovering how power operates in people’s everyday
actions is a crucial theoretical feature of institutional ethnography. According to institutional ethnography, individuals’ actions are part of the more extended social relation. The individuals’ accounts, such as the #MeToo accounts under investigation in this thesis, give clues about what informs their action and where that message comes from. If power enters into what individuals do, the institutional ethnographer has to investigate how (Campbell & Frances 2015, p.43). Institutional ethnography then may untangle how the experience of individuals is organized.

**Women’s Standpoint and the Ruling Relations**

Smith’s investigation of everyday life departs from the standpoint of women. In her work, she aims to demonstrate how the standpoint of women has historically been excluded from professional discourses. It is this excluded standpoint that provides the point of departure for Smith’s investigation on how the everyday worlds in which we live and act are shaped by institutional processes. As a feminist methodology, Smith’s institutional ethnography has been applied to a variety of topics including the organization of health care, education, and social work practice, the regulation of sexuality, police and judicial processing of violence against women, activism and so on (Devault 2007). Institutional ethnography provides an alternative to the objectified subject of knowledge of established social scientific discourses (Smith 2005a, p.17). Within the framework of institutional ethnography, the experience of the individual becomes the entry point for an investigation of institutional processes.

The version of standpoint Smith works with is, however, different from Sandra Harding’s (1988) understanding of the term, who identifies standpoint in terms of the social positioning of the subject of knowledge, the knower and creator of knowledge. It also differs from the concept of feminist standpoint by Nancy Hartsock (1998) as it does not identify a socially determined position or category of position in society. Smith’s notion of women’s standpoint is what she originally called “a sociology for women” and later transformed into “a sociology for people” (Smith 2005a). The sociology for people does not identify a position or a category of position, gender, class or race within the society. It does, however, establish a subject position for institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, “a site for the knower that is open to anyone” (Smith 2005a, p.17). “Standpoint” then describes a subject position in institutional ethnography, a point of entry into investigating the social, without subordinating the knowing individual to objectified forms of knowledge of society (Smith 2005a, p.18). According to Smith, a sociology for the people creates a subject position that can be occupied by anyone.
Ellen Pence (2001, p.199) builds on Smith’s work when applying institutional ethnography as a research strategy to explicate how practices and procedures used in the daily work routines of criminal justice professionals, who deal with cases of domestic violence, limit the likelihood that court involvement will result in interventions that focus on the safety of the survivor/victim. Pence argues that while judicial processes may be more successful in bringing domestic abusers to justice than in the past, they still are less successful when it comes to producing actual safety for survivors/victims of domestic violence. She explores how aspects of the work of criminal justice professionals in the United States, such as police officers, probation officers, judges, and prosecutors, are organized through texts. Texts are produced and processed in people’s work settings, and thus coordinate and regulate different phases of the work of the criminal justice professionals in question. Pence argues, that those “unobservable” aspects of the work of criminal justice professionals complicate the work of activists, who strive to support survivors/victims of domestic violence. Pence concludes, that these work processes, organized and limited by formalized texts such as administrative forms, regulations, reports to the court and legal arguments, erase the survivor’s/victim’s experience of violence and intimidation they face in their intimate relationships. Issues surrounding their safety thus disappear (Pence 2001, p.200). Pence’s work, by applying Smith’s notion of institutional ethnography, makes explicit how safety for survivors/victims is or is not accounted for in the institutional objectives of processing cases of domestic violence.

Gilian Walker draws on institutional ethnography to explore the struggles of the early days’ women’s movement in Canada to make the issue of violence towards women the subject of government legislation (Smith 2005a; Walker 1990a, 1990b). In her analysis, Walker deals with the interaction between the state and the women’s movement, and the organization of social relations linking the local, everyday activities and practices of people with the general and abstracted procedures of ruling and administering of Canadian society (Walker 1990b, p.64). Walker traces the processes through which women’s experiences of domestic violence were translated into the formalized terms, such as “male violence”, “domestic violence” and “family violence”, that made it possible to express women’s experience of oppression in their own homes and to define their experiences as a matter of public concern (Walker 1990b, p.65-66). Through her work, Walker aims to contribute to a better understanding of how women’s oppression is reinforced by the very nature of the organizations that are ought to support and protect them.
In applying Smith’s approach to analysing everyday life and how it is organized and ruled, Walker and Pence investigate the “textually-mediated” social organization of their cases and thus make explicit how texts are involved in organizing social and power relations between actors in the context of domestic violence.

The studies by Walker and Pence demonstrate how, by applying institutional ethnography as a research strategy, researchers can reveal to which extent work processes are limited and organized by formalized texts (e.g. work processes of the criminal justice system). While those work processes are expected to seek justice and safety for survivors/victims of (domestic) violence, they often fail to address the needs of survivors/victims in an adequate, sustainable manner at the same time.

#MeToo accounts in which survivors/victims share their experiences are usually not understood as formalized texts as the ones Walker and Pence are concerned with in their studies (Clark 2016; Conley 2017). However, I aim to demonstrate how, through the analysis of selected #MeToo accounts within the framework of institutional ethnography, authors of #MeToo accounts follow a certain “standard procedure” for producing an account to some extent. In that sense, #MeToo accounts could be understood as “formalized”, even though we usually would not perceive them as such due to their personalized storytelling format.

**Methods, Material and Ethics**

Considering my research questions, in line with my choice of theoretical framework and methodology as discussed above, my methods allow me to analyse the “textually-mediated social organization” (Smith 2005b) of the hashtag #MeToo movement and the active ways in which texts organize relations within public textual discourse.

**Methods**

For the first part of my analysis, I have selected two texts to be analysed within the framework of feminist institutional ethnography. Those texts have been selected according to the following criteria: (1) the text can be identified as part of the #MeToo movement, as it has been shared on social media using the hashtag #MeToo by the author; (2) the text reproduces the experience(s) of the author, in order to use the experience of individuals as the entry point into forms of social organization in line with an institutional ethnography approach; (3) the author of the text is by definition a person of public interest in the United States due to their profession (artist, actress, athlete and so on), which increases the likelihood of the #MeToo account being
picked up by mainstream media; and, in addition, allows me to limit the scope of the analysis to the context of Western popular culture and to start the analysis from the U.S. American context from which the #MeToo movement originated; (4) the initial #MeToo account published by the author has evoked a response that addresses an impact/consequence of the account and the event reproduced in it that has entered the public textual discourse surrounding the #MeToo movement. This will be of importance for the second part of my analysis.

The texts shared under the hashtag #MeToo will be analysed using a method suggested by Smith in chapter two of her book *Text, Facts, and Femininity- Exploring the Relations of Ruling* (2005). With the method outlined here, I aim to make explicit the various steps and activities that intervene between the reader of the account and the original events, and to show how the acceptability of the text as a factual account and as an account of someone who is, or was, subjected to sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse is provided for (Smith 2005b, p.10). At this point I would like to strongly emphasize that the analysis of these texts is not being viewed as accounts from which I am trying to trace back what “actually” happened, nor am I implying that the experiences shared in the selected texts aren’t valid.

In applying Smith’s method, I start out with conducting an analysis of “social organization” (Smith 2005b, p.40), by examining the “preliminary instructions” (Smith 2005b, p.19) of the selected accounts, that relate the original events described in the texts to the present of the reader. An instruction is given to the reader on how to read the accounts as accounts of sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse, and consequently as accounts that are part of the #MeToo movement. A social organizational analysis also includes an analysis of the “authorization rules” (Smith 2005b, p.20), which instruct the reader on what criteria to use in determining the adequacy of the description and credibility of the account.

The social organizational analysis is followed by an analysis of “contrast structures” and the analysis of the accounts “as a whole” to reveal the procedure for constructing an account of behaviour in order for it to be recognized by any member of the relevant cultural community as sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive (Smith 2005b, p.38). Smith uses the term “contrast structure” to refer to the contextual work the author of the account has to do in order to show how the behaviour can be read as sexual harassment/assault/abuse type behaviour. A “contrast structure” would be one where a description of a person’s behaviour is preceded by a statement which provides the instructions for how to see that particular behaviour as anomalous.
Finally, by looking at the accounts “as a whole” I am turning from an analysis of the individual items to looking at how those items work as a collection.

For the second part of my analysis, I am applying a method suggested by Smith (2005) in chapter five *The Active Text: A Textual Analysis of the Social Relations of Public Textual Discourse* of her book *Texts, Facts and Femininity* to analyse specific responses the texts examined in the first part of my analysis have evoked. This serves the purpose of analysing the active ways in which texts organize relations within public textual discourse. Here the term “public textual discourse” refers to the order of social relations mediated, otherwise identified as “public opinion” or “mass communications” (Smith 2005b, p.92). While the first text, the #MeToo account, poses a problem or challenge, the second text operates on the first to structure for the reader a definite reflection working retroactively upon the experience of that reading (Smith 2005b, p.93). The texts selected for the second part of my analysis therefore either feature a response or statement by the person whose deviant behaviour was addressed in the first text, a response or reaction from other survivors/victims or the texts claim an impact or a consequence of any kind. They also feature the first text or selected parts of it.

**Empirical Material**

On 17 November 2017 Lysette shared her #MeToo statement on sexual harassment and assault, which she experienced at the hands of co-star and lead of the show Jeffrey Tambor, on the set of Amazon’s *Transparent*. The show centres on a trans woman played by cis male actor Tambor, and has previously been hailed for employing more trans actors than any other Hollywood production in history. Lysette decided to come forward, after trans actress Van Barnes, who worked as Tambor’s assistant while shooting *Transparent*, had privately spoken out about Tambor’s abusive behaviour she was subjected to on her social media in the beginning of November 2017 (Vagianos 2017). After an internal investigation, Amazon confirmed that Tambor will not be returning to Amazon Studios’ *Transparent* on 15 February 2018. Tambor (Goldberg 2018) who denies any wrongdoing, has expressed his disappointment in Amazon’s handling of the allegations levelled against him.

Simone Biles (2018) revealed that she too is “one of the many survivors that was sexually abused by Larry Nassar” in her #MeToo statement on Twitter in January 2018. Nassar, a former team physician for both U.S.A. Gymnastics and Michigan State University, has been accused of sexual abuse by more than 260 women and girls (and counting). Nassar was sentenced to 60
years in prison in December 2017 for a conviction related to child pornography (Hoffman 2018). He received an additional 40 to 175 years in prison on sexual assault charges in Ingham County in January 2018, before being sentenced to yet another 40 to 125 years in prison on sexual assault charges on 5 February 2018. Court hearings included impact statements of women and girls, who spoke out about how Nassar’s sexual abuse changed their lives (Levenson 2018; Schonbrun & Hauser 2018; Hobson 2018). Before his sentencing, Nassar made a brief statement, in which he said that he would “carry the words” of his “victims” with him for the rest of his life (CNN 2018). The scandal around Nassar has received wide national and international media attention. Both #MeToo accounts will be introduced in their full length in the section on #MeToo: Tweets as Data of this thesis.

I have chosen to limit the extent of my empirical material to two accounts. This allows me to read the respective accounts very closely within the scope of this thesis. I am thus able to conduct an in-depth analysis, which is required to fully grasp the insights those accounts offer on the structure of their conceptual model and the active involvement of the reader. Also, the focus on two accounts provides for comparison. An analysis of two accounts might reveal similarities in the way the authors have produced their accounts and in the way the accounts interact with the reader, or were procedural differences might occur.

For the second part of my analysis, I have selected two texts, each responding to one of the above introduced #MeToo accounts.

*Trace Lysette Accuses Jeffrey Tambor Of Sexual Misconduct On ‘Transparent’ Set* was published online on 17 November 2017 in the Huffington Post’s *Queer Voice* section. The author Alanna Vagianos is the Huffington Post’s (2018) “Women’s Reporter”, who covers gender issues with a focus on sexual violence and activism. She has previously worked for *BUST Magazine* (2018), a lifestyle magazine that features celebrity interviews, music, fashion, art, crafting, sex, and news from a third wave feminist perspective, and *The Feminist Majority Foundation* (2017), an organization dedicated to women’s equality, reproductive health and non-violence. The article features Trace Lysette’s #MeToo account and a statement from Tambor in which he responds to Lysette’s “accusations”. The article also hints to potential consequences for Tambor.

*Simone Biles Says She, Too, Was Abused by Larry Nassar* was published online on 15 January 2018 in the New York Times’ *Sports* section. The author Benjamin Hoffman joined the New York Times as staff editor in 2005 and is a regular contributor for the sports section (The New York Times 2018). The article features Simone Biles’ #MeToo account, a statement by the
organization *U.S.A. Gymnastics* and a response by another survivor/victim, American gymnast Alexandra Raisman. The two texts will be introduced in full in the analysis chapter of this thesis.

Research approaches, such as assemblage, discourse and/or content analysis, that have been applied in the studies introduced in the previous research chapter, require a larger amount of data/empirical material. An analysis within the framework of institutional ethnography however benefits from a focus on detail and not scope. I am therefore limiting my empirical material to the accounts/texts as introduced above.

**Ethical Considerations**

As a principle of feminist research practice in general, and within the framework of institutional ethnography as a feminist methodology in particular, I aim to put a strong emphasis on reflexivity— the attempt to make the power relations and the exercise of power in the research process explicit (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002, p.118). I am a feminist, and I too, am a “survivor”. Because of that, I am aware of and at the same time confronted with the sexual violence people experience in their everyday lives. As a “survivor”, I relate to the experiences other survivors/victims have shared using the hashtag #MeToo.

Yet, I myself am not an active participant in the #MeToo movement. For reasons of personal safety, I have not shared my experiences on social media. I would like to remind the reader that depending on a survivor’s/victim’s individual context it might not feel safe and/or be safe for them to participate in the movement. I do, however, believe that sharing one’s experiences online and participating in the #MeToo movement can be an empowering experience for some survivors/victims.

Throughout this thesis, I am using the term “survivor/victim” when talking about those who have experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse. I have chosen to follow this approach to respect a person’s right to self-identification. While some may identify as survivors, others may identify as victims, and these self-identifications may change throughout a person’s individual process of healing. I indicate a person’s self-identification by putting the respective term, “victim” or “survivor”, in quotation marks. For example, in her account Biles (2018) identifies herself as a “survivor”. I am following the same approach with categorisations such as “abuser”, “predator”, “harasser”, and/or “offender”.

For similar reasons, I have chosen to talk about “sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse” when discussing the experiences of survivors/victims in the analysis chapter. Regardless
of how a respective criminal justice system might define sexual harassment, sexual assault or sexual abuse, I am concerned with how survivors/victims define for themselves what they have experienced, and I believe that their experiences are not for me to label.

I also believe in a survivor’s/victim’s self-determination, and that they themselves know best what they need to heal and what justice looks like for them. Some may prefer to seek justice through the criminal justice system, others may prefer to follow a transformative justice approach. For some it might feel empowering to share their experience in the context of #MeToo, others might feel different. I do, however, believe that the imperatives of the #MeToo movement require a survivor/victim to actively reproduce their experience and possibly to relive their trauma. And while I had initially considered to interview survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse, who actively participated in the #MeToo movement, for this thesis, I finally decided not to. Personally, I did not feel comfortable to approach survivors/victims, and interview them as to how and why they have decided to tell their stories a certain way. I feared that this could involve them having to relive their trauma (again). I also worried that survivors/victims could potentially interpret certain interview questions as a way of “questioning” their experience and the credibility of their #MeToo accounts. I do believe that a survivor’s/victim’s written down experience or personal account of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or abuse is how the survivor/victim has chosen to tell their story. My analysis is therefore based on these written accounts.

While I am personally under the impression that the hashtag, which has expanded beyond Twitter and the social media sphere by now, has contributed to a consciousness-raising in the public discourse, I nonetheless remain highly critical of #MeToo. I agree with Kindig (2018), that the “awesome fact” that only very few women, and trans and non-binary people, can claim that they have not been victims or are survivors of either attempted or accomplished sexual attacks is not news. Frankly, the extent of sexual violence we see ourselves confronted with in our everyday world should not come as a shock to anyone, given its continual presence. Women, and marginalized women of colour and trans women especially, have always told and written about their experiences of sexual violence (Kindig 2018, p.15).

The #MeToo movement has received criticism, in particular from black, queer and trans communities and from the founder of the Me Too campaign Tarana Burke herself, for failing to centre the voices of black and trans women (Talusman 2018; Adetiba & Burke 2018). While “black and brown girls” as well as “queer folks” (Adetiba & Burke 2018, p.19) have been and still are at the heart of Burke’s Me Too campaign, the #MeToo movement and the textual public
discourse surrounding it have mostly excluded black and trans women as well as non-binary people from the discussion. For example, the TIME has made the “Silence Breakers”, people who spoke out against sexual harassment and assault, their “Person of the Year 2017” (Zacharek, Dockterman & Sweetland Edwards 2017). While the TIME briefly mentions that according to the National Center for Transgender Equality 47 percent of transgender people report being sexually assaulted at some point in their lives, no trans or gender non-conforming person was featured on their profile of the #MeToo Silence Breakers in 2017 (Mamone 2018; Hale 2017; Zacharek, Dockterman & Sweetland Edwards 2017). While conducting my research I, therefore, always kept two important questions in the back of my mind: When survivors/victims of sexual violence speak up, who is being heard? And who is being excluded from the discussion?

In acknowledgement of the Me Too campaign as intended by Tarana Burke and in recognizing that the #MeToo movement has centred the experience of sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse of cisgender women, excluding and even erasing the lived realities of those whose race, gender identity and gender expression leaves them at their most vulnerable (Talusan 2018), I have chosen to centre my thesis around the experiences of black and trans women. Accordingly, the #MeToo accounts I have selected for the purpose of this analysis are the accounts of trans actress Trace Lysette (2017) and U.S. American gymnast and Olympic gold medallist Simone Biles (2018).

Analysis

The Anatomy of a Factual Account

The first part of my analysis deals with how Jeffrey Tambor and Larry Nassar’s behaviour comes to be defined as sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive in Trace Lysette’s and Simone Biles’ #MeToo accounts. These accounts are not just a record of events as they happened, but of events as they were seen as relevant to reaching a decision about the character of those events. This is a common feature of the individual accounts shared using the hashtag #MeToo.

As Smith (2005, p.9) points out, various agencies of social control have institutionalized procedures for assembling, processing, and testing information about the behaviour of individuals so that it can be matched against the paradigms, which provide the working criteria of class-membership whether as sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive. These
procedures, formal and informal, are a regular part of the work done by the police, courts, and other similar agencies (Cicourel 2017). The social organization practice of these agencies involves a procedure by which a set of original and actual events is transformed into the “currency of fact” (Smith 2005b, p.9). However, the accounts shared under the hashtag #MeToo suggest that a great deal of non-formal work has been done by the individual concerned, their family, their friends, their fellow colleagues, before entering an official process by making a public #MeToo statement, sometimes followed or preceded by an investigation or a law suit. Smith (1987, 2005) describes these non-formal processes as a “social organization”, which precedes the production of accounts of the kind I am analysing for the purpose of this thesis.

I follow this approach to be able to include not just the authors of the accounts as participants, but also those who brought about the original events and those who have attempted to reach a decision about what they were. This brings me back to my initial research questions, on which steps and activities intervene between the reader of an account shared using the hashtag #MeToo and the original events, and how the acceptability of the text as a factual account and as an account of someone who is, or was, subjected to sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse is provided for.

**Recognizing Sexual Harassment, Assault and Abuse**

For a behaviour to be defined as deviant, a definite rule must be broken or a norm deviated from. However, the process of showing that something an individual has done can be seen as rule breaking is not by any means simple, as for example demonstrated in the accounts under analysis in this thesis. However, it is also possible to describe deviant behaviour such as sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse, in a way that people will define the described behaviour as such. I therefore aim, within the framework of the #MeToo movement, to identify rules for representing such behaviour as sexually harassing/assaultive/abusive and that those procedures must meet the normative conditions for recognizing individuals as sexual “harassers”, “abuser”, “predators” and/or “offenders” and thereby others as “survivors” or “victims”. Making others recognize that certain events constitute the “fact” that someone is a “harasser”, “abuser”, “predator” and/or “offender” in a #MeToo account involves a complex conceptual work. It involves assembling observations and experiences from actual moments and situations dispersed in time, and organizing them or finding out that they can be organized, so that the reader can recognize a certain model in them to classify the particular account of events as an account of sexual harassment/assault/abuse and therefore part of the #MeToo movement. A #MeToo account that is immediately convincing is one that forces that classification and makes
any other difficult. The aim of analysing the following #MeToo accounts is to recover the structure of a conceptual model that allows the reader to recognize the account as an account of sexual harassment/assault/abuse and therefore a “justified” post under the hashtag #MeToo.

#MeToo: Tweets as Data
As I have already mentioned, the purpose of this analysis is not to investigate what “actually” happened, nor am I intending to question the credibility of the accounts under investigation. What “actually” happened, the actual events are rather a set of resources upon which the authors of the accounts drew in order to create an account of what happened for themselves and the reader. The actual events were of course much richer and less orderly than arranged by the authors in the form of a #MeToo account. This means radical processes of selection have been made by the author, certain things are left out and what is included has been included to provide a coherence for the reader, a coherence that was not present in the events. Additionally, some events are brought into the foreground as elements of the picture, while others become part of the background of the narrative in question.

What follows are the two accounts that I have selected for this analysis as they have been posted on Twitter by Trace Lysette and by Simone Biles, without any editing on my part.

Here is Trace Lysette’s #MeToo account, which she shared 16 November (2017) on her Twitter account.
And Simone Biles’ account of #MeToo, shared on her Twitter account on 15 January (2018).
Most of you know me as a happy, giggly, and energetic girl. But lately...I’ve felt a bit broken and the more I try to shut off the voice in my head the louder it screams. I am not afraid to tell my story anymore.

I too am one of the many survivors that was sexually abused by Larry Nassar. Please believe me when I say it was a lot harder to first speak those words out loud than it is now to put them on paper. There are many reasons that I have been reluctant to share my story, but I know now it is not my fault.

It is not normal to receive any type of treatment from a trusted team physician and refer to it horrifyingly as the “special” treatment. This behavior is completely unacceptable, disgusting, and abusive, especially coming from someone whom I was TOLD to trust.

For too long I’ve asked myself, “Was I too naive? Was it my fault?” I now know the answer to those questions. No. No, it was not my fault. No, I will not and should not carry the guilt that belongs to Larry Nassar, USAG, and others.

It is impossibly difficult to relive these experiences and it breaks my heart even more to think that as I work towards my dream of competing in Tokyo 2020, I will have to continually return to the same training facility where I was abused.

After hearing the brave stories of my friends and other survivors, I know that this horrific experience does not define me. I am much more than this. I am unique, smart, talented, motivated, and passionate. I have promised myself that my story will be much greater than this and I promise all of you that I will never give up. I will compete with all of my heart and soul every time I step into the gym. I love this sport too much and I have never been a quitter. I won’t let one man, and the others that enabled him, to steal my love and joy.

We need to know why this was able to take place for so long and to so many of us. We need to make sure something like this never happens again.

As I continue to work through the pain, I kindly ask everyone to respect my privacy. This is a process, and one that I need more time to work through.

XO, Simone Biles
**Definitions**

For the purpose of this analysis I am introducing a set of terms as outlined below:

(a) *The reader*: Anyone who reads or hears the text of the #MeToo accounts.

(b) *The author*: The person who wrote up the account in the form of a tweet using the hashtag #MeToo, here either Trace Lysette or Simone Biles.

(c) *The deviant*: The person whose deviant behaviour is addressed by the #MeToo account, here either Jeffrey Tambor or Larry Nassar.

(d) *The others*: Other people who previously have been or are affected by the deviant’s behaviour/actions, often referred to as “survivors” in the respective accounts, here Van Barnes or others “treated” by physician Larry Nassar.

(e) *The witnesses*: People who have witnessed the deviant’s behaviour as described in the account by the author.

(f) *The called-on*: People or institutions, who are called on to account for the events reproduced in the accounts other than the deviant. This can also include the reader/the audience of the account.

(g) *The personages*: People who are not introduced by name, but are internal to the account, and are referred to as being in any way active in moving the events along in whichever way, if applicable.

These definitions identify different levels of responsibility for making the account, and draw attention to the contributions of various people. They reveal a “role structure” for describing the social organization of the account (Smith 2005b, p.19). They also reveal who was active in generating the original set of events, and who else, other than the authors, was involved in identifying the deviant’s behaviours as sexually harassing and/or assaultive and/or abusive. The “role structure” also reveals, who is called on to account for the events by the authors.

**Preliminary Instructions**

The hashtag #MeToo introduces the account, that in both cases is added as a JPEG since tweets are limited to a total amount of 280 words. The hashtag not only connects the accounts to the #MeToo movement and other #MeToo accounts, but also serves as a preliminary instruction for the reader on how the account is to be read (Smith 2005b, p.20). This is given that the reader is familiar with Alyssa Milano’s initial post and/or the objectives of the #MeToo movement. Then the reader knows that what follows is to be read as an account of sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse. The reader thus is assumed to know the context of the account from the
#MeToo. The hashtag provides the context from which the reader can connect the described incident to a larger cultural formation, e.g. “patriarchal contexts of threat” (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer 2017, p.103). “My full statement #MeToo” (Lysette 2017) and “Feelings … #MeToo” (Biles 2018) further introduces the account as a personalized text.

That Lysette and Biles have experienced sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse at the hands of the deviant is asserted as a fact at the outset and preserved throughout their accounts.

“Last week, it was reported in the media that Van Barnes, who previously worked as Jeffrey Tambor’s assistant while shooting Transparent, had privately spoken out on her social media about her own experiences of abuse. Sadly, I must add my voice to the chorus. Jeffrey has acted inappropriately with me to.” (Lysette 2017, paragraph 1-2)

“I too am one of the many survivor that was sexually abused by Larry Nassar.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 1-2)

This construction establishes that the deviant’s behaviour is to be treated as sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse type behaviour, something which is a known fact and therefore already there prior to, and independently of its being “realized” by Lysette, Biles or others (Smith 2005b, p.20). Typical for these constructions is also the reference to other “survivors”, who have suffered from the deviant’s behaviour or actions in a similar way. The reader is also provided with preliminary instructions for how to read further descriptions of the deviant’s behaviour. The descriptions are to be read as the behaviour of someone who is a sexual “harasser”, “perpetrator”, “abuser” or “offender”. These instructions are repeated and renewed throughout the account, reminding the reader of how to read what comes next.

“[…] given the journey and circumstances of my life, I was used to being treated as a sexual object by men- this one just happened to be famous.”(Lysette 2017, paragraph 3)

“As trans-women and survivors we have often felt we never had the power or the voice to speak out on our personal and collective pain.” (Lysette 2017, paragraph 5)

“This behavior is completely unacceptable, disgusting, and abusive, especially coming from someone whom I was TOLD to trust.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 3)

“After hearing the brave stories of my friends and other survivors, I know that this horrific experience does not define me.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 6)

The instructions to read the deviant’s behaviour as “wrong”, harassing, assaultive and/or abusive are repeated throughout both accounts as collected above. Both authors, through the hashtag and through their preliminary instructions, connect with other survivors/victims of
sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse, adding to a collective consciousness by sharing their own experiences (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer 2017). In their accounts, both authors discuss how the phrase “me too” becomes a way of releasing the shame they felt and how the phrase “me too” serves to empower them and their respective community.

**Coming Forward: The Construction of the Account as Factual**

As Smith points out, actual events are not facts. There is a procedure of categorizing events, that needs to be followed for actual events to be transformed into facts (Smith 2005b, p.23). This involves that the nature of the events themselves entitle the author to make that categorization and that the categorization itself is ineluctable: “Whether I wish it or not, it is a fact. Whether I will admit it or not, it is a fact.” (Smith 2005b, p.23).

“Sadly, I must add my voice to the chorus. Jeffrey has acted inappropriately with me too.” (Lysette 2017, paragraph 1)

“I am too one of the many survivors that was sexually abused by Larry Nassar. Please believe me when I say it was a lot harder to first speak those words out loud than it is now to put them on paper.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 2)

The “facts” that are established throughout the accounts are negative ones. The authors assert that they “sadly” must add another story of sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse (Lysette 2017). The reader learns about the process of coming forward with such a story and how the authors came to terms with what happened. The authors do not wish to be confronted with the deviants behaviour, but are “forced to face it” (Smith 2005b, p.23). In order to construct a fact and to connect this fact with the experiences of other survivors/victims, the authors display that it has been the same for others, that others have identified the deviant’s behaviour as harassing, assultive and/or abusive as well, and that their recognition of it as a fact is not only based on direct observation, but also constrained by the nature of the events themselves (Smith 2005b, p.23). The hashtag not only connects the authors experience with the experience of other survivors/victims of sexual harassment/assault/abuse in general, but with the survivors/victims of the deviant whose behaviour is addressed in the account specifically. To a certain extent, the hashtag produces a context in which the account can be read as factual.

The reader also learns why the authors at first have been reluctant to come forward with their experiences of sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse and why they have chosen to come forward now.
“Compartmentalizing has always been part of my survival tool kit, long before I came to Hollywood. It’s shitty to admit out loud—and I don’t say it to justify what I went through – but given the journey and circumstances of my life, I was used to being treated as a sexual object by men –this one just happened to be famous.” (Lysette 2017, paragraph 3)

“Don’t let the trans community suffer for the actions of one cis male actor. Transparent has been a guiding light in the industry, by employing more trans people in Hollywood than any other production in history, which made it even more difficult to speak out.” (Lysette 2017, paragraph 5)

“My hope is that Amazon can find the good in this, and use this as an opportunity, a teachable moment to re-center the other trans characters in this show with the family members instead of just pulling it.” (Lysette 2017, paragraph 5)

“I’ve felt a bit broken and the more I try to shut off the voice in my head the louder it screams. I am not afraid to tell my story anymore.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 1)

“There are many reasons that I have been reluctant to share my story, but I know now it is not my fault.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 2)

“For too long I’ve asked myself, ‘Was I too naive? Was it my fault?’ No. No, it was not my fault.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 4)

“After hearing the brave stories of my friends and other survivors, I know that this horrific experience does not define me. I am much more than this. I am unique, smart, talented, motivated, and passionate. I have promised myself that my story will be much greater than this and I promise all of you that I will never give up.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 6)

The reasons why survivors/victims of sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse stay silent are manifold and intersect with social categories such as race, class, religion, gender and so on. The fear of not being believed, the fear of the consequences speaking up or reporting an incident might have- losing the job that provides for you and your family’s livelihood, putting yourself and your loved ones at risk, being deported or publicly questioned, shamed or (partly) blamed for the harassment, assault or abuse are some of them (Beusman 2015; Hines 2014; McLaughlin 2017; McBride 2017). Barriers for speaking up and/or reporting violence can feel even more insurmountable for survivors/victims when the alleged assailant is a public figure and in a position of power (Beusman 2015). When speaking up about sexual harassment, assault and abuse survivors/victims often find themselves treated with suspicion or in some cases even hostility by the public (McLaughlin 2017): Why didn’t they report the incident when it happened? Why are they coming forward now, why didn’t they come forward sooner? When shame, the fear of personal and professional consequences and the fear of the public’s disbelief are overbearing, and in addition the past has proven that those who perpetrate violence tend to
get away with it, especially when in a position of power, this could be a reason to feel discouraged from talking about a traumatic event. The desire to move on and to avoid negative repercussions can certainly be reasonable motivations for keeping quiet. It could also be the reason why the #MeToo accounts under investigation here both feature an explanation for having remained silent in the past, even though the hashtag #MeToo imperatives do not require survivors/victims to give such an explanation.

In her account, Lysette (2017) shares how “being treated as a sexual object by men” has become something she has gotten used to. Lysette here refers to her experience as a trans woman that is being sexualized and reduced to her body. This type of behaviour appears to be normalized in her everyday world. The reader learns that “compartmentalizing” (Lysette 2017) her experiences has become a way of surviving this everyday world. However, there is more to her account than that. The reader learns about possible costs her coming forward might have. Not only is the deviant a person in a position of power due to his significance to the show as the lead character, but coming forward with her story might not only have professional consequences for Lysette herself, but for the trans community as well. Lysette here connects her personal #MeToo experience to the wider public textual discourse surrounding the hashtag #MeToo in the “Hollywood” context. Since the movement started in October 2017, the public has not only witnessed the scandals involving Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, which ultimately resulted in him losing his job, but also several other people, mostly cis white men in positions of power, being let go from their jobs as a result of survivors/victims coming forward and sharing their experiences as part of #MeToo. In some cases, this has resulted in shows being pulled altogether as a consequence of a lead character’s deviant behaviour, resulting in a job loss not only for the deviants, but for survivors/victims and others (Cooney 2017). Barriers for speaking up can therefore feel even more insurmountable to survivors/victims, when coming forward could not only lead to negative consequences for oneself, but for one’s community, especially when belonging to an already vulnerable and under-represented community, as is the case for the trans community.

In Biles’ account the reader can observe a similar pattern, when Biles gives her reasons for having kept quiet about her experience of sexual abuse before. The reader learns that she is “not afraid” to tell her story anymore, indicating that fear had kept her from speaking up sooner. Biles also expresses tendencies of shame and self-blame for the abuse when admitting that she has asked herself whether it was her “fault” or if she had been “too naive” in the past, knowing
now that she is not responsible or to be blamed for Nassar’s abusive behaviour (Biles 2018, paragraphs 1, 2 & 4). She clearly states, that she is not the one to account for Nassar’s wrongdoings. Biles also hints the reader to other reasons for having kept silent. Knowing now that “this horrific experience” does not define her, Biles shares her fear of being defined by her experience of abuse, which she worries could potentially overshadow her professional achievements in the public discourse:

“I will compete with all of my heart and soul every time I step into the gym. I love this sport too much and I have never been a quitter. I won’t let one man, and the others that enabled him, to steal my love and joy.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 6)

Biles’ account gives the reader a strong sense of a “survivor” that wishes to move on, and that wishes to not be defined by her experience of abuse, a “survivor” that will not carry the guilt that belongs to the deviant and the called-on.

Both accounts follow a similar structure that allows the reader to perceive the #MeToo accounts as factual accounts: both authors are being “forced” to face the deviants’ behaviour (Lysette 2017, paragraph 1; Biles 2018, paragraph 1), the authors connect their experience to those of other “survivors”, who also experienced sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse at the hands of the same deviant (Lysette 2017, paragraph 1; Biles 2018, paragraph 2 & 6), and the authors give reason for coming forward now and having kept silent in the past (Lysette 2017, paragraph 3, 4 & 5; Biles 2018, paragraph 2, 4 & 6).

In Lysette’s account we are additionally introduced to a person that has been a witness to one of the described incidents:

“One day on set during season 2 Jeffrey, Alexandra Billings and I were all outfitted in pajamas. […] Upon seeing me in my costume, Jeffrey sexualized me with an over the top comment. Alexandra and I laughed it off because it was so absurd and we thought surely it had to be a bad joke.” (Lysette 2017, paragraph 3)

The introduction of a witness in Lysette’s account, and the order of the narrative inherent in both #MeToo accounts serves to construct the objectivity of a fact, and connect the individual experience to the #MeToo movement and thus to the wider public textual discourse.

**The Authorization of the Version**

According to Smith, there is always more than one version that can be treated as what happened, when it comes to actual events. Smith argues that social events or facts, such as under analysis here, involve a complex assembly of events occurring in different settings and at different times.
Any process of assembly can no longer draw on “the total universe of resources”, all aspects and details that were present to the observer in those moments (Smith 2005b, p.21). The question that remains is, how a given version of a set of events is authorized as a version that can be treated by others as an account of what “actually” happened. Smith draws on Durkheim’s (1960, p.102) rule that the definition of an act as deviant serves to sanction and legitimize a social order. In the context of this thesis, this means that the rules or norms of the authors are the rules and the norms against which the behaviour of the deviant is defined. That we are told that Tambor’s and Nassar’s behaviour is sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive authorizes the version of those who realized or came to admit the fact that the deviants are sexual “harassers” or “abusers”. It authorizes or assigns the definitional privilege to the authors, who themselves are “survivors”. Internal to the account, it also authorizes the versions of other “survivors”, even at points where the authors themselves were not ready yet to come forward with their experiences of sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse. The deviants’ harassing, assaultive and/or abusive behaviour is present as a fact in the accounts (Smith 2005b, p.21). Since Tambor and Nassar are defined as sexual “harassers” and “abusers” at the outset, and other members of the account are not, boundaries are drawn that serve to exclude the deviants from the accounts. As a consequence, Tambor’s and Nassar’s behaviour may not be treated as a source of normative definition, whilst the authors’ and the other “survivors’” behaviour may provide norms (Smith 2005b, p.22). This effect is achieved through a specific way of structuring a statement as outlined in the following sections on contrast structures and other constructions of anomalies.

It shall also be noted here that the accounts do not feature statements given by the deviants on the events and/or their behaviour. In line with the objectives of both the Me Too campaign by Burke and the #MeToo movement, the authors’ focus lies on themselves as “survivors” and other “survivors”. Accordingly, it is no surprise for the reader, who has followed the instructions for how the #MeToo accounts are to be read, that no explanation or statement from the deviants is included. The preliminary instructions, the norms and other information introduced allow the reader to treat the accounts as the “authorized” version of the events.

**Contrast Structures and Other Constructions of Anomalies**

To make the contextual work of the authors explicit that is necessary to demonstrate how the deviant’s behaviour can be identified as sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive by the reader, I am continuing with an analysis of what Smith calls “contrast structures” (Smith 2005b,
p.27) and “other constructions of anomalies” (Smith 2005b, p.33). In a contrast structure the description of how a person’s behaviour is preceded by a statement which supplies the instructions for how to read that particular behaviour as anomalous/deviant (Smith 2005b, p.27). Smith identifies different kinds of contrast structures and constructions of “anomalies”, some of which can be found in the accounts under investigation.

**Contrast structure type one: rule anomalies**

One type of contrast structure that can be identified in both Lysette’s and Biles’ account is the “standard pattern rule anomalies” contrast structure (Smith 2005b, p.30), wherein the first part of the contrast structure gives a “rule”, which is derived from routine features of either the author’s or the deviant’s behaviour. The second part of the structure shows a violation of that “rule”.

(a) Most of you know me as a happy, giggly, and energetic girl. But lately …
(b) I’ve felt a bit broken and the more I try to shut off the voice in my head the louder it screams. (Biles 2018, paragraph 1)

Biles, as a “rule” a “happy, giggly, and energetic girl” engages in a behaviour atypical for her as a consequence of, as we learn from context, not only the deviant’s behaviour towards her, but towards other “survivors”. The reader is instructed on how to read what comes next as having an impact on the author that leads her to break with routine features of her behaviour. Lysette’s account contains a similar contrast structure for the deviant’s behaviour.

(a) Jeffrey has made many sexual advances and comments at me,
(b) but one time it got physical. (Lysette 2017, paragraph 2)

The deviant has apparently engaged in inappropriate behaviour towards the author on a regular basis, which constitutes a “routine” behaviour for Tambor specifically. The second part of the contrast structure displays the point in time where the deviant breaks with the routine features of his behaviour. His actions go from verbal remarks to physical action, crossing another boundary that had not been crossed yet.

**Contrast structure type two: normatively generated anomalies**

Another rather common structure in both accounts is that of “normatively generated anomalies” contrast structures (Smith 2005b, p.31):

(a) It is not normal to receive any type of treatment from a trusted team physician and refer to it horrifyingly as the ‘special’ treatment.
(b) This behaviour is completely unacceptable, disgusting, and abusive,
Part (a) introduces the deviant’s behaviour as anomalous behaviour, especially with regards to his profession and positionality as the author’s physician. Part (b) further emphasizes the behavioural anomaly of the deviant. Part (c) refers to a doctor-patient relationship that by norm is built on trust. This norm is not only known to the author, but also known and propagated by the personages. Part (a) therefore indicates a behavioural norm that is violated by an abuse of trust and power. It is this trust and power that enables the deviant’s behaviour in the first place. The author and the deviant are engaged in a doctor-patient relationship, which by norm is characterized as a relation of trust and the patient’s confidence in the competence and trustworthiness of their physician. In Biles’ account we find the patients’ trust violated by the sexual abuse at the hands of the deviant. The deviant whom she “was TOLD to trust” (Biles 2018) by the personages has taken advantage of her by means of his profession and an abuse of power.

Lysette’s account also features a contrast structure of normatively generated anomalies.

(a) One day on set during season 2 Jeffrey, Alexandra Billings and I were all outfitted in pajamas. I was in a flimsy top and matching short shorts.
(b) Upon seeing me in my costume, Jeffrey sexualized me with an over the top comment.
(c) Alexandra and I laughed it off because it was so absurd and we thought surely it had to be a bad joke. (Lysette 2017, paragraph 3)

Part (a) identifies an occasion and part (b) the deviant’s behaviour. Part (c), by giving the reaction of the author and the witness, provides further instructions on how to read the deviant’s behaviour as anomalous. The behaviour was “so absurd”, given the occasion, that “surely” the deviant’s behaviour “had to be a bad joke” (Lysette 2017). Part (a) demonstrates how the behaviour introduced in part (b) can be read as anomalous and “over the top” (Lysette 2017). The deviant’s behaviour appears as not instructed by the occasion as introduced in part (a).

**Other contrast structures and anomalies**
In Lysette’s account we find another type of contrast structure that resembles some of the aspects of the contrast structures as introduced above, yet something else is involved here.

(a) I felt his penis on my hip through his thin pajamas and I pushed him off me.
(b) Again, I laughed it off and rolled my eyes.
(c) I had a job to do and I had to do it with Jeffrey, the lead of our show.
(Lysette 2017, paragraph 3)
(a) Despite multiple uncomfortable experiences with Jeffrey,
(b) it has been an incredible, career-solidifying honor to bring life to my character Shea
in Amazon’s Transparent.
(c) Working on the award-winning series as a low-income trans woman with active
roots in New York’s ball culture is a rare opportunity most of my sisters are not
given. (Lysette 2017, paragraph 4)

The parts marked (a) introduce the anomalous behaviour of the deviant, the reader has been
instructed to read as sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive. The parts marked (b),
however, introduce the authors reaction to that behaviour, that somewhat appears quite contrary
to the behaviour introduced in part (a). The reaction might not meet the expectations of the
reader, who has followed the instructions on how to read the account as an account of sexual
harassment, assault and/or abuse. The deviant’s behaviour is “laughed off” and despite
“multiple uncomfortable experiences” with the deviant, working on Transparent has been an
“incredible, career-solidifying experience”. The reader finds an explanation in the parts marked
(c). The author refers to a position of power the deviant is holding as “the lead” of the show. A
sort of “having to get along” with the deviant is implied in order for the author to be able to do
her job. The reader gets the sense that “playing along” is a necessary evil for keeping one’s job
as well. The author also addresses issues related to the social category of class and her belonging
to the trans community as a “low-income trans woman”. Not doing her job or losing her job is
ruled out as an option due to her belonging. The reader learns about the reasons behind the
author’s reaction that extend beyond considerations for personal well-being or safety. The
author describes a certain social responsibility that comes with being a trans woman in what is
clearly perceived by her as a privileged position.

While Tambor falls into deviant behaviour in a work environment, Lysette engages in
normative behaviour. She remains “professional” and carries out the job she has been hired to
do, despite the “multiple uncomfortable experiences” (Lysette 2017) she endured at the hands
of her co-worker. Lysette thus provides the norm against which Tambor’s behaviour is to be
recognized as anomalous/deviating.

Besides contrast structures, the accounts include other constructions of anomalies, that do
address the extend of anomalous behaviour perpetrated by the deviant. For example:

“Then later, in between takes, I stood in a corner on the set as the crew reset for a
wide shot. My back was against the wall in a corner as Jeffrey approached me. He
came in close, put his bare feet on top of mine so I could not move, leaned his body
against me, and began quick, discreet thrusts back and forth against my body.”
(Lysette 2017, paragraph 3)
The author not only finds herself literally with her “back against the wall”, “cornered” by the deviant, but she is also standing with her back against the wall in the figurative sense with regards to her positionality as a trans woman employee.

**Linking the Individual Experience to the Collective**

In their accounts the authors have testified to sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual abuse. By adding #MeToo, they have linked their individual experience to the collective. I aim to demonstrate that the authors not only do so to validate their own and the experience of other survivors/victims. I also aim to show how their #MeToo accounts call on the personages and the called-on to share the responsibility for confronting sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive type behaviour.

“No, it was not my fault. No, I will not and should not carry the guilt that belongs to Larry Nassar, USAG, and others.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 4)

“We need to know why this was able to take place for so long and to so many of us. We need to make sure something like this never happens again.” (Biles 2018, paragraph 7)

“I am proud of my work on Transparent and its ‘trans-affirmative action’ mission, as coined by its creator Jill Soloway. And I call on Amazon to make another bold affirmative move to our communities, remove the problem and let the show go on. It’s vital that the show’s creator, showrunner and its studio re-center the narrative of Transparent on the experiences of the other trans characters and family members audiences have grown to love on the series.” (Lysette 2017, paragraph 5)

Both authors make explicit the power relations that were in place with regards to their individual and the experience of other survivors/victims. They uncover how institutions and organization that ought to support and protect them, such as U.S.A. Gymnastics (USAG), Amazon and others, have not only failed to do so, but have enabled (and tolerated) the deviants’ sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive type behaviour. For example, Biles not only holds the deviant himself, but also “U.S.A. Gymnastics, and others” who enabled his behaviour responsible. She links her experience to a collective of other survivors/victims: “We need to know why this was able to take place for so long and to so many of us.” (Biles 2018) The “We” here is the collective of survivors/victims, of which she is part of.

By paying witness to their own and the experiences of others, adding #MeToo not only becomes a way to link the individual experience to the collective. The authors also bear responsibility for confronting sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive type behaviour and the systems that enable such behaviour by verbalizing the issue and by lifting it into the public textual discourse. The individual “witness” is connected to a larger collective of “witnesses” via
Twitter and other social media platforms. Additionally, other forms of media production around #MeToo may contribute to processes of consciousness-raising across different media platforms (Rentschler 2017, p.572-3). I will expand more on this aspect in the section on the social relations of public textual discourse of this thesis.

The way the authors connect their experience to the collective, and the way they call on others to account, also gives an indication about what justice may look like for them. Lysette calls on Amazon “to make another bold affirmative move” to the trans community by removing “the problem” and letting “the show go on” (Lysette 2017). Justice for Lysette (2017) includes a positive contribution to her community by re-centring “the other trans characters” of the show. In Biles account, the reader can identify a tendency to transformative approaches to justice (INCITE! 2014). She does not explicitly call for a carceral approach to justice. Biles’ idea of what justice looks like includes finding out “why this was able to take place” and making sure “something like this never happens again” (Biles 2018). This reads as a call for the transformation of existing structures that have enabled the deviant’s behaviour.

The authors’ calls for justice also include a call for the restoration of safety for survivors/victims, either by removing “the problem” (Lysette 2017) or making sure “something like this never happens again” (Biles 2018). Calling for accountability and defining for oneself what justice looks like can be important steps within the healing process of survivors/victims (INCITE! 2014). It is a way to re-claim one’s agency and to call on the community to re-store and ensure safety for survivors/victims (Clark 2016; INCITE! 2014). As Pham (2018) has emphasized, writing about sexual violence can be a way to start a process of healing. For example, Biles indicates the beginning and/or continuation of her healing process in her #MeToo account:

“As I continue to work through the pain, I kindly ask everyone to respect my privacy. This is a process, and one that I need more time to work through.” (Biles 2018)

Healing in the context of #MeToo does not only entail a process of writing that helps survivors/victims to unpack their experiences of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse (Pham 2018, p.151). Healing in the context of #MeToo also means finding a voice and finding a platform to call for accountability and transformation with the support of the collective.
The Accounts as a Whole

It is, when looking at the accounts as a whole, that the active part the reader plays in finding out how to read the narrative as an account of anomalous/deviant behaviour and as a part of the #MeToo movement, becomes visible (Smith 2005b, p.37). The accounts as a whole and the structure of particular items within them allow the reader to read the respective account as an account of sexual harassment, assault and/or abuse. The culmination of all items present in the accounts, as examined above, has a progressive effect (Smith 2005b, p.38). The reader looks for the next item that can be read as a further contribution to the whole picture. Thus, each item that follows, works retroactively on the previous one. The hashtag itself provides the context from which the reader is able to connect the described event(s) to the specific context of the #MeToo movement.

The analysis of the two #MeToo accounts has dealt with two main aspects. First, with their social organization. The social organizational analysis includes the structure of the accounts, which relates the original events described in the #MeToo accounts to the present of the reader. It also includes the authorization rules, which instruct the reader on what criteria to use in determining the adequacy of the description of one or more incidents in the account (Smith 2005b, p.38). Second, looking at the accounts “as a whole” and the analysis of contrast structures brings out a procedure for constructing an account of behaviour that can be recognized by any member of the relevant cultural community as sexually harassing/assaultive/abusive type behaviour. By analysing the #MeToo accounts within the framework of institutional ethnography, the structure of the conceptual model that allows the reader of the accounts to recognize the experience of the author as an experience of sexual harassment/assault/abuse and as part of the #MeToo movement, can be recovered.

A Textual Analysis of the Social Relations of Public Textual Discourse

Smith argues that among sociologists a tendency to examine textual materials as sources of information about something, rather than as a phenomenon of its own, often prevails. Smith however thinks of texts as “active” in the sense that they organize a “course of concerted social action” (Smith 2005b, p.91). While the text is activated by the reader, the text itself has its own structuring effect. The operation of the text, as I have argued in the previous section, depends on the reader’s interpretative practices. Smith assumes that the text intends methods and schemata of interpretation that can be recovered through analysis. If the reader’s interpretative
practices comply with those intended by the text, a textual analysis can recover how the text “makes sense” (Smith 2005b, p.91). In this second part of my analysis, I am therefore investigating texts as active constituents of the social relations of public textual discourse. This means, that I am examining the active ways in which texts organize relations within the public textual discourse.

In this chapter, I am therefore introducing two responses the above analysed #MeToo accounts have evoked within the public textual discourse surrounding #MeToo. I do so, to exemplify how the first text, the respective #MeToo account, has posed a problem or a challenge on which the respective second text, the response/the article, operates.

The Texts

The two #MeToo accounts and the two articles as introduced below entered the public textual discourse at a particular moment in time. It is the moment, when the hashtag #MeToo movement started to evolve and spread across social media and other media outlets, and more and more people started to come forward with their stories. Both the #MeToo accounts and the two articles therefore make connections to a larger, wider set of relations of the public textual discourse surrounding #MeToo, sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual abuse.

Here then are the two articles selected for this analysis that followed the #MeToo accounts written and published by Trace Lysette and Simone Biles.

QUEER VOICES 11/17/2017 10:56 am ET Updated Nov 17, 2017
Trace Lysette Accuses Jeffrey Tambor Of Sexual Misconduct On ‘Transparent’ Set
Tambor responded that he “can be volatile and ill-tempered,” but he has “never been a predator.”
By Alanna Vagianos

Actress Trace Lysette has accused co-star Jeffrey Tambor of sexual misconduct. Lysette, who plays Shea on Amazon’s “Transparent,” posted a statement on Twitter on Thursday night accusing Tambor of making “many sexual advances and comments” about her while they worked together. She wrote that she was prompted to come forward after Tambor’s former assistant, Van Barnes, accused him of acting inappropriately with her.

“Sadly, I must add my voice to the chorus,” Lysette wrote. “Jeffrey has acted inappropriately with me too.”
Lysette says that out of the many times Tambor allegedly behaved inappropriately, there was only one time it became physical. She wrote that she and Tambor were shooting a “Transparent” scene with co-star Alexandra Billings when Tambor forcibly rubbed his body up against Lysette’s.

Later, in between takes, I stood in a corner on the set as the crew reset for a wide shot. My back was against the wall in a corner as Jeffrey approached me. He came in close, put his bare feet on top of mine so I could not move, leaned his body against me, and began quick, discreet thrusts back and forth against my body. I felt his penis on my hip through his thin pajamas and I pushed him off of me. Again, I laughed it off and rolled my eyes. I had a job to do and I had to do it with Jeffrey, the lead of our show. When they called action, I put that moment in the corner into its own corner of my mind.

“Transparent,” which centers on a trans woman played by Tambor, has won eight Emmys and been hailed as a revolutionary show. It has employed more trans actors than any other production in Hollywood’s history.

Lysette urged Amazon to not let the trans community suffer because of “the actions of one cis male actor.”

“I call on Amazon to make another bold affirmative move to our communities, remove the problem and let the show go on,” she wrote. “It’s vital that the show’s creator, show runner and its studio re-center the narrative of Transparent on the experiences of the other trans characters and the family members audiences have grown to love on the series.”

Read her full account below.

[Lysette’s full #MeToo account is inserted here as introduced in the #MeToo: Tweets as Data section of this thesis]

Tambor responded to Lysette’s accusations in a statement to Deadline on Thursday night, writing that he “can be volatile and ill-tempered,” but is not a predator:

For the past four years, I’ve had the huge privilege — and huge responsibility — of playing Maura Pfefferman, a transgender woman, in a show that I know has had an enormous, positive impact on a community that has been too long dismissed and misunderstood. Now I find myself accused of behavior that any civilized person would condemn unreservedly.

I know I haven’t always been the easiest person to work with. I can be volatile and ill-tempered, and too often I express my opinions harshly and without tact. But I have never been a predator — ever. I am deeply sorry if any action of mine was ever misinterpreted by anyone as being sexually aggressive or if I ever offended or hurt anyone. But the fact is, for all my flaws, I am not a predator and the idea that someone might see me in that way is more distressing than I can express.
Amazon told Deadline that Lysette’s allegations will be added to an ongoing investigation that was opened after Barnes’ accusations came to light.

**Simone Biles Says She, Too, Was Abused by Larry Nassar**

*By Benjamin Hoffman*  
*Jan. 15, 2018*

After having vocally supported her teammates as they publicly detailed the sexual abuse they endured, Simone Biles, one of the most decorated gymnasts in Olympic history, added her own name on Monday to the list of those who have accused Dr. Lawrence G. Nassar of sexual abuse. “I too am one of the many survivors that was sexually abused by Larry Nassar,” Ms. Biles said in a statement posted to Twitter. “Please believe me when I say it was a lot harder to first speak those words out loud than it is now to put them on paper.”

[[Biles’ full #MeToo account is inserted here as introduced in the #MeToo: Tweets as Data section of this thesis]

Dr. Nassar, a former team doctor for both U.S.A. Gymnastics and Michigan State University, where he was a faculty member, has been accused of sexual abuse by more than 130 women. Dr. Nassar, 54, was sentenced to 60 years in prison last month for a conviction related to child pornography, and he is awaiting additional sentencing after having pleaded guilty to one set of molestation charges, which could bring a life sentence. More criminal charges are likely to follow, and a group of accusers has also filed a civil case against him.

Among Dr. Nassar’s more prominent accusers are the Olympic gold medalists Aly Raisman, Gabby Douglas and McKayla Maroney. Ms. Biles, who won four gold medals at the 2016 Rio Olympics, including in the all-around event, is 20 years old and still squarely in her prime as a gymnast. She mentioned in her statement that her dream was to compete at the 2020 Tokyo Games, though she lamented that it would require training in the facilities where she says the abuse occurred.

In a statement provided to The Associated Press, U.S.A. Gymnastics said the organization was “heartbroken, sorry and angry” that Ms. Biles and other athletes had been harmed by Dr. Nassar. “U.S.A. Gymnastics’ support is unwavering for Simone and all athletes who courageously came forward to share their experiences,” the organization’s statement said. “We are our athletes’ advocates. U.S.A. Gymnastics will continue to listen to our athletes and our members in our
efforts of creating a culture of empowerment with a relentless focus on athlete safety every single day.”

Ms. Biles was fiercely protective of her teammates as they revealed their own abuse, and she stood by Ms. Raisman amid a brief controversy where Ms. Douglas seemed to criticize the victims before apologizing and adding her own name to the list. Ms. Biles’s statement explained what caused her to wait until months later to reveal her own allegations.

“For too long I’ve asked myself ‘Was I too naïve? Was it my fault?’” she said in the statement. “I now know the answer to those questions. No. No, it was not my fault. No, I will not and should not carry the guilt that belongs to Larry Nassar, U.S.A.G. and others.”

Ms. Raisman was quick to praise Ms. Biles’s statement in a Twitter post of her own.

It was an Indianapolis Star investigation in 2016 that publicly revealed the allegations against Dr. Nassar that had led to his firing by U.S.A. Gymnastics in 2015. In September of that year, a Star report detailed the experiences of a pair of gymnasts who said that they had been sexually abused. Rachael Denhollander was named in the initial report, and Jamie Dantzscher later revealed herself as the second gymnast.

Since those initial allegations, the case against Dr. Nassar has exploded. It now includes gymnasts at all levels, with at least eight having been members of the United States national team, five of whom have competed in the Olympics.

As the legal case against Dr. Nassar has expanded, there has been a great deal of criticism of U.S.A. Gymnastics as well, with several of the victims accusing the organization of either negligence or complicity in the abuse. In a lawsuit against U.S.A. Gymnastics, Ms. Maroney claimed the organization had paid her to sign a nondisclosure agreement that prevented her from speaking out about the abuse; the organization responded by saying she and her lawyer had initiated the process rather than the other way around. In March 2017, Steve Penny resigned as president of U.S.A. Gymnastics.
The decades-worth of allegations against Dr. Nassar will likely take some time to sort out, but Ms. Biles’s statement included a call for the investigation to continue until some sort of resolution can be found for the victims.

“We need to know why this was able to take place for so long and to so many of us,” she said. “We need to make sure something like this never happens again.”

The Directly Versus the Organizationally Known

Both the #MeToo accounts and the two articles lift particular experiences of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse into the public textual discourse (Smith 2005b, p.101). Once again, I would like to emphasize, that I am addressing these experiences as worked up in the respective accounts. The analysis of the texts I am concerned with here is not an attempt to trace back what “actually” happened, nor am I implying that the experiences shared by the authors in the selected #MeToo accounts aren’t valid.

The version present in a #MeToo account is the version of a survivor/victim and at the same time that of a witness to the events. Everything that is presented in the #MeToo accounts is presented as what the author, here the survivor/victim, experienced and witnessed. The author becomes a “witness” of the events through the presence of the reader. In the original events, the author is a “participant” (Smith 2005b, p.102). The author of the respective #MeToo account is thus a survivor/victim and a witness of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse through their participation in the hashtag #MeToo movement.

The two articles that followed the #MeToo accounts of Lysette and Biles have been assembled differently. The knowledge reproduced in the articles does not arise from an observation, as the articles’ authors were not present at the events. Their knowledge about the nature of the events stems from Lysette’s and Biles’ #MeToo accounts, and probably from several other sources such as public statements from the deviants, U.S.A. Gymnastics, Amazon, and other media publications. The two articles appear to the reader as reports without a reporter, which gives the reader the effect of objectivity (Smith 2005b, p.103). Even though quoted in the articles, Lysette and Biles are no longer the ones telling their story. The survivor/victim, who is a direct witness to the events, has been removed from the position of the storyteller they originally inhabited in their #MeToo account.

The knowledge embodied in the articles has an organizational character (Smith 2005b, p.103). For example, the articles identify Lysette, Biles and other survivors/victims as “accusers” and
the deviants as the “accused”. Both terms and their application are essentially organizational functions. Identifying an individual as a member of either of these categories is an essentially organizational accomplishment (Smith 2005b, p.103). What the reader sees here is a “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach that is organizational in its character. The deviants remain “the accused” until they “plead guilty”, or official and/or internal investigations have been concluded and a decision about the nature of the events has been reached by the respective authorities. The organizational language of the articles situates the events in what Smith calls a “mandated course of action” (Smith 2005b, p.104). The organizational language is of significance for the way the versions present in the articles operate on the versions present in the #MeToo accounts.

**The Mandated Course of Action**

The articles repeat the version of the survivor/victim by including their #MeToo accounts and by highlighting certain aspects of the survivor’s/victim’s version of the events. The articles, with some variations, follow a narrative formula (Smith 2005b, p.104): the story of the survivor/victim is reproduced as an “accusation” against the deviant; if applicable, existing responses to the “accusations” (e.g. by the “accused”/deviant and/or a respective institution that is called on to account for the events by the survivor/victim) are included; information and status updates on ongoing investigations into the deviant’s behaviour/”wrongdoings” are given; and, if applicable, possible consequences or already existing consequences for the deviant are being indicated.

In the same manner as cases of sexual violence are processed by criminal justice systems, the articles follow a what Smith calls “mandated course of action” (Smith 2005b, p.104). It is the “mandated course of action”, that requires the “accuser’s” testimony (here the #MeToo account of the survivor/victim), and if applicable the consideration of testimonies from other witnesses/”accusers” (here statements/stories of other survivors/victims), previous convictions of the deviant or previous “accusations” against the deviant, a statement by the deviant and/or the institution that provides the organizational context (here Amazon, U.S.A. Gymnastics).

Within this “mandated course of action”, the actions of individuals are appropriated as acts of the organization, or of individuals as representatives of the organization, rather than individuals acting for themselves (Smith 2005b, p.104). Through this “mandated course of action” the articles follow a “not guilty on proven otherwise” approach that dominates the way criminal justice systems process cases of sexual violence. This approach is of organizational character.
The survivor’s/victim’s written account of sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual abuse is turned into an “accusation” that needs “proving” through means of an investigation and assembling of evidence.

The #MeToo accounts mirror the “mandated course of action”, the “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach. The authors “testify” to their experience in the form of a #MeToo account. They also connect their experience to the stories of other survivors/victims, who experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse at the hands of the same deviant, and thus include previous “wrongdoings” of the deviant. They also address the deviant and the called-on to bear responsibility for what happened. That the authors are influenced by the “mandated course of action” becomes particularly visible in what I have outlined in the The Authorization of the Version section of this thesis. That the deviant is a “harasser”, “abuser”, “predator” and/or “offender” must be and is established as a fact by the authors. An investigation into the events is required or requested by the survivor/victim to determine the extent of consequences for the deviant, to prevent the deviant from doing further harm and to expose those who have enabled the deviant’s behaviour. It is however not required to determine whether the deviant is “guilty” or not, as this has already been established by the authors, the survivors/victims.

The articles however are implying that there is a more complete version to be told, before a definite decision on the nature of the events and the deviant’s behaviour can be reached. This can for example include giving others, who have not been vocal in the #MeToo account, a voice. Also, following the “mandated course of action” the authors can provide the reader with additional sources of information, for example by bringing in other actors, who have not been present or are not explicitly named in the #MeToo accounts.

“Among Dr. Nassar’s more prominent accusers are the Olympic gold medalists Aly Raisman, Gabby Douglas and McKayla Maroney.” (Hoffman 2018)

“Ms. Biles was fiercely protective of her teammates as they revealed their own abuse, and she stood by Ms. Raisman amid a brief controversy where Ms. Douglas seemed to criticize the victims before apologizing and adding her own name to the list.” (Hoffman 2018)

“Ms. Raisman was quick to praise Ms. Biles’s statement in a Twitter post of her own.” (Hoffman 2018)
“It was an Indianapolis Star investigation in 2016 that publicly revealed the allegations against Dr. Nassar that had led to his firing by U.S.A. Gymnastics in 2015. In September of that year, a Star report detailed the experiences of a pair of gymnasts who said that they had been sexually abused. Rachael Denhollander was named in the initial report, and Jamie Dantzsch er later revealed herself as the second gymnast.” (Hoffman 2018)

“In a lawsuit against U.S.A. Gymnastics, Ms. Maroney claimed the organization had paid her to sign a nondisclosure agreement that prevented her from speaking out about the abuse; the organization responded by saying she and her lawyer had initiated the process rather than the other way around. In March 2017, Steve Penny resigned as president of U.S.A. Gymnastics.” (Hoffman 2018)

In line with the “mandated course of action” Hoffman here has extended the set of actors present in the #MeToo account of Biles, by naming other “prominent accusers” and by reproducing previous accusations levelled against the deviant by other survivors/victims. Hoffman in addition gives voice to Alexandra Raisman, who voices her support for Biles, and thus includes an example of how the individual connects with the collective in the context of #MeToo.

The Power of the Institutional in Public Textual Discourse

The articles are not just picking up the events reproduced in the #MeToo accounts, lifting them into the wider public textual discourse. They are a process of conversion of one kind of account into another. They are producing a special relation between the two such that the institutional account, the account that follows the “mandated course of action” of a “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach, embeds and subsumes the observational mode of the #MeToo account (Smith 2005b, p.114). This process depends on the use of a distinctive terminology. It is one that appears to be descriptive, but at a higher level of abstraction than the detailed personal accounts of the #MeToo authors (Smith 2005b, p.115). It is the use of organizational language (e.g. “accuser” vs. the “accused”/ “allegedly”/ “allegations”) that organizes the events into the
organized/institutional form of processing cases of sexual violence as determined by the criminal justice system of a society.

“Actress Trace Lysette has accused co-star Jeffrey Tambor of sexual misconduct.” (Vagianos 2017)

“Lysette, who plays Shea on Amazon’s “Transparent,” posted a statement on Twitter on Thursday night accusing Tambor of making “many sexual advances and comments” about her while they worked together. She wrote that she was prompted to come forward after Tambor’s former assistant, Van Barnes, accused him of acting inappropriately with her.” (Vagianos 2017)

“Lysette says that out of the many times Tambor allegedly behaved inappropriately, there was only one time it became physical.” (Vagianos 2017)

“Amazon told Deadline that Lysette’s allegations will be added to an ongoing investigation that was opened after Barnes’ accusations came to light.” (Vagianos 2017)

“After having vocally supported her teammates as they publicly detailed the sexual abuse they endured, Simone Biles, one of the most decorated gymnasts in Olympic history, added her own name on Monday to the list of those who have accused Dr. Lawrence G. Nassar of sexual abuse.” (Hoffman 2018)

“Dr. Nassar, a former team doctor for both U.S.A. Gymnastics and Michigan State University, where he was a faculty member, has been accused of sexual abuse by more than 130 women.” (Hoffman 2018)

“More criminal charges are likely to follow, and a group of accusers has also filed a civil case against him [Nassar].” (Hoffman 2018)

“Among Dr. Nassar’s more prominent accusers are the Olympic gold medalists Aly Raisman, Gabby Douglas and McKayla Maroney.” (Hoffman 2018)

“As the legal case against Dr. Nassar has expanded, there has been a great deal of criticism of U.S.A. Gymnastics as well, with several of the victims accusing the organization of either negligence or complicity in the abuse.” (Hoffman 2018)

The personally observed/experienced is converted into forms in which it can be appropriated by, and incorporated into the institutional process. The organizational language converts the experience of the individual into a “mandated” form (Smith 2005b, p.117). The survivor/victim, who once was the teller of their own story, becomes the “accuser”. The deviant, whose behaviour was described by the survivor/victim, becomes the “accused” until proven guilty by means of institutional processes.

Another example for the use of organizational language is the use of the term “sexual misconduct” (Vagianos 2017). “Sexual advances and comments” that “got physical” (Lysette
“Sexual misconduct” is a legal term to describe “any physical act of a sexual nature perpetrated against an individual without consent or when an individual is unable to freely give consent. It encompasses a range of behaviours, from inappropriate touching to rape. It also includes sexual exploitation” (Sperry 2007, p.238). As outlined in the previous research section, it has been argued that the use of the term “sexual misconduct” in mainstream media is often too vague and does not grasp that sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual abuse are enabled by a system, for example a workplace’s culture of disregard (Grant 2018). “Sexual misconduct” thus functions as an umbrella term for deviant behaviour, a term that appears descriptive on a higher level of abstraction than those used in the #MeToo accounts.

The use of organizational language becomes even more evident in Hoffman’s article. While Biles’ account remains an “accusation” in Hoffman’s article, other “accusations” levelled against the deviant Nassar have already been investigated by means of an institutional process (e.g. through criminal investigations). The criminal justice system has reached a decision on the nature of the events and in some cases on the extent of consequences for the deviant.

“Dr. Nassar, 54, was sentenced to 60 years in prison last month for a conviction related to child pornography, and he is awaiting additional sentencing after having pleaded guilty to one set of molestation charges, which could bring a life sentence.” (Hoffman 2018)

“As the legal case against Dr. Nassar has expanded, there has been a great deal of criticism of U.S.A. Gymnastics as well, with several of the victims accusing the organization of either negligence or complicity in the abuse.” (Hoffman 2018)

Where the deviant has been found “guilty” by the criminal justice system, the reader can observe a swift in organizational language. The deviant has already been sentenced, thus found guilty on child pornography charges and “has pleaded guilty” in “one set of molestation charges” (Hoffman 2018). In the context of the legal case against the deviant, the survivors/victims thus turn from “accusers” to “victims” of Nassar, who are accusing U.S.A. Gymnastics of “either negligence or complicity in the abuse” (Hoffman 2018). In relation to the deviant, they are no longer “accusers”, they are, by institutional/organizational definition, “victims”.

**Reading and Reproducing #MeToo Accounts**

The “mandated course of action” and the circumstance that the two articles appear to the reader as reports without a reporter, give an effect of objectivity (Smith 2005b, p.103). While the
authors of the articles follow a “mandated course of action”, attention to their choices of terminology may however indicate that the authors have made specific choices on how to reproduce the #MeToo accounts. Their choice of terminology may provide insights on how the authors have picked up the instructions on how to read the respective #MeToo account, and how they have thus read and interpreted the accounts accordingly, in the context of #MeToo. Here are some examples:

“She wrote that she and Tambor were shooting a “Transparent” scene with co-star Alexandra Billings when Tambor forcibly rubbed his body up against Lysette’s.” (Vagianos 2017)

“Lysette urged Amazon to not let the trans community suffer because of ‘the actions of one cis male actor.’” (Vagianos 2017)

“She mentioned in her statement that her dream was to compete at the 2020 Tokyo Games, though she lamented that it would require training in the facilities where she says the abuse occurred.” (Hoffman 2018)

“The decades-worth of allegations against Dr. Nassar will likely take some time to sort out, but Ms. Biles’s statement included a call for the investigation to continue until some sort of resolution can be found for the victims.” (Hoffman 2018)

Vagianos and Hoffman here convert one account, the #MeToo account, into another. Vagianos (2017) adds “forcibly”, when converting Lysette’s experience as reproduced in her #MeToo account. Lysette herself however does not use this term. This implies that Vagianos, as a reader of the #MeToo account, has followed the instructions for reading the account as an account of sexually harassing, assaultive and/or abusive type behaviour, a behaviour that is in its nature of “forcibly” character. Further Vagianos (2017) has translated Lysette’s (2017) “hope” that “Amazon can find the good in this” and “not let the trans community suffer for the actions of one cis male actor” into Lysette “urging” Amazon. This indicates that Vagianos is aware of the context the hashtag provides. In this context, individuals and institutions are called on to bear responsibility for having provided an environment that has enabled such behaviour by survivors/victims. They are complicit to the events.

Hoffman converts Biles’ “heartbreak” over having to continually return to the same training facility, where she was abused during her preparations for the Tokyo 2020 Games, into her “lamenting” over this reality. Hoffman converts a “heartbreak” that is in itself something very personal, into a “lament” that appears slightly more abstract in its description of Biles’ feelings. Hoffman too, in his conversion of Biles’ #MeToo account, gives an indication for how he has read the #MeToo account and has followed the instructions for the reader. Hoffman reads the
“We” in Biles’ account (2018) as a “We” that consists of “victims”. In her account, Biles however does not explicitly equal “We” with the term “victim”, in fact, Biles herself does not use the term “victim” in her account at all. She also does not explicitly call for an investigation or a resolution. However, Hoffman, as a reader of the #MeToo account, who is familiar with the context and imperatives of #MeToo and the wider public textual discourse surrounding the movement, has read it this way.

**Statements on #MeToo Accounts**

The #MeToo accounts have posed a “problem” on which the articles operate. In line with the “mandated course of action” they imply, by providing statements by others that there is a more “complete” version to be told. In Lysette’s case this entails a statement made by the deviant, following the “accusations”:

“For the past four years, I’ve had the huge privilege — and huge responsibility — of playing Maura Pfefferman, a transgender woman, in a show that I know has had an enormous, positive impact on a community that has been too long dismissed and misunderstood. Now I find myself accused of behavior that any civilized person would condemn unreservedly. I know I haven’t always been the easiest person to work with. I can be volatile and ill-tempered, and too often I express my opinions harshly and without tact. But I have never been a predator — ever. I am deeply sorry if any action of mine was ever misinterpreted by anyone as being sexually aggressive or if I ever offended or hurt anyone. But the fact is, for all my flaws, I am not a predator and the idea that someone might see me in that way is more distressing than I can express.”(Tambor in Vagianos 2017)

In accordance with the “mandated course of action” (Smith 2005b, p.104), Vagianos gives the deviant a voice and an opportunity to respond to the “accusations” by including his statement in the article. The statement is introduced as Tambor’s response to Lysette’s “accusations” (Vagianos 2017), but does not contain the deviant’s version of the events. Tambor’s statement rather reads as a denial. This effect is achieved through the removal of other actors, in particular the “accusers” Lysette and Van Barnes, from the statement. Tambor does not directly respond to the “accusations” by providing an alternative version of the events.

Like in the #MeToo accounts, contrast structures can be identified in Tambor’s statement. For example the “standard pattern rule anomalies” contrast structure as defined by Smith (2005b, p.30), wherein the first part of the contrast structure gives a “rule” which is derived from routine features of the deviant’s behaviour. The second part of the structure shows a violation of that “rule”.

(a) For the past four years, I’ve had the huge privilege — and huge responsibility — of playing Maura Pfefferman, a transgender woman, in a show that I know
has had an enormous, positive impact on a community that has been too long dismissed and misunderstood.

(b) Now I find myself accused of behavior that any civilized person would condemn unreservedly. (Tambor in Vagianos 2017)

Or other contrast structures, such as the ones shown below.

(a) I can be volatile and ill-tempered, and too often I express my opinions harshly and without tact.

(b) But I have never been a predator — ever. (Tambor in Vagianos 2017)

(a) But the fact is, for all my flaws,

(b) I am not a predator and the idea that someone might see me in that way is more distressing than I can express. (Tambor in Vagianos 2017)

The contrast structures make explicit the contextual work of Tambor, in his attempt to demonstrate how his behaviour might be interpreted as “volatile and ill-tempered”, but not as “predatory” (Vagianos 2017). Here Tambor re-assigns the definitional privilege to himself. Since he does not identify his behaviour as “predatory”, it is not. He does not provide an alternative version of the events in his statement.

Through the contrast structures Tambor seems to emphasise that he who has played a trans woman “in a show that has had an enormous, positive impact” (Tambor in Vagianos 2017) on the trans community, cannot have possibly done what he is being “accused” of. Between the lines, this reads as a “I am supporting the trans community by playing a trans woman, thus I cannot be transphobic or a predator” argument.

Still, Tambor’s statement does reveal how, to some extent, he has picked up the instructions for how to read Lysette’s #MeToo account as an account of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse:

“[…] I have never been a predator—ever. I am deeply sorry if any action of mine was ever misinterpreted by anyone as being sexually aggressive […] I am not a predator […]” (Tambor in Vagianos 2017)

Tambor converts Lysette’s account into another, his statement. He has never been a “predator” or “sexually aggressive” — Lysette however uses neither of these terms to describe Tambor and his behaviour.

In his article, Hoffman does not provide a statement from Nassar, who at the time of the article’s publication is already awaiting sentencing for a set of criminal charges. He does however quote an official statement made by U.S.A. Gymnastics, the organization Biles calls on to account.
“In a statement provided to The Associated Press, U.S.A. Gymnastics said the organization was ‘heartbroken, sorry and angry’ that Ms. Biles and other athletes had been harmed by Dr. Nassar. ‘U.S.A. Gymnastics’ support is unwavering for Simone and all athletes who courageously came forward to share their experiences,’ the organization’s statement said. ‘We are our athletes’ advocates. U.S.A. Gymnastics will continue to listen to our athletes and our members in our efforts of creating a culture of empowerment with a relentless focus on athlete safety every single day.’” (Hoffman 2018)

As I have previously outlined, within the “mandated course of action” the actions of individuals are often appropriated as acts of the organization, or of individuals as representatives of the organization, rather than individuals acting for themselves (Smith 2005b, p.104). Here we have a statement of an organization — the individuals behind this statement act as representatives of the organization. Interestingly enough, the language of the statement does not appear organizational or on a higher level of abstraction than the language of Biles’ account. On the contrary, the organization picks up a similar terminology when responding to the #MeToo account. For example, the organization, like Biles, is “heartbroken”, a quality that is usually attributed to individuals and not organizations. They also pick up Biles’ use of “We” when stating:

“We are our athletes’ advocates.” (U.S.A. Gymnastics in Hoffman 2018)

This gives the reader the effect that an organization, here U.S.A. Gymnastics, acts and feels in ways individuals do. It appears as if the organization is including itself in Biles’ “We” that is the collective of survivors/victims.

Conclusions

Summary of Findings
The two main aims of this thesis were to critically examine how survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse tell their stories and reproduce their experiences in #MeToo accounts, and how these accounts interact with those who read them in return. The first part of my analysis provides answers to the question of how a person’s behaviour comes to be defined as sexually harassing, sexually assaultive and/or sexually abusive type behaviour in #MeToo accounts. It also provides insights as to how the acceptability of a #MeToo account as a factual account is provided for.

The hashtag #MeToo functions as a preliminary instruction that provides the context from which the reader is able to place the experiences reproduced in the account within the context
of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse. The rules and norms of the author of a #MeToo account are the rules and norms against which the behaviour of the deviant is defined. The definitional privilege is assigned to the author, the survivor/victim, which allows the reader to recognize the #MeToo account as the “authorized version” of the events. In addition, “contrast structures” provide a description of the respective deviant’s behaviour that is preceded by a statement that supplies the instruction for how to read that particular behaviour as anomalous or deviant. It is the collection of all of these items and the structure of particular items within the accounts that allows the reader to read them as accounts of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse. By looking at the accounts as a whole, the active part of the reader becomes visible.

The second part of my analysis offers insights on how texts actively organize relations within the public textual discourse surrounding #MeToo. The two articles I have selected for the purpose of this analysis followed the #MeToo accounts of Lysette and Biles. In these articles, Lysette and Biles are no longer the ones telling their story—they have been removed from the position of storyteller, they once inhabited in their #MeToo accounts. The articles appear to the reader as reports without a reporter, which gives an effect of objectivity. The knowledge embodied in the articles is of organizational character. The deviants remain the “accused”, while Lysette, Biles and other survivors/victims are identified as “accusers”. The organizational language inherent in the articles situates the events in what Smith calls a “mandated course of action” (Smith 2005b, p.104). It is through the “mandated course of action” that the articles follow a “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach that we find in criminal justice systems and that is of organizational character. The articles imply that there is a more complete version of the events to be told, before a decision on the nature of the events and the deviants’ (e.g. the “accused”) behaviour can be reached. It is the “mandated course of action” that requires the “accusers’” testimonies (here the #MeToo accounts of the survivors/victims), and if applicable the consideration of testimonies from other witnesses/“accusers” (here statements/stories of other survivors/victims), previous convictions of the deviants or previous “accusations” against the deviants, a statement by the deviant’ and/or the institutions that provide the organizational context (here Amazon, U.S.A. Gymnastics). The fact that the deviants are “guilty”, needs “proving” by means of the “mandated course of action”.

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The articles reveal a process of conversion of one kind of account into another. The institutional account, the article that follows the “mandated course of action” of a “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach, embeds and subsumes the observational mode of the #MeToo accounts. This process depends on the use of distinctive terminology that appears to be descriptive on a higher level of abstraction than the detailed personal accounts of the #MeToo authors. The personally observed/experienced is converted into forms in which it can be appropriated by, and incorporated into, the institutional process that is the institutional form of processing cases of sexual violence as determined by the ruling apparatus of the respective society.

While following the “mandated course of action”, the articles’ authors choices of terminology when reproducing the #MeToo accounts provide insights on how they have picked up the instructions on how to read the #MeToo accounts. They have read and interpreted the accounts accordingly, in the context of the #MeToo movement.

**Final Conclusions**

This thesis demonstrates that institutional processes of processing cases of sexual violence within a respective criminal justice system influence the ways in which survivors/victims tell their stories in the context of #MeToo movement. The analysis reveals the ways in which we are, consciously and subconsciously, influenced by institutional processes that are part of our everyday lives. The “mandated course of action” therefore does not only influence the way in which media outlets reproduce and report on events connected to #MeToo, but also how survivors/victims reproduce their experiences within the framework of the movement.

While #MeToo does not require survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse to reproduce their experiences in line with a specific procedure, the analysis of the accounts shows that both authors nonetheless did follow a similar procedure when writing down their experiences. Both accounts follow a procedure that instructs the reader on how to read the accounts as accounts of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse. And it is in the articles on the accounts that we find proof for how these instructions get picked up by those who read them. It is this procedure that is inseparably connected to institutional processes of investigating and processing cases of sexual violence within a criminal justice system. In the context of this thesis, the criminal justice system is primarily based on a retributive model of justice, a model that depends on a “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach and punishment. To some extent, survivors/victims act upon this “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach that prevails in their cultural community and the criminal justice system. Survivors/victims
“have to” establish the fact that the deviant is “guilty” from the outset and throughout their accounts. That the deviant’s behaviour is sexually harassing, sexually assaultive and/or sexually abusive needs to be established as a fact. I find this to be an expression of the challenges and barriers survivors/victims see themselves confronted with, not only when attempting to make themselves heard and believed, but also when seeking justice. The latter is especially true when seeking justice through the criminal justice system, that depends on a “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach, in opposition to transformative justice approaches that prioritize the safety and long-term healing of survivors/victims. While a survivor/victim may not want to seek justice through the criminal justice system (e.g. a retributive model of justice) or may define justice different than the respective criminal justice system, the prevailing model of justice of the survivor’s/victim’s cultural community nonetheless affects the way they tell their story.

The discourse surrounding #MeToo has created an image of the hashtag as a powerful, personalized storytelling device, and supported the idea that anyone’s personal story can contribute to change (Clark 2016; Pazzanese & Walsh 2017). However, as this thesis has demonstrated, personal stories are embedded in institutional contexts, and institutional processes influence the way survivors/victims share their experiences within the framework of #MeToo. I would like to emphasize that it is important to be mindful of the ways in which institutional processes affect the ways in which survivors/victims reproduce their experiences. #MeToo accounts are not “only” a way to share and express personal experiences of sexual violence, but also an expression of how a respective cultural community deals with cases of sexual violence, and which models and ideas of justice and accountability dominate the public discourse. In the context of this thesis, the analysis demonstrates how the influence of a criminal justice system that relies on a “not guilty until proven otherwise” approach and punishment, significantly influences the way survivors/victims reproduce their experiences of sexual violence.

As the previous research section of this thesis has demonstrated, there is a tendency among researchers and activists to view the feminist hashtag as a personalized tool for storytelling with an ability to disrupt and challenge the dominant discourse on sexual violence (Clark 2016). And while #MeToo first-person narratives may allow survivors/victims to re-claim agency over the production of their own stories (Clark 2016), I believe it is important to remind ourselves of the institutional contexts that shape the way we as survivors/victims tell our stories. The way cases
of sexual violence are processed within our respective criminal justice system shapes the way we tell our stories. The ideas of justice that dominate our cultural community shape the way we share our experiences. I believe, that when we participate in a movement like #MeToo, we need to be critical of the influence the institutional has on us. To be critical and to be mindful of the institutional processes that affect us, in the context of #MeToo, means to disrupt the oppression and the violence that the criminal justice system and retributive models of justice perpetrate. It is then that we can open up to more transformative, sustainable approaches to justice and survivor/victim support, and challenge the prevailing ones. It means shifting from having to “proof” that we are survivors/victims of sexual violence, to being able to prioritize our own and others’ safety and long-term healing.

Working on this thesis has made me aware of the amount of contextual work that is required from survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse to define and grasp what they have experienced as sexual violence. Considering my own positionality as a survivor of sexual violence, I recall how long it took me to realize that what I was experiencing was a form of sexual violence. I remember how difficult it was for me to phrase my experience in ways that would allow me to eventually seek safety from the violence I was experiencing. Writing this thesis has made me aware that what connects me with other survivors/victims and those who have shared their experiences within the framework of #MeToo is not only the experience of sexual violence per se, but also being confronted with having to come to terms with ones’ experiences to be able to articulate them for others— a process that marks the beginning of a survivor’s/victim’s individual healing process and way of seeking support, justice and safety. So in that sense, yes, #MeToo.

**Further Research**

Writing my thesis has been an eye-opening experience that has challenged the way I perceive feminist hashtags like #MeToo. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I had decided to narrow down my empirical material. This has allowed a more in-depth analysis that I believe has contributed to a better understanding of how survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse tell their stories within the framework of #MeToo.

Thinking with intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), further research within the framework of institutional ethnography (Smith 2005b) could benefit from an extension of empirical material. For example, further research could include an analysis of #MeToo accounts by “non-famous” people, white cis women and/or white cis men, to allow for a comparative study of how
intersections of class, race, gender, dis/ability and so on, influence the way in which #MeToo accounts are constructed and how they may or may not produce similarities and/or differences in the procedure of constructing a #MeToo account. As the #MeToo movement has evolved on a transnational level, this could also include an extension of the analysis beyond the context of Western societies and different criminal justice systems.

Thinking with transformative justice (Generation FIVE 2007; Pérez 2017), further research could extend to a point where the researcher follows up on the selected accounts to trace their impact on the reader, the authors, the deviants, the others, the witnesses, the called-on, the personages. Was safety provided and restored for survivors/victims and if so, how? How did the author of the #MeToo account address issues surrounding their safety? What does justice look like for the survivor/victim and how did they address justice in their #MeToo account? Was a process created during which the deviants could account for their actions and possibly transform their behaviour? Has a form of justice been achieved, and if so, how and what kind of justice? Following the #MeToo account, have strategies been developed to resist future sexual harassment, assault and abuse in the context specific to the account?

This thesis focused on the voices of survivors/victims and their written accounts. However, I think it is crucial to increase the focus on those who perpetrate violence. I believe that it is important to start moving away from the notion that it is the survivors’/victims’ responsibility to initiate change and raise awareness, and to focus on, as Lysette has so accurately put it in her #MeToo account, “the problem”. Further research could benefit from an analysis of statements made by deviants, the “predators”, “harassers”, “abusers” and “offenders”, to gain a deeper understanding of how procedures of constructing these statements are connected to institutional processes of processing cases of sexual violence within a respective criminal legal justice systems and how this affects the way deviants respond to “accusations”.
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On 15 October 2017 actress Alyssa Milano posted the following on her Twitter account: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet”. After Milano’s tweet, the hashtag #MeToo is said to have gone viral overnight. Suddenly, the stories of survivors and victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse seemed to be everywhere—although, it may be argued, that they have always been the lived reality for many of us. Activists and those who research feminist hashtags like #MeToo tend to view the hashtag as a personalized tool for storytelling that enables survivors and victims to re-claim agency over the production of their own stories. This thesis deals with how survivors/victims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and/or sexual abuse tell their stories and reproduce their experiences in the context of #MeToo movement. Through an analysis within the framework of institutional ethnography, the process of constructing a #MeToo account will be recovered. The analysis focuses on investigating what informs and shapes the way in which survivors/victims tell their story and how their #MeToo accounts interact with the reader. It will be argued that institutional processes of handling cases of sexual violence significantly influence the way survivors and victims share their experiences in the context of the movement. It will be suggested that being critical and mindful of the institutional processes that affect the way survivors and victims share their experiences, means to disrupt the oppression and the violence that criminal justice systems and retributive models of justice perpetrate. As it is then that we can open up to more transformative, sustainable approaches to justice and survivor/victim support. The project contributes to the current body of feminist hashtag activism scholarship with an institutional ethnography perspective.