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**ANALYSIS OF SEXUALLY ASSAULTED WOMEN'S TESTIMONIES  
GATHERED FROM #METOO WEBSITES**

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Orientador: Prof. Dr. Débora de Carvalho Figueiredo

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**Analysis of sexually assaulted women's testimonies gathered from #metoo websites**

O presente trabalho em nível de mestrado foi avaliado e aprovado por banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

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Certificamos que esta é a **versão original e final** do trabalho de conclusão que foi julgado adequado para obtenção do título Mestre em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários, na área de concentração Estudos da Linguagem.

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Florianópolis, 03 de março de 2023.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the people who have been by my side when I needed the most, without whom I wouldn't be strong enough for the production of this paper.

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Deciding on a specific topic to write my dissertation about was at the same time natural and demanding. When I entered the world of gender studies, I knew for sure I had to write about some of the many challenges women face daily in their lives. Therefore, choosing to write about sexual and gender violence was both a wish and a need. A wish to bring forward the matter in an analyzed way so that the victims become more than just a statistic or a topic of gossip between neighbors. And a need, that it took me a while to realize it was there, for healing my own traumas regarding my own sexual assault stories. I was sexually assaulted by my aunt's husband when I was 14 years old, I was raped when I was 20 years old, and I was only able to communicate, to myself and to a close friend, what happened two days before my 27th birthday. I decided to disclose my own stories here since reading and analyzing many women's testimonies gave me the strength to talk and to understand my own unwritten testimony. And I got to feel the power that each woman's words evoked in me to the point that I felt ok doing so myself, even if in a spoken way.

It was not my intention to depict the women/writers as just victims of what happened to them, because they are a lot more than only what violent men made of them. They are women who chose to write their testimonies about what they went through to let other women, who suffered through violence themselves, know that they are not alone, to let other women know that it is not their fault, that the only person to blame for an aggression is the aggressor himself. They are women who chose to fight back against sexual violence by exposing what happened in their own words for others to read, feel inspired to do the same, and to disclaim every day more different types of sexual violence against women that not everyone sees or understands. Bringing awareness and putting out in the open an issue that is not seriously discussed because it became a reality, something 'normal', on women's lives.

Every day when I go out, I think through a number of things: the clothes I will wear; the place I am going to; how will I get there; the path I will take; who will be there; and so many other things. It became a daily routine, that other women have as well, to think and prepare ahead because the danger is anywhere that a man might be at. Yeah... it might not be all men, as many care to point out, but the feeling of insecurity does not disappear by knowing that and the violence does not end because of it.

Doing my master's studies at PPGI-UFSC was the best choice for me. I did not envision everything that I would learn and how much I would grow throughout my studies guided by so many competent professors. Now, almost at the finishing line, when I look back

at everything, even the hardship, I know for sure I was right all along for choosing this program to add to my academic and personal lives. My life changed after joining it and I was able to spread out this knowledge in the lives of those near me and I hope I am able to reach people even further away with the writing of this dissertation.

I would like to thank every woman who shared their stories online for others to read and find in them strength to share their own.

I would like to thank the women in my life for every teaching, for every word, for every help, for every support. We need to stand together, to protect and fight for each other instead of letting others make us adversaries in a world where that only benefits men.

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I would like to thank Gabriela and Mariana, the family I chose to have in this earth, for the infinite conversations we exchanged, for your support, your words, your shoulders, your ears, your laughs, your presence which I truly needed the past year or so.

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## RESUMO

O objetivo desta pesquisa é analisar depoimentos de mulheres que sofreram violência sexual, coletados dos sites *MeTooEP* e *me too.*, com o intuito de explorar como as mulheres/autoras expressam as emoções sobre os eventos, os agressores e a/agressão/agressões sofridas. Para tanto, a análise tem como base o sistema de avaliatividade (Martin & White, 2005), que sustenta o estudo das emoções expressas em um texto e permite classificá-las de acordo com as categorias de engajamento, atitude e gradação, sendo o foco desta pesquisa a atitude. Além da avaliatividade, os estudos sobre linguagem e gênero nos ajudam a interpretar as questões de gênero existentes nos depoimentos. Trazendo, assim, conscientização para os desafios que as vítimas de violência passam durante e depois do trauma devido à convenção social, às ideologias, ao sexismo, ao patriarcalismo, à sexualização e objetificação do corpo feminino, e também conscientização quanto ao mau entendimento do conceito de consentimento. Esta análise foi feita para trazer luz a um assunto que ainda é tabu se falar à respeito abertamente, observando que falar sobre violência sexual ainda é uma polêmica dependendo do lugar físico em questão.

**Palavras-chave:** agressão sexual. depoimentos. emoções. sistema de avaliatividade.



## ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to analyze sexually assaulted women's testimonies, selected from the *MeTooEP* and the *me too.* websites, in order to explore how these women/authors structure their narratives of the episode with the purpose of identifying the discourses about sexual assault present in there and how they report the emotions about the events, the aggressors, and about the aggression/s. Therefore, the analysis is based on appraisal (Martin & White, 2005), which supports the study of the reported emotions in a text and allows their classification according to the categories of attitude, engagement and graduation. This research focuses on attitude. Beyond appraisal, the studies on language and gender help the interpretation of any existent gender matters present in the testimonies, thus bringing awareness to the challenges victims of violence face during and after the trauma due to social convention, ideologies, sexism, patriarchalism, sexualization and objectification of the female body; and also bringing awareness to the misunderstanding of the concept of consent. This analysis is done to clarify an issue that is still taboo to openly talk about, noting that talking about sexual violence it is still an issue depending on the place in question.

**Keywords:** sexual assault. testimonies. emotions. appraisal framework

## FIGURES

Figure 1 – *MeTooEP* website homepage

Figure 2 – *me too.* website homepage

## **LISTA DE ABREVIATURAS E SIGLAS**

CDU Christian Democracy Union

MEP Member of the European Parliament

RAINN Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network

CDA Critical Discourse Analysis

SFL Systemic Functional Linguistics

## SUMMARY

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>15</b>
1.1	OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	19
1.2	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	20
1.3	ORGANIZATION OF THE RESEARCH .....	21
<b>2</b>	<b>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</b> .....	<b>23</b>
2.1	OVERVIEW OF SIMILAR STUDIES .....	23
2.2	OVERVIEW OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT .....	25
2.3	LITERATURE FOR DATA ANALYSIS .....	26
<b>2.3.1</b>	<b>Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>2.3.2</b>	<b>Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL)</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>2.3.3</b>	<b>Appraisal</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>2.3.4</b>	<b>Gender, discourse and language</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>METHOD</b> .....	<b>42</b>
3.1	DATA COLLECTION .....	42
<b>3.1.1</b>	<b>Instruments for data collection</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>3.1.2</b>	<b>Procedures for data selection</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>3.1.3</b>	<b>Categories for data analysis</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>ANALYSIS OF THE TESTIMONIES</b> .....	<b>48</b>
4.1	CLUSTER A – testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which it is not specified whether the aggression happens around others or not .....	49
<b>4.1.1</b>	<b>Conclusion for cluster A</b> .....	<b>54</b>
4.2	CLUSTER B – testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened around one or more people .....	55
<b>4.2.1</b>	<b>Conclusion for cluster B</b> .....	<b>73</b>
4.3	CLUSTER C – testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened when they were alone with the aggressor .....	74
<b>4.3.1</b>	<b>Alone somewhere</b> .....	<b>74</b>

<b>4.3.2</b>	<b>Alone in the elevator.....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>4.3.3</b>	<b>Conclusion for cluster C.....</b>	<b>94</b>
4.4	CLUSTER D – testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened when they were alone with the aggressor and rape was a factor .....	95
<b>4.4.1</b>	<b>Conclusion for cluster D.....</b>	<b>119</b>
4.5	ANALYSIS OUTCOME.....	120
<b>5</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>123</b>
	<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>127</b>



## 1 INTRODUCTION

When talking about violence against women, there is a variety of things that might come to mind, since it is such a broad term. It is possible, however, to name some forms of this type of violence: abuse; rape; domestic, physical, emotional, sexual and/or psychological violence. Other types lie in between and can be more specific. For the scope of this dissertation the focus will be on sexual violence - which in the case of the testimonies here analyzed includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, and abuse -, and also on the emotions reported by the victims due to the trauma they suffered during their abuse, as well as on how sexual violence is socially viewed.

In order to standardize the writing of this dissertation, victims of sexual violence will be mostly referred to as ‘she’ and aggressors as ‘he’, considering that most victims of sexual assaults are women: according to a study conducted in Virginia, USA, through the data analysis of “[...] a nationally representative survey of approximately 1,000 women and 1,000 men, ages 18 and up conducted online using the GfK Knowledge Panel [...], “81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime.” (KEARL, 2018, p.7). Another study conducted in Brazil and published by the *Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública* points out that 86,9% of rape victims in the year 2020 were women (BUENO, 2021). Even though women are the majority of victims of sexual violence, it is not the intention of this study to imply that only women are sexually assaulted or that only men are perpetrators of sexual assault.

As central concepts to this investigation, the terms sexual assault and rape (which is a type of sexual assault) will be addressed as different things, noting that the term ‘sexual assault’ will also be employed referring to cases where rape is not a factor in the abuse described.

According to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, sexual assault is an illicit sexual contact forced on someone without their consent, or on someone who is unable to give consent, or if the perpetrator is an authority in relation to the victim (2020). However, the dictionary fails to address that sexual assault is basically anything sexual that is done to the victim or that the victim is forced to do to the assailant’s body. Therefore, rape, attempted rape, sexual harassment and undesirable sexual touching are also types of sexual assault (COOK et. al, 2008).

Now taking into consideration that rape is a type of sexual assault, the online Cambridge Dictionary defines rape as “to force someone to have sex when they are unwilling, using violence or threatening behavior” (2020, p.1). The dictionary entry does not mention situations when the person is in no condition to give consent, for example when intoxicated. When we search and analyze further, in the same online dictionary, for the definition of sex, we find: “physical activity between people involving the sexual organs” (2020, p.1); in fact, the majority of entries for ‘sex’ are definitions regarding being male or female. The definition above clearly states the involvement of the sexual organs, and it is possible to assume that oral sex, involving the sexual organs of only one person, is indeed sex, despite the common belief that it is not.

Still bearing in mind the dictionary definition of rape, it is necessary to pay attention to what it really signifies when the phrase ‘using violence or threatening behavior’ is added to it. With that addition, rape is defined not as just having sex with someone when they are unwilling; according to this dictionary, it is necessary to use violence or threats in order for forced sex to be seen as rape. There are many ways of analyzing why that is the definition of rape, one of them being the fact that society created the idea that women must be submissive to men, and this view is so deeply rooted that many women are unable to see certain actions as rape. Even Christianity reinforces this traditional thinking, as we can see in 1 Timothy 2:11-12: “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” And this is only one example among many in the Bible.

Another way of understanding why so many misconceptions about rape exist is by taking notice of the dissemination of rape myths. Rape myths are socially constructed ideas about rape that remain current even though they were spread a long time ago. Francis X. Shen (2019, p.6), in his article *How we still fail rape victims: Reflecting on responsibility and legal reform*, talks about:

(A) the failures of rape law reform and, thus, the need to revisit the issue of blame; (B) the historical context of blame attribution in rape; (C) the origins of rape myths in our desire to believe in a just world; (D) the implications of rape myths for adjudication in the legal system; and (E) the importance of race in understanding rape myths.

The article presents a historical context of the term ‘rape myths’, pointing to the fact that “In the earliest written laws – the Code of Hammurabi, for example – women were seen as the property of males.” (SHEN, 2019, p.10). There are other examples which show that, in past times, such as ancient Greece and before the Constitution of the USA, women were seen as



objects that belonged either to their fathers and brothers or to their husbands, implying the nonexistence of women's citizenship. Illustrating this ancient way of thinking and how its roots remain today, Figueiredo (2020) points out that "In Brazil, for example, until 2009 rape was still characterized as a crime of private action against social customs." (*my translation*. p. 321). Therefore, only about a decade ago did the Brazilian legal system begin to understand rape as a crime against the life and dignity of women.

It is vital to consider that giving every term - such as rape, harassment, sexual assault, and sexual abuse - a definition may sound complex and sometimes confusing, but what can be relied on is how each woman feel (felt) when they suffer(ed) some type of sexual violence. It does not matter what convention dictates, or if it is a joke or not, or if the perpetrator is drunk. If a woman feels uncomfortable, violated, frightened, scared, shocked, or whatever feeling that is negative and it is because of a man or something he has done, that is definitely not right. Women do not need to look for a definition of terms to know that something distressed them, and if that bothered them it should not happen. How they feel is more than enough evidence that it is an improper (to say the least) thing to be happening.

Concerning the problem of sexual violence, something that made and still makes an impact on the reality of women around the globe was the *#metoo* movement. The movement came into existence in 2007 through Tarana Burke who

[c]reated [it] as a way for young women of color to share their stories, Burke began using the phrase 'me too' to promote the idea of 'empowerment through empathy'. Her campaign was not only designed to facilitate healing, but she also wanted to train survivors to work in communities of color. (NATIONAL Women's History Museum, 2020, p. 1).

The hashtag saw its peak in the USA in 2017, thanks to the actress Alyssa Milano, who shared Tarana Burke's hashtag, being open about her own harassment story, and also to other actresses who followed her lead, such as Reese Witherspoon, Thandie Newton, Lady Gaga, Salma Hayek, Jennifer Lawrence, among others (ARMSTRONG, 2018). Although the *#metoo* movement had its peak five years ago, there are still websites open to receive testimonies from those who wish to share their stories of sexual violence in the way they see fit. Two groups which share the testimonies openly in their websites are *me too*<sup>1</sup> and *MeTooEP*<sup>2</sup>. The first one

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<sup>1</sup> <https://metoomvmt.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://metooep.com/>

is an American website, whilst the second is a British one. Unfortunately, during the time of the production of this dissertation, no similar official *#metoo* website, with the possibility of posting and reading testimonies, was found in Brazil. The websites found are places for people to share the sexual violence they have gone through, or to read the testimonies of others. They are different in their layout and in what they provide beyond the possibility of posting and reading testimonies, and the description of their additional specificities are provided further on in section 3.1.1 Instruments for data collection.

Talking about sexual assault is not a simple task and it was not the purpose of this researcher to address it through numbers and percentages, thus hiding the women who went through it. However, conducting online interviews (considering the Covid-19 pandemic, which occurred when this research was being written) was not an ideal option, given the delicate nature of the topic. Therefore, the idea of utilizing the testimonies available in the *#metoo* websites mentioned above suited the intention of this thesis. My aim was to collect personal narratives of sexual violence to analyze their structure and the emotions reported in them, (with the support of the chosen bibliography), so that these women and what they went through can be seen as more than yearly statistics. And also so the victims of violence will not become just another story to tell, another number on a percentage of violence, another unlucky number. Barely anyone talks about how the victim felt; how she is managing all the emotions bottled up inside of her; barely anyone tries to listen and understand what the victim went through, because the majority of people are concerned with the ‘ifs’ and the ‘at leasts’.

The decision to analyze the testimonies of sexual assault victims came from my indignation when learning that many people, especially women, are sexually assaulted daily and not enough is talked about it. According to *Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública* (BUENO, 2022, p.8):

The year of 2021 marks the return of the increase in records of rape of girls and women in Brazil [...]. 56.098 incident reports were registered on rape, including the rape of vulnerable victims, females only. Meaning that [...] every 10 minutes a girl or a woman was a victim of rape, taking into consideration only the cases that reached police authorities. (*My translation*<sup>3</sup>)

As this data only takes into consideration reported sexual assaults, it is possible to presume that many more women have been sexually assaulted, but due to shame (believing that

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<sup>3</sup> O ano de 2021 marca a retomada do crescimento de registros de estupros e estupros de vulnerável contra meninas e mulheres no Brasil [...]. Foram registrados 56.098 boletins de ocorrência de estupros, incluindo vulneráveis, apenas do gênero feminino. Isso significa dizer que [...] uma menina ou mulher foi vítima de estupro a cada 10 minutos, considerando apenas os casos que chegaram até as autoridades policiais.

what happened was somehow their fault), or even to the fear of having their words questioned at every step, they decided not to report the assault. Society often blames the victim for what happened and the justice system, which should help the victims find justice, often revictimizes them by questioning the veracity of their report, for example. Even though rape is seen as a serious crime, society as a whole still allows gender violence to happen, tolerating and enabling the maintenance and circulation of stereotypes and rape myths. Therefore, negative consequences, such as the low reporting rate of sexual crimes, happen due to the confusing and contradictory messages conveyed to women by public discourses on rape and sexual violence (FIGUEIREDO, 2020).

In addition to that, rape myths in circulation frequently prevent women from recognizing sexual violence. According to Wilson and Miller (2016), a review of 28 studies of women who were forced to have sex (the study was conducted through online American websites) showed that 60% of them did not recognize the act as rape. This also reveals that the understanding of consent is still clouded to the overall society, and the term needs to be examined, debated and clarified urgently.

Despite the fact that rape myths are constantly being disseminated in every society, and despite the underreporting of sexual assaults, there are those who try to resist this oppression over women and decide to take a stand against it, and the *#metoo* movement is an example. Even though the peak of the movement was five years ago, the *MeTooEP* website, for example, still receives testimonies to this day, showing the need to continue exposing and bringing to light women's experiences and perspectives about sexual violence.

## 1.1 OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Taking into consideration the *#metoo* testimonies available in the *MeTooEP* and *metoo* websites, this research will focus on matters of sexual violence, departing from the problem that sexually assaulted victims are often seen by others and by themselves as responsible for what happened to them. The selection of this theme came from my interest in feminisms and gender studies, and my realization, after learning more about gender problems, that discourse

and language play a central role in how women are sexualized and objectified, contributing to the establishment of a rape culture in many societies.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the written testimonies produced by women victims of sexual violence, gathered from the *MeTooEP* and *me too* websites, in order to see how these women structure their narratives of the assault episode, with the purpose of identifying the discourses about sexual assault present there, and how they report their emotions about the events and the aggression.

The research questions that were raised are:

- a) How do the women, writers of the testimonies, structure their narratives to talk about the aggression suffered?
- b) How do the writers of the testimonies report the emotions that the event, the aggressor, and themselves evoke?
- c) Are there myths about sexual assault in their testimonies?

## 1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Much has been studied regarding violence against women, and especially sexual assault. However, as long as these problems persist in social life, and until the situation is changed, the need to go on researching, studying, analyzing, and talking about them remains, especially to raise awareness about sexual and gender violence.

This research is significant in the sense that many women are sexually assaulted daily, and not primarily by strangers. According to RAINN<sup>4</sup> (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), a USA website, 55% of the reported sexual assaults in the USA occur “at or near the victim’s house”. In Brazil, as published in the *Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública* (BUENO, 2021), in 2020 85,2% of the victims of sexual assault knew the perpetrator. And the problem is intensified given that the largest share of sexual assaults is not even reported (RAINN [s.d.]). For these reasons it is crucial to talk about what defines sexual assault and consent, and the challenges a sexual assault victim goes through, before and after the event, due to social conventions, ideologies, sexism, patriarchy, sexualization and objectification of women’s bodies. It is also concerning that not all sexual assaults are reported due, among other

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rainn.org>

reasons, to the fact that many women still struggle to identify what can be considered a sexual assault (Wilson and Miller, 2016). It is essential to emphasize that it is never the victim's fault and that there is no such thing as '*it was not that bad*', because no matter what people go through sexually against their will, it is bad enough for them (HIRSCH. et al, 2018).

### 1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE RESEARCH

First of all, the introduction briefly presented some types of violence against women, among which the topic of this research is included. This was followed by the definitions of sexual assault and rape, and why these definitions need to be discussed, reviewed and expanded. Secondly, an overview of the *#metoo* movement was presented, which will be further discussed in chapter 2, subsection 2.2.

The next section put forward the objectives and research questions that guided this research. This section was followed by the section concerning the significance of the study, which explains, as the title suggests, why it is so important to conduct this research.

Chapter 2 presents the review of the literature, where other works on the same area will be introduced and relevant parts outlined in order to understand what has already been written about the subject, what methods were used, and their findings, as well as the differences and similarities they present in relation to the objectives of this research. After that, the *#metoo* movement will be presented - where, when and through whom it became popular, and also what purposes it has. In addition, this chapter includes the discursive theories used for this work, which are Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Appraisal framework, as well as feminist studies on gender and sexual violence.

Chapter 3 is the method section, which will be initiated by introducing the websites used for data collection (*MeTooEP* and *me too.*) and their content display. Next, the procedures used to select the data will be presented and explained. Then, the appraisal framework will be examined, and I will explain how it will be applied and presented in the analysis of the testimonies.

Chapter 4 will deal with the analysis of the testimonies utilizing the literature presented in the previous section. This will be followed by the conclusion, summarizing the analysis and

the results reached. And finally, the section for the references used in the development of this dissertation will finalize this study.

## 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following subsection will present works with a similar purpose to this research, that is, which also present a discourse analysis of testimonies of sexual assault victims published online. Initially, the works and writers will be presented, as well as an overview of their papers, followed by a comparison with this study pointing out similarities and differences. The second subsection will present the *#metoo* movement, from the time it became a trend to the present configuration and importance. The third subsection will present the literature for data analysis which include an overview on CDA, SFL, Appraisal and Gender, discourse and language. The online search engines used to find relevant works were *SSRN*, *CORE*, *Research Gate*, *RI UFSC*, and *Portal de Periódicos da CAPES/MEC*.

### 2.1 OVERVIEW OF SIMILAR STUDIES

After some search for similar works on discourse and sexual assault/sexual violence, a paper by Muhammad Arslan Saeed (2019), entitled *#MeToo Pakistani moment: Social media for taboo activism*, was found. Even though it talks about the *#metoo* movement, it does not analyze the testimonies of women. It does talk about the replies to the posts in the *#metoo* websites, regarding the filthy language often used and the lack of seriousness present in them. However, the focus is on examining the rise and fall of the *#metoo* movement in Pakistan, which, according to the author, ended soon after it had started. Therefore, it can be noted that it does not have the same objectives as my research, since my concern is to analyze thoroughly the written testimonies of sexually assaulted women, not only the types of words used by others to refer to them.

Another example is *Twitter for sparking a movement, Reddit for sharing the movement: #metoo through the lens of social media* (2018), written by Lydia Manikonda, Ghazaleh Beigi, Huan Liu, and Subbarao Kambhampati, which emphasizes how users on Reddit and Twitter share and respond to comments under the *#metoo* hashtag. The authors collected words often used in those comments, which they categorized into different groups corresponding to the sentiments the words evoke. In their words, their “investigation suggests

that Reddit enables individuals to share their personal stories in depth while on Twitter, users tend to pursue other users to continue the #metoo movement.” (p. 6). Therefore, their work was not focused on analyzing the speech of victims and the possible meanings in them, but on exploring interactions on certain social media about #metoo.

When using the CORE online search engine, one of the works found was a paper by Anjalie Field, Gayatri Bhat, and Yulia Tsyetkov, entitled *Contextual Affective Analysis: A case study of people portrayals in online #MeToo stories* (2019). This work does analyze depositions of rape victims under the #metoo heading; however, they “investigate the dynamic of sentiment, power, and agency in online media coverage” (2019, p.1) of the movement. The paper by Field et al analyzes relations between rape victims and rapists, while the aim of the present research is to analyze the discourse of the victims, not focusing on the abuser. Another difference between Field’s paper and my work is that they do not use feminist studies or gender studies to support their analysis, whereas this dissertation does.

Another work found deals specifically with the issue of rape, although it does not address testimonies from #metoo. Nonetheless, it brings forward the issues of victim blaming and rape myths, for that reason, it is important to mention it here as well. The paper comes from a doctoral dissertation in psychology entitled *Blaming victims of rape: Studies on rape myths and beliefs about rape* (2018), by Kerstin Adolfsson, in which the author works not only with written texts, but with participants as well. He points out that the aim of his thesis is to explore what is more significant when trying to comprehend allocation of blame, whether the point of view of the person involved or the factors present in each situation. His purpose was also to involve professionals who deal with rape victims.

It can be perceived that Adolfsson’s work was conducted analyzing other sources than just written texts; he worked with participants (victims and professional therapists), going through factors (age, gender, etc.) that might change in some way how the trauma affects the victims. He came to the conclusion that people assign blame more easily to victims of multiple perpetrator rape (MPR) rather than of lone-perpetrator rape (LPR); he also observed that professionals who deal with rape victims were conscious of what could lead to secondary victimization, but the majority of these professionals see themselves as part of the justice system. Another conclusion presented by Adolfsson is that the professionals investigated were not often prepared to deal with rape victims, and he pointed out that the three most important variables in forecasting blame levels were “sympathy for the victim, rape myth acceptance and perception of consent” (2018, p.72). Besides dealing with rape myths and victim blaming, the



author also investigated possible treatments and the points of view of professional therapists on their preparation to deal with rape victims.

## 2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT

As mentioned in the introduction, the *#metoo* movement began when Tarana Burke started using the *me too* hashtag back in 2007. Even before the hashtag was created, she was already an activist who focused her efforts in helping young black women through their development, and from this standpoint she created the *me too* hashtag to encourage “[...] young women of color to share their stories” (NATIONAL Women’s History Museum, 2020, p. 1). However, the hashtag only became popular in 2017, when it went viral after the sharing of the hashtag by Ashley Judd (exposing Harvey Weinstein as a sexual harasser) and Alyssa Milano’s call for people who had ever been sexually harassed or assaulted to share the *#metoo* (MING, [w.d.]<sup>5</sup>). Both of these women are US actresses who took action, raising a problem that had been silenced for too long. The first one decided to reveal her own sexual assault, and the second to motivate others to do the same. Their determination reverberated and helped to spread the movement all around, thus impacting the lives of so many women.

According to the BBC News website, in the first three months after the hashtag went viral (2018), the calls to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) increased 23% in comparison with the previous year. However, not everything that came out of the *#metoo* movement is as positive as it may appear. The article *Looking ahead: How what we know about sexual harassment now informs us of the future* (ATWATER et al, 2018) shows that 74% of the women who answered the authors’ survey study would take a stand against harassment; 77% of men would be more prudent not to act improperly; however, surprisingly 10% of men and women would be less inclined to hire attractive women; and 44% of women said that men would be more inclined to leave women out of social situations after work to avoid sexual harassment accusations. It is curious to notice how very specific this data is regarding what type

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<sup>5</sup> [without date]

of women they would be less inclined to hire: **attractive** women, as if the only women who are susceptible to be sexually harassed are the ones considered pretty.

Something else to be highlighted from the data presented by Atwater et al. (2018) is that a high percentage of men **and** women would rather not include attractive women in their afterhours events. This gives the misguided idea that the problem is the presence of attractive women and not the behavior of men; this is also evidence that blaming the victim is socially accepted in many cases.

It has been five years since the climax of the *#metoo* movement, but even after its dissemination, the understanding of sexual harassment and sexual assault remains blurred. Many people still see the victim as the issue and the man as a victim of his own desires. That is one of the reasons why talking about sexual harassment and sexual assault is still of extreme importance, and the *#metoo* movement should continue until everyone clearly understands who the victim truly is, and it is not the harassing male.

## 2.3 LITERATURE FOR DATA ANALYSIS

In this section the focus is on the theories that will be used to critically analyze the written testimonies gathered from the two *#metoo* websites.

### 2.3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the theoretical approaches that will be used in this research as the foundation for the analysis of the testimonies. A meaningful definition of critical social analysis, of which CDA is part, is: “Critical social analysis shows how forms of social life can damage people unnecessarily, but also how they can be changed” (FLOWERDEW; RICHARDSON, 2018, p.13). This assertion is expressive to this study bearing in mind that a constant topic in the testimonies is how the assault harmed each woman in varied ways, and this harm is openly expressed in their narratives. That is one of the reasons why CDA was chosen to be applied in this study. Another point worth mentioning is that with CDA it is possible to tackle social phenomena, such as ideology and power relations, through textually oriented analysis. Although just analyzing the testimonies through a CDA perspective and using all the available resources this approach provides is not enough for social change to

happen, this type of analysis has the potential to raise awareness about the ongoing problem of gender violence.

More specifically, the approach used is also grounded on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), which is

[...] a perspective that seeks to examine the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and power asymmetries get discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and contested in specific communities and discourse contexts. (LAZAR, 2014, p.182).

This approach gathers together the perspectives of Critical Discourse Analysis and Feminist Studies in order to defy discourses that tend to limit men's and women's potential as human beings (LAZAR, 2014).

The term 'discourse' was initially popularized by Foucault, therefore, his "[...] approach to discourse analysis is widely referred to as a model by social scientists [...]" (FAIRCLOUGH, 1993, p. 37). However, Fairclough (1993) points out that there is considerable difference between his textual approach to discourse and Foucault's approach.

[I see] discourse as a complex of three elements: social practice, discursive practice [...], and text, and the analysis of a specific discourse calls for analysis in each of these three dimensions and their interrelations. (FAIRCLOUGH, 1995, p.74)

Considering that there are distinct critical approaches to discourse analyses, this dissertation will focus on Fairclough's approach, called CDA, which sees language as a social practice socially shaped and socially shaping (FAIRCLOUGH, 1995). In other words, the way we use language is influenced by society and influences society. As much as society produces and disseminates the discourse of hegemonic femininity that says that women should be quiet and smile often, when this discourse is reproduced or resisted it also influences society.

In this research the testimonies of rape victims will be analyzed. Here we categorize them as testimonies given that they were written by the victims, therefore, it was not a mere description of the violence. Seeing that the victims are the writers of their own texts and also agents in their stories, it is understandable that they are the ones to choose the rhythm of the story; from which part to start to with which part to end; to say what happened openly or to leave it to the readers' interpretation; and they can also narrate their story as matter of fact or let out their emotions regarding the whole situation. The writers control their narratives and this

is a type of power that language provides: writing their testimonies was a way of taking action about what happened to them.

Similar to Halliday (2014), who claimed that language produces three types of meanings: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational metafunction addresses how matters are expressed through language; the interpersonal metafunction represents the relationships between the text participants; and the textual metafunction deals with the structure of the text, its connection with other texts and the wider framework. Fairclough (2003) also sees three types of meaning in texts: actional, representational and identificational.

Thinking about representation, for example, in which “What can be represented in clauses includes aspects of the physical world [...], aspects of the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, sensations and so forth, and aspects of the social world.” (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003, p. 134), it is noticeable how often in the testimonies the women were caught off guard by the behavior of the aggressor(s), which made them susceptible to shock and surprise and prevented them from indicating clearly that what they were going through was not ok. In such occasions, since they did not expect that to happen, they did not have control over the situation, for example, when one of them had a boss press his genitals on her while she was sitting at her desk. The fact that they were in a workplace environment, that she was sitting in her chair inside her own office and that he was her boss are not indicators of a possible assault, whereas being inside a bus or subway during rush hour, no seats left empty and a man getting too close, might be indicators. Due to the lack of control over the situation the common description in their testimonies is ‘shock’.

Regarding action in discourse, it “is to do generally with relations with others, but also ‘action on others’, and power” (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003, p. 28). In the testimonies, it is noticeable how the women often expressed their relationship with the aggressor by the way they chose to refer to them. None of them were described in the women’s narratives as friends, they were a man in the elevator, a man working in their group, a colleague or even a cousin of someone she used to call “friend”. This last one was the closest thing to a relation of ‘friendship’, not with the perpetrator, but with his cousin. And the choice of the word ‘colleague’ reflects the fact that the women knew the perpetrator because they worked together, but also implies that they were not close outside their workplace. There were other situations in which the hierarchy between the woman and the man was stated. Another type of relationship is with the situation, such as in one case when the woman was feeling uncomfortable about a meeting that would still take place, and she would invite a friend to go along. However, the ones that faced an uncomfortable

situation without any previous preparation showed their shock. One specifically did not say anything about the abuse even though it was happening in the presence of her boyfriend: “I clung on to my boyfriend who hadn’t noticed as it was dark, **I felt trapped because I couldn’t escape such an uncomfortable situation**<sup>6</sup>. It was great relief when the taxi dropped him off first.” (Testimony B4). The narrator does not clarify if she eventually told her boyfriend about what happened in the taxi or what happened before, but through the analysis of her testimony we can see that she did not inform him of the abuse while it was happening.

Fairclough (1993) discusses the relation between discourse and ideology and the fact that “the ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalized, and achieve the status of ‘common sense [...]’” (FAIRCLOUGH, 1993, p.87). For example, it has become naturalized to see sexual assault within a kind of hierarchy, with some types being worse than others. In one of the testimonies the narrator says: “Admittedly, I didn’t think the episode itself was very bad, but I still reported it to my supervisor.” (Testimony A2). In this case she reported the assault despite her thoughts on how grave it was; this shows how people still measure different types of assault by a scale of severity created socially.

Another issue that has become naturalized is blaming the victim, even if partially, for what has been done to her/him. Victim blaming, as defined by the website *The Atlantic*,

[...] comes in many forms [...] [i]t can apply to cases of rape and sexual assault, but also to more mundane crimes, like a person who gets pickpocketed and is then chided for his decision to carry his wallet in his back pocket. Any time someone defaults to questioning what a victim could have done differently to prevent a crime, he or she is participating, to some degree, in the culture of victim blaming. (ROBERTS, 2016)

There is an example in the testimonies that reveals this practice, in which the writer told her friend that she had been raped by a friend’s cousin (“I was raped by the cousin of someone I called “friend” when I was 23 years old” – Testimony D4). The victim trusted this friend enough to tell her what had happened, but instead of receiving support she had to hear her friend telling her “[...] it was [her] fault and listed a litany of things [she]’d done wrong while alone with him.” (Testimony D4). It is a common-sense belief that a woman should behave in a specific manner in order not to be assaulted, or that a woman should be careful about the amount

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<sup>6</sup> Any type of emphasis found on the testimonies (or the titles), be it bold, italics, or the use of capital letters, as well as spelling and grammar mistakes were maintained as in the original.

of alcohol she drinks; all of this delivers a message that blames the victims for whatever bad situation they go through, when in fact the only one who should be blamed is the perpetrator of the assault(s).

To conclude the topic of matters that become common sense, it is worth mentioning how women grow accustomed to constant harassment. It is not news that women are harassed and assaulted on a daily basis in public transports, at school, in the streets, and also in their workplaces. To exemplify, I present a passage from one of the testimonies in which the writer is talking about the environment in the European Parliament: “I was already accustomed to the always **present look by older men** as this was not **my first experience in the ‘EU bubble’** and I couldn’t be **too** bothered.” (Testimony A2). She mentions the ‘always present look by older men’, in which she is very specific when referring to ‘older men’ and not just ‘men’. Then she declares it was not her ‘first experience’, meaning that it had become naturalized to be looked at by older men in that working environment. And although she declares ‘I couldn’t be **too** bothered’, as if that did not disturb her anymore (since it was frequent), she still adds ‘too’, implying that at some level that ‘present look’ continues to bother her, but it is something she learned to live with.

### 2.3.2 Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL)

The intent of this study is not only to work with CDA to analyze the testimonies, but also to add to it the approach of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). According to Eggins (2004, p.21), “what is distinctive to systemic linguistics is that it seeks to develop both a theory about language and social process *and* an analytical methodology which permits the detailed and systematic description of language patterns”.

The type of text that will be dealt with in this research is ‘testimony’. There are some reasons why this genre was selected: first, because those texts were written in the first person by the victims and the narratives of the assault are written through their perspective; second, those texts were not written as just stories or a matter of fact kind of text, they are traumatic experiences lived by the writers, therefore, embedded with emotions (even if a few of them did not express any type of emotion in their writing) that affected them personally; and third, the victims were able to choose how to tell their story, while having in mind that anyone who is able to understand English (the language in which all the gathered testimonies were written) can read them, therefore, the purpose of their texts is to share with others their experience in their own words.

And sharing written testimonies has to do both with the ideational and interpersonal functions of language, and “[...] function will be interpreted not just as the use of language but as a fundamental property of language itself, something that is basic to the evolution of the semantic system” (Halliday, 1985, p.17).

Now, according to Halliday, when thinking about language in its many forms (spoken, written, signed) through Systemic Functional Linguistics, it can be said that using language for whatever purpose always involves choice. People choose to write something in a certain way for various reasons, and through systemic functional analysis of a text it is possible to explore the meanings created by the selections made, such as those from the system of *transitivity*.

The study of transitivity is concerned with how actions are represented: what kind of actions appear in a text, who does them and to whom they are done. When we make choices between different types of process and different participants, between the different roles participants might take, these decisions are shown syntactically through transitivity choices. (MILLS, 1995, p.111).

As observed in section 2.3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis, SFL claims that language use serves three metafunctions (Halliday, 2014): ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction addresses how matters are expressed through language; the interpersonal metafunction represents the relationships between the text participants; and the textual metafunction deals with the structure of the text, its connection with other texts and the wider framework.

The three metafunctions – ideational, interpersonal and textual – are present in the assaulted women’s testimonies, but as the goal of analyzing these accounts is to verify how they express their relationship with the perpetrator and their emotions, the ideational metafunction is more relevant to our study, and our analysis will focus on it.

Besides always offering the choice to mean something in more than one way, language is also functional (HALLIDAY, 1985), meaning that it serves social functions in any specific context. In that sense, texts need to be looked at as product and process, according to Halliday (1985, p.10):

[...] the text is a product in the sense that it is an output, something that can be recorded and studied, having a certain construction that can be represented in systematic terms. It is a process in the sense of a continuous process of semantic choice, a movement through the network of meaning potential, with each set of choices constituting the environment for a further set.

In view of that, we can say that the testimonies are both written products that will be analyzed in this study, and also processes of text construction, considering the semantic choices the writers made to voice this or that situation and even their positions in relation to what they narrate.

The choices a text writer makes are directly dependent on the contexts of language use. To explain the relation between text and context, Halliday (1985) presents three features of the context of situation: the field of discourse, the tenor of discourse, and the mode of discourse. The field refers to what is being talked about in the text; the tenor relates to the participants of the text, what they do and who they are in the narrative, and their relation with each other; and the mode refers to the channel used for the textual interaction. The contextual variables of field, tenor and mode will be illustrated below in the shortest testimony gathered from *MetooEP*:

The time I receive an unwanted kiss  
Jun 25, 2019

I was an assistant at the European Parliament from 1994 until 1999. On one occasion, several German CDU MEPs went to Restaurant Maxburg. When I went downstairs to the toilet, a male MEP came and gave me an unwanted kiss on my mouth. I was completely shocked. (Testimony C1).

In the case presented above it can be said that the field refers to a written testimony of an assault situation that happened between the years of 1994 and 1999, in a downstairs toilet at the Restaurant Maxburg. The tenor regards a person addressing the general public (those able to understand English) about the assault. And the mode is a written text to be shared and read silently, at distance.

As stated by Eggins, “[...] our use of language will also be influenced by our ideological positions: the values we hold (consciously or unconsciously), the perspectives acquired through our particular path through culture.” (2004, p. 10). By applying this statement to the testimonies, it is possible to note that the assault myths that circulate in many societies constitute an ideological framing that has an effect on the writing of the testimonies; another point is that the testimonies were written to be read by anyone; this might have had an impact on how the testimonies were written and the writers’ choices of words, meaning that, although to write the testimonies was a choice made by the writers, the way they articulate their narratives might have been influenced by the fact that strangers would have access to them afterwards. Still according to Eggins (2004), while using language for whatever purpose it is not possible to leave context and ideologies out, since whenever and however language is used it will always be embedded with people’s own particular view of things due to their upbringing and their relations with others and the world.



Eggin also notes that “People interact in order to make meanings: to make sense of the world and of each other” (2004, p. 11). This statement can also be applied to the testimonies: some women wrote their testimonies even if they were not sure if what had happened to them was considered assault; each woman wrote their testimonies in their own way, trying to make sense, both to herself and to whoever reads it, of what had happened. In general, the women freely express their emotions regarding their assault and even how they felt before and after the assault.

### 2.3.3 Appraisal

Considering that this work focuses mainly on the emotions reported in the testimonies, the framework for the analysis of evaluation in texts, proposed by Martin & White (2005), is applied in order to better explore what the women are saying and construing about the violence they went through. Another reason to investigate how the sexual violence was evaluated by the victims is to throw light on the emotions and reactions that might be dismissed as just a ‘way of saying’ something, exploring what they add to the narration that could go unnoticed when not analyzed in this manner. That is why the main framework for the analysis will be appraisal.

Appraisal can be located as a branch of SFL, as “an interpersonal system at the level of discourse semantics.” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.33). Therefore, appraisal aids in the interpretation of meaning at the interpersonal level. According to Martin and White (2005), there are three interacting domains inside appraisal: attitude, engagement and graduation.

**Attitude** is concerned with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and evaluation of things. **Engagement** deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse. **Graduation** attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred. (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.35).

The category ‘attitude’ is the one chosen for the analysis of the testimonies. This domain is divided into three other categories, affect, judgment and appreciation. Affect deals with the registration of positive and negative feelings that can be expressed as a mental process/state or as a behavioral surge. Feelings reported as a mental process/state can be exemplified as ‘I was happy’ – this representing a positive affect of happiness as a mental state–, and feelings reported

as a behavioral surge can be exemplified as ‘I shuddered when he passed by me’ – this reporting a negative affect of disinclination as a behavioral surge in reaction to other.

Now, “[j]udgement deals with attitudes towards behaviour, which we admire or criticise, praise or condemn.” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.42). It literally means the judgement of the writer in relation to the attitude and/or behavior of a third party. In the case of this category in appraisal, a judgement can be of social esteem “hav[ing] to do with ‘normality’ [...], ‘capacity’ [...] and ‘tenacity’ [...]” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.52); or it can be of social sanction, which “ha[s] to do with ‘veracity’ [...] and ‘propriety’ [...].” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.52).

Finally, appreciation has to do with the “evaluation of ‘things’, especially things we make and performances we give, but also including natural phenomena” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.56). this category can be applied according to the ‘thing’s’ value and the reactions to them.

There are still the domains of ‘engagement’, which is “[...] is comparable in many respects to evidentiality, but our social perspective, inspired by Bakhtin’s dialogism, contrasts with the truth functional orientation of more philosophically influenced approaches” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.40), and of ‘graduation’, which “[a]s far as **graduation** is concerned, we establish resources for intensification (**force**) and for adjusting boundaries (**focus**) as distinct systems, both concerned with modulating meaning by degree.” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.40). Neither of these two last domains will be used for the analysis of the testimonies,

Although the appraisal approach provides those three interacting domains that can be used to analyze speech (and other forms of communication) through reported emotions, as exemplified above, for the purpose of this research, the focus is on the domain of attitude.

The analysis of the testimonies will be dealt with in chapter 4.

### 2.3.4 Gender, discourse and language

Why is gender an important category to be used in this research? This section aims at answering this question through studies on discourse and gender and through examples from the testimonies themselves, but before it is necessary to differentiate ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, which are two terms that some people still understand as synonyms. “Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex.” (ECKERT, 2003, p.10). Therefore, gender is a term that regards the cultural framing of

each individual, which is developed socially, while sex is basically biological<sup>7</sup> (the term ‘sex’ here is being considered in relation to gender, therefore, other meanings to the same word were not taken into account). “For feminists, ‘gender’ is considered an ideological structure that divides people hierarchically into two classes, ‘men’ and ‘women’.” (LAZAR, 2014, p.186).

Understanding more about feminism leads people to better reflect on common-sense ideas that are spread around among social groups. Many rape myths happen to be replicated among those ideas, such as: if the person does not scream or fight back it is not rape; if the person is in a relationship, it is ok to give in to sex with the partner; if women go out at night wearing ‘revealing’ clothes they are trying to provoke men (RAPE Crisis England & Wales, 2020), among others. It is common to not question certain comments, attitudes, and behaviors when one is not aware that one does not have to accept everything.

Women are not only oppressed by men because of their biological condition, but also because of the ideological discourses (PHILIPS, 2021) that propagate that it is up to the woman not only to reproduce, but also to raise her children and take care of the house; that women have maternal instincts; that women are natural caregivers; among other things. The idea of a single possible family configuration (mother, father, and children, considering the traditional family configuration in heterosexual relationships) makes women always tied to responsibilities inside their homes, regardless of having a job and social life outside the house. While for men the responsibilities inside the home are seen as optional.

Regarding ideological matters, it is worth mentioning that the expression ‘gender ideology’ was spread by the Catholic church as a means of trying to discredit the term ‘gender’ that was seen as something that would pervert the traditional forms of sexuality, family and relationships (SCOTT, 2012). This reaction by the Catholic church is no simple affair, considering that the church can have a large influence in state matters in many countries, including Brazil. This influence, in the case of Brazil, can be noted considering that the

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<sup>7</sup> Although, according to Judith Butler, sex can also be something developed socially and culturally since woman “is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called “the sex,” meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute. She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential.” (BEAUVOIR, 2011, p. 26).

expression ‘gender ideology’ is something that depreciated the common sense understanding of the word ‘gender’, even though this depreciation was based on the misinterpretation of the meaning of the word (JUNQUEIRA, 2018).

The Catholic church’s influence is crucial to understand why the church is responsible for reproducing discourses emphasizing the submission and the decorum expected from women as, for example, being careful about their words and their clothing choices; holding women responsible for the happiness of family members, and so on. Not only the Catholic church’s influence but also evangelical churches as well considering that in Brazil, for example, the number of evangelicals grew considerably between the years of 2000 and 2010 (IBGE, 2010). Maybe there are those who fail to understand the problems embedded in those religious ‘principles’, but these are factors that can lead women to blame themselves for being raped, for example, because they might be convinced that if they had worn something different the assault wouldn’t have happened. Or it can lead them to feel responsible for satisfying their husbands’ sexual desires, because if men cheat on women it is seen as the women’s fault for not pleasing the males enough.

Now for the purpose of this study, the term in emphasis here is gender, especially because gender has to do with culture and everything that has to do with culture is embedded with ideologies, preconceptions, prejudices, and so on. Also, talking about “[...] ‘gender relations’ carries the potential not just for differentiation and differential empowerment, but also dominance, disadvantage, and economic, educational and political inequality.” (SUNDERLAND, 2006, p.25). We can begin talking about the preconceived notions that surround women by remembering that there are preestablished “rules” on how women should behave, dress, talk, and perform, and there are also “rules” for how women should *not* behave, dress, talk, and perform. Men also suffer from the existence of preestablished “rules” for male performance and identity, but in distinct ways.

Talking about dress codes, for example, it is expected of women to always be well dressed, make up on, and bearing a rested appearance. If a woman does not comply with these norms she will probably be asked if everything is ok, if she is sick, or she will be looked from head to toe and she will receive disdainful looks. While a similar dress code may be applied to men (although the ‘make up on’ part is not a requirement), it is not demanded from them as strongly as from women.

One possible reason for these differences on demands depending on gender can be attributed to the idea that men, because of their left-brain dominance, are more “rational” than

women (ECKERT, 2003, p. 12), which implies that the most valued characteristic in males is not how they look, but rather how they use their brains. Meanwhile, women who are categorized as ‘pretty’ or ‘sexy’ have their mental abilities questioned, seeing that in common sense they cannot be both pretty and/or sexy and smart. In the testimonies there is the example of a woman who received an email invitation to a party from a “high ranking official” (her words) in which “the man was clearly suggest[ing] what kind of clothes [she] should wear to the party because he particularly enjoyed the view of some of [her] body parts in the suggested outfit” (ATTACHMENT A – testimony 13). This shows hierarchy (the next paragraph addresses this matter) regarding gender and job title and also how comfortable the man was in sending an email suggesting what his colleague should wear to appear sexy to him.

It is taken more or less as a fact that “[...] there are some biological differences between most women and most man” (BING, 1996, p.15), but the problem is not the differences. According to Bing (1996), the problem is in stereotyping and in excessive simplification to categorize all women and all men as the same due to some similar biological factors.

The dominant ideology does not simply prescribe that male and female should be different – it insists that they simply are different. Furthermore, it ascribes these differences to an unchanging essential quality of males and females. This view is referred to as essentialism. (ECKERT, 2003, p.35).

Another category that has to do with how people are expected to behave and even perform appears in the testimonies in the form of workplace hierarchy, evidence that “[...] one of the most striking aspects of the workplace context is the hierarchical nature of relations among speakers.” (KENDALL, 1997, p.95). This occurs in three ways: the first regards binary gender division, which allows men to consider themselves greater than women (according to their behavior towards women); the second is the expressed hierarchy regarding job titles, although the gender hierarchy cannot be excluded in this case, since it is still a stated relationship between woman and man; and the third way regards age difference, usually the man being older than the woman, and again gender hierarchy also has an influence here. Examples of these hierarchies in the testimonies are as follows: “A man approached and physically pushed me aside [...]”; “During **my first week of my internship** at the European Parliament, I was warned that a certain **MEP** [member of the European Parliament] (also known as a **head** of a religious organi[z]ation) is a ‘harasser’ [...]”; “It happened when I started as an **intern.**”; “My first **boss** was an over **50 year old** French male.” (Testimonies B1, B2, B4, D2).

One important point to make concerns the intersectional relation between gender and other hierarchical systems, as pointed out by Lazar:

Even though women as a social category are structurally disadvantaged in the patriarchal gender order, the intersection of gender with other systems of power based on race, social class, sexuality, and so on means that gender oppression is neither materially experienced nor discursively enacted in the same way for women everywhere. (LAZAR, 2014, p. 189).

The fact that in this study the data used are written testimonies by anonymous writers limits the possibilities to analyze the intersection of gender with, for instance, race, sexuality, and social class. Race is mentioned in the testimonies only once when the writer identifies herself as a “black feminist” (Testimony D3); except for that there is no other reference to race in the narratives. Sexuality is another topic that is not talked about in the testimonies; there is one testimony in which the woman refers to her ‘boyfriend’; however, only this information is not enough to say if the woman is straight, bisexual, or other. Finally, social class is something that can be inferred when the writer mentions the position of the assailant, but that inference is not well founded, therefore, it cannot be used as part of the analysis. This point is being made to explain why these categories will not be examined in addition to gender, which, as a consequence, will restrict the possibility of looking intersectionally at characteristic(s) present in some (if not the majority) of the testimonies.

The next term to be clarified is ‘sexism’, which is getting more popular lately as more information is spread about it. Sexism is based on the notion that one gender (male) is the primary one, while the female gender is considered as ‘the other’, which is why Simone de Beauvoir (2011) entitled one of her books ‘The second sex’. It is worth noting that sexism

[...] refers to discrimination within a social system on the basis of sexual membership. In Western culture, as in most other social systems, this means, in concrete terms, that there are exactly two sexes in binary opposition to each other: female and male. (WODAK, 1997, p.7).

That is why sexism is often referred to as a ‘binarity between genders’, since the range of genders is not widely known and also due to the fact that biological sex still has great influence in the understanding of gender, despite the existence of intersex persons (people born with different sexual characteristics which cannot be classified as the traditional notions of female or male), for example. Understanding the relations between language, sexism, hierarchy and ideology reveals “how the linguistic structure of an individual’s language is connected to the structure of society, how the structure of the language is conditioned by the structure of society and vice versa.” (WODAK, 1997, p.10).

Sexism can also appear in discourse when women are interrupted and/or silenced by men, as frequently “[...] men use verbal behaviour to try to silence women, to embarrass individual women, or to devalue women in general. They demonstrate how language serves as a conduit for men who want to maintain a sense of dominance by demeaning women.” (FREED, 2020, p.12). We can add to it the fact that, historically, the presence in the public sphere is attributed to men, whereas women’s presence is supposed to be in the domestic sphere. That adds up to why many women suffer violence at their work place, mainly in public positions: because historically that is not seen as their place, and men have not yet learned to respect women in every environment. It is worth noting that there was a time when oratory and public speech were not even considered female practice “[...] public speaking and oratory were not merely things that ancient women *didn’t do*: they were exclusive practices and skills that defined masculinity as a gender.” (BEARD, 2017, p.12). Therefore, in a way it is possible to interpret that men feel emasculated by the fact that women are doing exactly something that used to define masculinity as a gender

There are three excerpts from three different testimonies that illustrate the interruption and silencing of women: “He pulled me aside and accused me of lying, **forbidding me to say anything to the other men present**. He then turned to my colleagues and continued his accusations about me.”; “I tried to leave a couple of times but he kept striking up new conversation in a very domineering way. **Each time I would attempt to politely wrap up the conversation and leave, he would start a new conversation.**”; “**I used to work for someone who would shout at me** whenever he was stressed out, or for meaningless things, such as not printing documents.” (Testimonies B5, B6, C4).

Now being more specific on language use and gender, Deborah Cameron (1997) discusses the notion of ‘women’s language’ and what that implies; it is not just the way girls are taught to behave and talk, it also has to do with taking away power from women since their young age, it is about women “[...] taking up less space, making fewer demands, appearing weaker and less aggressive than boys.” (CAMERON, 1997, p.26). Using examples from the testimonies, there is one specific situation in which the aggressor told the woman/writer (in his office) that he wanted to meet personally because she was pretty and his boss suggested “jokingly” that he should invite her out (Testimony B6). Considering that this is out of boundaries when talking about a workplace environment and that she was there to solve a work-

related problem, it would be natural to feel disrespected. However, while men react openly when disrespected, the woman from the testimony was trying to “politely wrap up the conversation and leave [...]” (Testimony B6), despite the fact that she was feeling “[...] incredibly uncomfortable and powerless. [Because] he was intimidating.” (Testimony B6). Men are taught to rule, to be strong, and women are taught to be less, especially in the presence of males, unless in what regards appearance, than she has to look her best to please the male gaze.

Considering how male behavior towards women is often excused and framed as a compliment or a joke, it is difficult to see verbal harassment, for example, as harassment. Usually, assaults are easier for people to recognize as violence, given their physical nature which is harder to pass by as unintentional. However, there are

[...] the less consciously recognized forms of harassment and oppression such as street remarks and subtle gender norms; the latter include requests that girl children and women be more polite, smile, take sexist remarks as innocent jokes or flattery, and conform to heterosexual conventions. (DEFRANCISCO, 1997, p.44).

The point made by DeFrancisco (1997) about the masking of acts of harassment as jokes is illustrated in this passage: “He continued messaging me and proposing sex on subsequent work missions, making humiliating jokes in front of the rest of the team. The other (male) colleagues always laughed which encouraged him on.” (Testimony D2). Different from the other situations exemplified so far, in this case there were witnesses during the harassment (she had already been abused by him on other occasions), notably men, which tallies with Holmes’ statement that “It is [...] worth paying attention [...] to what is achieved by less powerful participants in an interaction in responding to subtle and not-so-subtle exercise of systemic power by superiors.” (HOLMES, 2007, p. 32). The presence of others was not a comfort since none of them stood up for her, instead they laughed at the ‘jokes’.

Discussing specifically about gender and language in the workplace, Kendall (1997) talks about the choices women and men make during interactions in the workplace and how each gender structures their utterances in order to achieve their purposes while also following sociocultural norms:

Women and men actively choose ways of framing to accomplish specific ends within particular interaction. These choices are drawn, in part, from sociocultural norms for how women and men are expected to accomplish such actions through talk. Individuals' language choices, in the local interaction, invoke these gendered norms and, thus, perform gendered identities as well. (KENDALL, 1997, p.82).



Examples of people performing these gendered identities can be seen in the same testimony exemplified above:

He continued [...] making humiliating jokes in front of the rest of the team. The other (male) colleagues always laughed which encouraged him on. Over the years I have learnt to smile less, to call out inappropriate behaviour, and to name what is happening. (Testimony D2).

In this scenario, and through the perspective of gendered identities, it can be noted that:

1. The man making ‘humiliating jokes’ about the woman in front of male colleagues was encouraged by their laughter; 2. The woman remained in silence throughout this harassment, which illustrates how women are often silenced, mainly when there are men present and in environments considered as public domain (BEARD, 2017); 3. She states that she ‘learnt to smile less’, which corroborates the fact that women are taught to smile more; however, certain ‘polite’ smiles can often be interpreted as agreement to whatever is being said, therefore, she modified her behavior so as not to give any wrong impression (this was interpreted considering the assault she had previously suffered and how she narrates her relationship with her boss before being assaulted), which implies also that she blamed herself in a way, as if the way she behaved before being assaulted gave the assailant reasons to assault her.

Considering all the examples provided in this section, in addition to the studies linked to them, it can be inferred that men behaving/acting as superior to women in varied situations has proven to be a common occurrence. Therefore, as argued by Holmes, “[...] despite the apparent increase in the number of women in authoritative positions, there is little evidence that gender has become a superfluous consideration in analyzing workplace interaction.” (HOLMES, 2007, p.31). Going even further, gender is critical to analyze any given situation in which interaction is taking place, particularly between women and men.

### 3 METHOD

In this chapter, subsection *3.1.1 Instruments for data collection* will present first how the search for the data was conducted; secondly, where the data was found, specifically in which websites; and thirdly, a basic description of the layout and contents of these websites. Subsection *3.1.2 Procedures for data collection* will offer an outline of the logic that guided the choice of data and the classification used to organize the data for analysis. And subsection *3.1.2 Categories for data analysis* will present the dimension of Attitude from the appraisal system and its subsequent categories, explaining how they are sorted in each emotion reported.

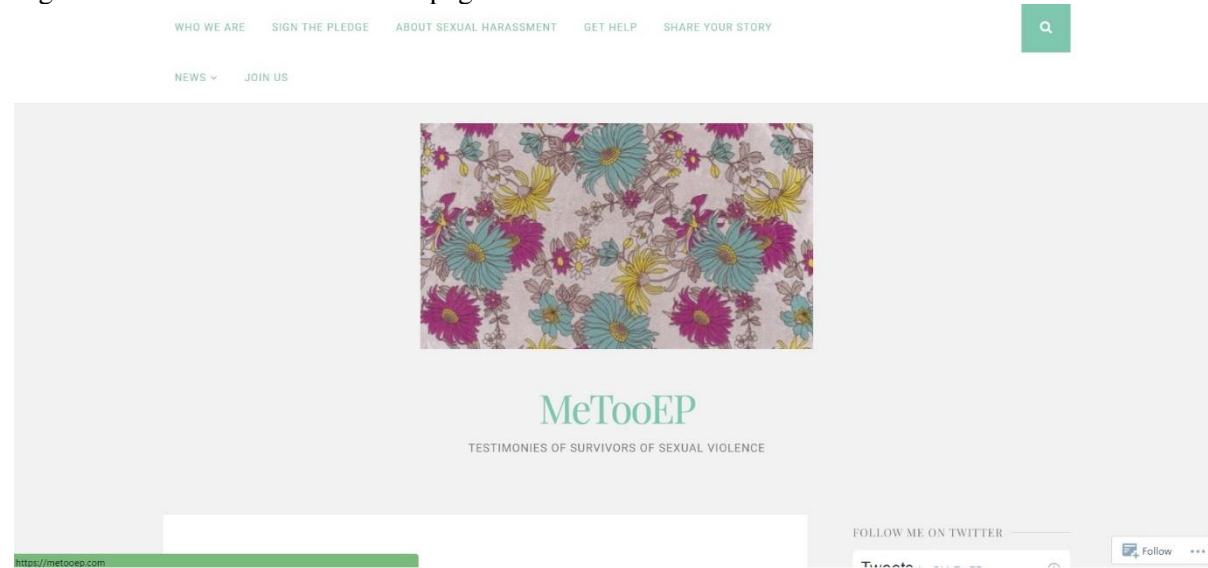
#### 3.1 DATA COLLECTION

##### 3.1.1 Instruments for data collection

The instruments are online pages where stories of sexual assault are shared with whoever wants to read them. These websites provide a space for people to share what happened to them and for people to read testimonies as well. The search for the testimonies was done under the heading *me too testimonies*, which led me to a limited number of useful websites, among which two were chosen: the *me too.* website, which states that its aim is “to assist survivors of sexual violence and help them find the beginning of their path to healing”, and “to disrupt the systems that allow sexual violence to proliferate in our world. [...] So that one day, nobody has to say “me too” ever again.” (METOO.); and the *MeTooEP: Testimonies of sexual violence*, which was launched to fight sexual harassment and to “call for exemplary working conditions within the European Parliament” (METOOEP).

Each website has its own display of contents

The *MeTooEP* is mainly a place to read and write about experiences of sexual violence.

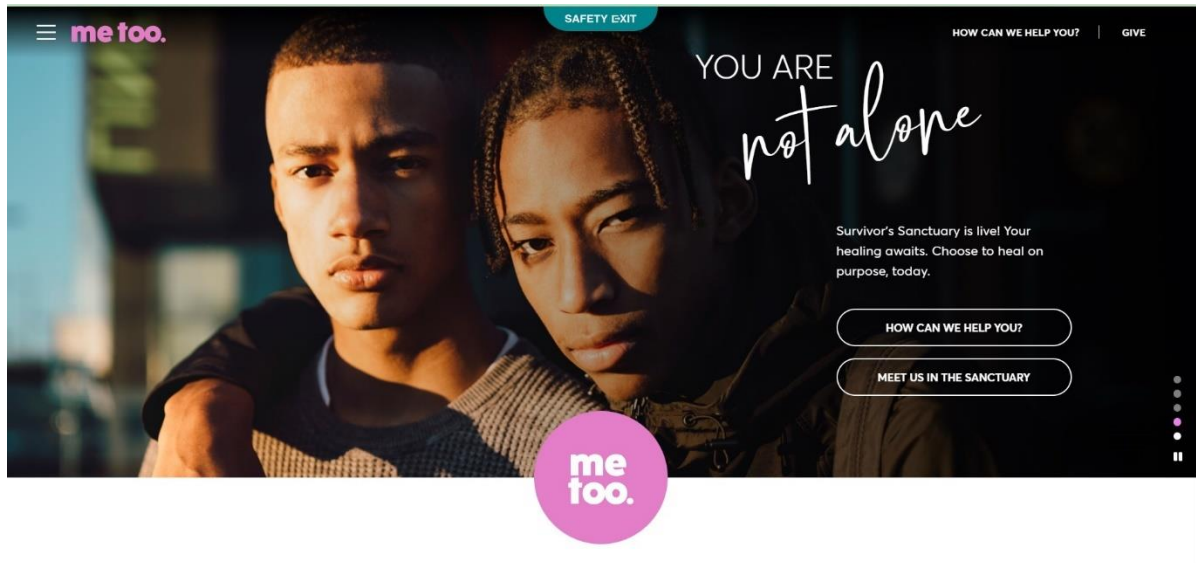
Figure 1 – *MeTooEP* website homepage

Source: <https://metooep.com>

The first thing you see when entering the website is an image of blue, pink, and yellow flowers, above the name of the website. On the top of the page there are five main sections labeled *who we are*; *sign the pledge*; *about sexual harassment*; *get help*; and *share your story*, in this order. Scrolling down the main page we find the testimonies available to be read. In total there were 20 testimonies at the time of my data selection (November 2020), with usually short and anonymous stories whose titles often start with “The time ...”, followed most of the times by the pronoun ‘I’ or ‘he’. Most of the stories are of sexual assault (16), only four of them have rape as a factor.

On the other hand, the *me too.* website has a design that focuses on the victims and reassures them that they are not alone.

Figure 2 – *me too.* website homepage



Source: <https://metoomvmt.org/>

The first noticeable thing is the image that takes the whole initial layout of the page. In it there is a close-up photo of two people next to each other, where the one on the left has the right arm behind the neck of their friend, resting it on the friend's right shoulder. However, this background image changes, showing five alternating images. On the central top of the page there is a safety exit button; on the right, in medium sized letters, it is written *You are not alone*, followed by *Survivor's Sanctuary is live! Your healing awaits. Choose to heal on purpose, today*. Under this are two button sections *How can we help you?* and *meet us in the Sanctuary*. In order to get to the testimonies part of the website, it is necessary to click on the menu button on the top left side, then click on the *Explore Healing* section, and finally choose the *Telling our truths* option. In this part there are testimonies, which are longer than the ones presented in the *MeTooEP*; a second difference is that the stories include the name of the writers, and a third difference is that most of the time the stories are not testimonies, but a guide to help others recover from their own trauma in different ways. The way the data were selected will be explained in the following subsection.

### 3.1.2 Procedures for data selection

Considering that the testimonies on both websites are limited in number (42 available on the *MeTooEP* website and 13 on the *me too* website) the stories were read one by one to choose the most relevant ones for this research. In order to be considered significant, the testimonies needed to contain specific characteristics, which were: a) the story had to be written by a woman (keeping in mind that this research focuses on women as victims of sexual violence); b) the texts had to report emotions, not just an exposition of the matters; and c) the stories had to be coherent. Following these criteria, the search resulted in the selection of 20 testimonies. After that, the testimonies were divided into four main clusters considering if the victim was alone or not during the violence or not. Therefore, Cluster A contains two testimonies that do not specify whether the victim was alone or not; Cluster B contains six testimonies in which the victims were with one or more people through the violence; Cluster C contains eight testimonies in which the victims were alone, and is subdivided in two subgroups: 1. alone somewhere (with 5 testimonies) and 2. alone in the elevator (with three testimonies); and Cluster D contains four testimonies in which the victims were alone and rape was a factor as well. This division was chosen to make the analysis and the reading of this thesis less strenuous, considering the number of testimonies analyzed.

### **3.1.3 Categories for data analysis**

As discussed in subsection 2.3.3 =, the main approach that will be used for the analysis of the testimonies is appraisal. Why appraisal? Why emotions? Whenever there is a report of sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, or any other type of sexual violence, the people who suffered from it, who maybe died because of it, become a percentage added to other percentages, they become a number in a long list of other victims. Whenever someone hears a story about a woman who was raped, or a woman who was harassed, or a woman who was assaulted, other stories start to come up and piled up. It can be a story of a close friend, or of a family member, or a story of the neighbor next door. No matter how close or distant the relation with the person is, their story becomes another story about an unlucky person, with added 'if' comments: 'if she had not drunk'; 'if she was wearing something else'; 'if she had tried to fight

back'; or 'at least...' comments: 'at least he did not hit her'; 'at least she did not have a gun to her head'; 'at least she was not raped'; 'at least she is not dead'.

The 'if' comments add blame to the person who suffered the abuse, and the 'at least' comments send a message that the victim should be glad the violence was not worse. The victims of violence become another story to tell, another number on a percentage of violence, another unlucky number. Barely anyone talks about how the victim felt; how she is managing all the emotions bottled up inside of her; barely anyone tries to listen and understand what the victim went through, because the majority of people are concerned with the 'ifs' and the 'at leasts'. I chose to analyze the testimonies using the appraisal framework because I wanted to somehow 'translate' what the women are expressing in their testimonies overtly and covertly. Because I wanted to listen and to translate it in a way that people can read and see beyond the 'ifs' and the 'at leasts', in a way that people can read and relate to how each of the victims expresses their feelings about the violence they suffered. Not because I think people should go through that experience, but because to understand what lies underneath the surface it is necessary to listen to what has been said, or to read what has been written without a judging gaze but with an empathetic mind. And the appraisal system has provided me with the tools to try and do that within a method, since appraisal

[...] is concerned with the interpersonal in language, with the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate. [...] It is concerned with the construction by texts of communities of shared feelings and values, and with the linguistic mechanism for the sharing of emotions, tastes and normative assessments. (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.1).

As already said in the subsection 2.3.3 *Appraisal*, the main category to be used in the analysis is attitude, which "is concerned with our feelings, including emotional reaction, judgements of behaviour and evaluation of things." (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.35), and is subdivided in other three categories *affect*, *judgement*, and *appreciation*. Although all emotions reported in the testimonies will be categorized according to the attitude system, the ones that are reported by the writer/victim in relation to her aggressor will be analyzed in greater detail beyond their simple categorization. The ones that do not have this association will be categorized (as explained ahead in this section), but they will not be on the center of the analysis.

Affect deals with the registration of *positive* and *negative* feelings, and this duality is specified in the three subcategories of affect that are introduced in opposing pairs: *unhappiness/happiness*, unhappiness can be reported as *misery* or as *antipathy*, and happiness as *cheer* or *affection*; *insecurity/security*, the first one can be reported as *disquiet* or as *surprise*,

and the second one as *confidence* or as *trust*; *dissatisfaction/satisfaction*, dissatisfaction can be reported as *ennui* or as *displeasure*, and satisfaction as *interest* or *pleasure*. The name of each subcategory speaks for itself in terms of definition, and some emotions may fit into more than one subcategory. Next, the emotions can be categorized as *behavioral surge* or *mental process/state*; emotions reported through a physical reaction, such as ‘with tears in my eyes’ or ‘I curled up in a ball’ are categorized as a behavioral surge, while emotions reported using a word to describe it, such as ‘I am happy’ or ‘I felt uncomfortable’ are categorized as mental processes/states.

The emotions can also be reported as *in reaction to other* or as an *undirected mood*: when the cause of the emotion is specified that emotion is categorized as in reaction to others, whereas when the cause of the emotion is not disclosed it is categorized as an undirected mood; they can be graded as *low*, *medium*, and *high* emotions according to the choice of adjective to report it, for example, using the adjective *down* implies a low kind of emotion, using the adjective *sad* implies a medium kind of emotion, whilst using the adjective *miserable* implies a high kind of emotion.

Therefore, throughout the analysis, the parts of the testimonies containing attitudinal categorizations will be highlighted. This highlighting was not present in the originals. Here is an example of how that will look like and of how the categories presented above will be applied to the emotion reported: ‘I got angry and insisted he leave’ (Testimony C5), the highlighted part reports a negative affect of unhappiness as antipathy, as a mental process in reaction to other. Therefore, the first information is whether the emotion is an affect, judgement, or appreciation. Next, since we are dealing with affect in this part, it will be informed if the emotion is positive or negative, of which subcategory it is a part of; whether it is a behavioral surge or a mental process/state; and finally, if it is in reaction to others or an undirected mood.

Now, judgement deals with the evaluation of people’s attitudes in relation to their character and behavior. This category is also divided in *positive* or *negative* judgements, and it is subdivided in two subcategories: *social esteem* and *social sanction*.

**Social esteem** tends to be policed in the oral culture, through chat, gossip, jokes and stories of various kinds [...]. **Social sanction** on the other hand is more often codified in writing, as edicts, decrees, rules, regulations and laws about how to behave as surveilled by church and state [...]. (MARTIN & WHITE. 2005, p. 52).

Social esteem can be divided in three more branches: *normality* (how unusual), *capacity* (how capable), and *tenacity* (how resolute); while social sanction is divided in two more branches: *veracity* (how truthful) and *propriety* (how ethical).

To illustrate how the categorization of judgement will look like in the analysis here is an example of it in a sentence from one of the testimonies: ‘The man is still around, sometimes **staring aggressively at me.**’ (Testimony B1); the highlighted part reports a negative judgement of social esteem in terms of normality, and also a negative judgement of social sanction in terms of propriety. First, it is specified whether the emotion is positive or negative, then it is indicated if it concerns affect, judgement, or appreciation. Next, since this part is dealing with judgement, it is informed if it is social sanction or social esteem and, then, the specific branch to which the emotion applies. Just like in affect, in here there is the possibility of an emotion being categorized as more than one type of judgement, when that is the case, both will be mentioned (as exemplified in the stretch above).

Appreciation has to do with the “[...] evaluation of ‘things’, especially things we make and performances we give, but also including natural phenomena [...]” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p. 56). This category, as well as the previous one, can be divided into positive and negative emotions considering their specificity; that is, whether they are a *reaction in impact* or in *quality*; a *composition in balance* or in *complexity*; or a *valuation*. To illustrate how this category will be applied here is an example in a sentence: ‘here in Brussels, **beautiful people, beautiful environment.**’ (Testimony A2), through the use of ‘beautiful’ the writer/victim reports a positive appreciation as a reaction in quality.

The next chapter contains the analysis and categorization of all the emotions, as exemplified in this section, and further discussion about them will take place.

#### 4 ANALYSIS OF THE TESTIMONIES

This chapter handles the analysis of the testimonies, taking into consideration the theories presented in the previous chapters. As informed in the methodological chapter, this section will be divided into four clusters, even though the analysis is done in the same way for all. For the analysis, first the testimony will be presented with highlighted parts. These parts are the ones that will be attributed a category, according to the appraisal framework. Second, the



analysis of the given testimony follows, along with the reference to the highlighted parts and the detailed attributed category. After every testimony goes through this process, the findings gathered from them are compared, disclosing similarities and differences in each cluster before the final conclusion in which all the testimonies are taken into account.

The titles of the testimonies present first the word ‘Testimony’ followed by the letter representing the cluster in which the testimony was placed followed by a number, which corresponds to the position within the cluster, as the example shows ‘Testimony A1 – *The one who spread fake stories*’. This is an structure choice to organize the testimonies within this research, what follows ‘Testimony A1’, for example, is the original title attributed by the writer of the testimony under analysis. Any type of emphasis found on the testimonies (or the titles), be it bold, italics, or the use of capital letters, as well as spelling and grammar mistakes were maintained as in the original. Highlighted in yellow are the parts of the testimony containing attitudinal categorizations. This highlighting was not present in the originals.

#### 4.1 CLUSTER A – testimonies of sexually assaulted victims where it is not specified whether the aggression happened around others or not

##### Testimony A1 – *The one who spread fake stories* (April 9, 2019)

I have been working in this institution for 2 years now. I started as an intern in a political group. This was my **first ‘serious’ position, but I had no friends inside or outside the institution in this city.** A man working for my group approach me and started talking with me. I thought **‘Great! A nice person inside this huge place’**. After some time I noticed, he wanted something more, so I introduce him to my boyfriend **in order to get him to stop making a move on me.**

A year later, two colleagues ask me if I have had sex with the same man working for our group. **Apparently, he had told half of the group about a ‘secret sexual relation’ between us. Never ever had this happened between us.** I told him to stop spreading lies about me, **and ever since, he has not helped me with a file.** Looks like he only works with girls that accept his fake sex stories.

(Source: MeTooEP)

The title of this testimony brings the attention of the writer to the harasser and what he had done. Although the title does not report any overt emotion, the adjective ‘fake’ can be interpreted as a negative judgment of social sanction in veracity towards the one who spread the news. The writer starts her narrative by stating how long she has been working at the place, what position she had at first and the fact that she did not have friends at the city she was living in. It can be inferred that she decided to expose this last fact as an explanation to why, at first, she was excited by the man’s approach. That may be the reason she welcomed it without hesitation. This excitement is expressed in the sentence ‘I thought ‘Great! A nice person inside this huge place’’. Although she did not use any words to report overtly how she felt about it, her excitement is perceived by the conveying of her thought, therefore, it can be analyzed as a positive affect of satisfaction as pleasure, also of happiness as cheer, and as a mental process in reaction to other.

The excitement is, however, subdued before long – ‘after some time’ – when she ‘noticed he wanted something more’. Nowhere in her narrative does she expose openly what the man did or what kind of behaviors he had in order for her to notice he wanted something more. Maybe she chose not to be open about her observations or maybe she could not find the words to explain how she noticed it. This last possibility is something recurring for women, noticing that there is something more in someone’s behavior; or in the way they say certain things; or in how they treat women; these are subtle things that can happen daily and leave women without words to explain exactly what it was that made them uncomfortable or wary, but they still notice. And sometimes is not a matter of subtlety, it is a matter of a behavior that has being deemed normal among men, that is why women should not be going around making a big deal out of it.

What she chooses to do after noticing that the man wanted something more is to present him to her boyfriend – ‘I introduce him to my boyfriend in order to get him to stop making a move on me’’. In this stretch, although the writer again did not report any emotion overtly, the fact that she wanted the man to ‘stop making a move on’ her implies dissatisfaction and unhappiness, therefore, it is reporting a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, also of unhappiness as antipathy, as a mental process in reaction to other. In the same stretch she also points out two things: the man was making a move on her and she no longer wanted him to do that; and in order to make him stop she decided to introduce him to her boyfriend. Another type of experience that women go through often is saying no to a man’s approach and not being

listened to. That is why many women (in which the writer of this testimony is included) choose to introduce or mention the existence of another men, because men respect men more than they do women. Moreover, as Marilyn Frye argues:

To say that straight men are heterosexual is only to say that they engage in sex (fucking) exclusively with (or upon or to) the other sex, i.e., women. All or almost all of that which pertains to love, most straight men reserve exclusively for other men. The people whom they admire, respect, adore, revere, honor, whom they imitate, idolize and form profound attachments to, whom they are willing to teach and from whom they are willing to learn, and whose respect, admiration, recognition, honor, reverence and love they desire... those are, overwhelmingly, other men. [...]. From women they want devotion, service and sex. (FRYE, 1983, p.134-135).

The excerpt above clarifies why it is more effective for women to use a man's existence in order to stop another man's forwardness. Since the writer did not declare whether or not her attempt was successful, it is possible to assume that it was, considering that her next paragraph refers to something that happened a year after those events, and if her attempt was not successful it is presumable that she would have mentioned it in addition to another event she would have gone through because of the harasser.

In her last paragraph she states that two of her colleagues asked her if she 'have had sex with the same man working for [their] group.'. And she continued '**Apparently, he had told half of the group about a 'secret sexual relation' between us. Never ever had this happened between us.**'. The aggressor tried to make a move on her, and upon being unsuccessful he started spreading stories. According to what she wrote in the end of her testimony, she was not the only woman about whom the aggressor spread fake stories 'I told him to stop spreading lies about me, **and ever since, he has not helped me with a file.** Looks like he only works with girls that accept his fake sex stories.'. The writer chose to confront her aggressor in order to get him to stop, as a consequence he no longer helped her with work-related things. The aggressor was the one to be using the work environment to be forward towards women, but when one of them put a stop to it, he opted to act more unprofessionally by not helping her any longer.

Testimony A2 – *The time a high-ranking official asked me to wear tight clothes because he liked my body* (November 5, 2018)

I was enjoying my traineeship at one of the EU Institutions, here in Brussels, beautiful people, beautiful environment.

I was already accustomed to the always present look by older men as this was not my first experience in the “EU bubble” and I couldn’t be too bothered. Then, one day something happened which was more annoying than usual.

I received an invitation to a private party on my work email from a high-ranking official, who did not work in my unit. In his invitation, **the man was clearly suggested what kind of clothes I should wear to the party because he particularly enjoyed the view of some of my body’s part in the suggested outfit.**

In the beginning, I just couldn’t believe **someone I didn’t even know** would make such an offensive reference in an email sent **directly to my work email.**

Admittedly, I didn’t think the episode **itself was very bad,** but I still reported it to my supervisor. I’d encourage everyone to do the same, even if we feel it’s something small or not too important or that it won’t matter.

(Source: MeTooEP)

This writer specified her assailant’s job status in the title – *‘The time a high-ranking official asked me to wear tight clothes because he liked my body’* –. Here there is hierarchy as a part of the violence. The writer chose to state who was her assailant by referring to his job title, then, what he did and why. In her title she was the object of the sentence while the assailant was the subject.

She started her narrative by stating how she felt about her job and by assessing how she felt about the country she was working at ‘I was enjoying my traineeship at one of the EU Institutions, here in Brussels, beautiful people, beautiful environment.’. Through the use of ‘beautiful’ she reports a positive appreciation as a reaction in quality. Then, the writer remarks on how common it is for a woman to be observed and looked at by ‘older men’ – ‘I was already accustomed to the always present look by older men as this was not my first experience in the ‘EU bubble’ and I couldn’t be too bothered.’. It is important to remember also what has been already discussed, about the fact that public places did not use to be a place for women, therefore, working at a male dominated area women become used to the always present male gaze. The fact that something is common and seen as normal does not mean it should be accepted. Women everywhere should be respected as professionals, workers, mothers, or just as people. But by the way they are treated it gives the impression that they are not just people

they are adornments that need to be looked at constantly to earn their value. Therefore, they also need to look good to deserve to be observed.

Still in the sentence mentioned above, the writer said ‘I couldn’t be too bothered’, in this case the intensifier ‘too’ allows the presumption that she was at least somewhat bothered but that was not the major thing that bothered her. And then she wrote ‘Then, one day something happened which was **more annoying than usual.**’ This is not the only writer who first referred to something that was annoying or difficult in relation to their assailant, but not the worst thing to happen or at least something that they were able to manage or endure. And then, they start the narrative on the violence that traumatized them, by saying ‘then one day...’. This writer wrote ‘something more annoying than usual’, therefore, it was something different from what she was used to dealing with. She is also implying that other kinds of violence are common. By using ‘more annoying’ the writer reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a mental state in reaction to other, since she did not just become annoyed for no reason.

She continued her narrative by writing ‘I received an invitation to a private party on my work email from a high ranking official, who did not work in my unit.’, something to be remarked in this sentence is the fact that she clarified that her assailant ‘did not work in [her] unit’. Then she goes on ‘In his invitation, **the man was clearly suggested what kind of clothes I should wear to the party because he particularly enjoyed the view of some of my body’s part in the suggested outfit.**’. Therefore, a man from outside her unit felt comfortable to send her an invitation through her work email making suggestive remarks on what she should wear. The writer opted not to tell exactly what her assailant wrote on the email, instead she wrote about what she perceived from it. However, from what can be inferred from her narrative, her assailant’s insinuations were obvious enough since she said ‘he was clearly suggest[ing]’. This is another testimony that shows a man feeling entitled to openly give his assessment over a woman’s body (a coworker’s body). This assailant used a work email as an excuse to harass a coworker.

In her next paragraph she said ‘In the beginning, I just couldn’t believe **someone I didn’t even know** would make **such an offensive reference** in an email sent **directly to my work email.**’. In this excerpt, she reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in impact with the intensifier ‘such’, through the use of ‘such an offensive reference’, and also a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety, since she wrote ‘I couldn’t believe **someone I didn’t**

**even know**', inferring a criticism towards the behavior of her aggressor. She also highlighted that she did not know her assailant and that he made 'an offensive reference' directly to her work email. Her use of 'even' signals her indignation to the fact that he did not know her and still made the 'offensive reference', giving the impression that if he knew her there would be some justification for his behavior.

Then she wrote 'Admittedly, I didn't think the episode itself was **very bad**, but I still reported it to my supervisor.'. By the use of noun phrase 'very bad' the writer reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in impact with the intensifier 'very'. Although, she said 'it was not very bad', it means it was at some level bad. It is important to emphasize once more that there is no 'not that bad', there is no ruler to measure the levels of badness in an act of violence, going through whatever type of violence is already bad enough. The writer did not say what was the outcome of her report or if it had had any type of outcome so far.

She ended her narrative by encouraging people to report no matter how they feel about the violence they have been through: 'I'd encourage everyone to do the same, even if we feel it's something small or not too important or that it won't matter.'

#### **4.1.1 Conclusion for cluster A**

The emotions reported throughout both narratives in cluster A are mainly negative. There are two positive emotions reported as well, the first one is in testimony A1 and it refers to the narrator's belief that maybe she had found a nice person at her work place, which proved to be a wrong idea considering the rest of her narrative; and the second positive emotion is in testimony A2 and it refers to the victim's evaluation of the people and the environment of the country she was living at, which had nothing to do with her assailant.

Only the writer of the second testimony informed that she reported the violence; the author of testimony A1 did not talk about any type of report or complaint she might have filed.

The adjectives used to report emotion were not many and although the majority was negative, they were relatively mild terms which did not report insecurity in the form of fear, anger, shame, or even discomfort. Neither of the writers mentioned if the events changed something in the way they behaved or not, or if they had negative feelings that lingered after the episode.

#### 4.2 CLUSTER B – testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened around one or more people

In this section it is presented and analyzed the testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened around one or more people beyond the victim and the aggressor.

##### Testimony B1 – *The time I was at lunch* (May 22, 2019)

I was at the entrance of the canteen of my building with a colleague one day. It was 12:00 o'clock, there was no one around yet. Just me and my colleague chatting before entering the canteen. A man approached and physically pushed me aside just to reach the compartmental waste bin to throw his chewing gum. I asked him why he thought it was necessary to push me. He then verbally assaulted me by telling me that I didn't know how to behave like a lady, that I was just a cunt. I was in shock, and I proceeded to ask him what kind of language was he using. He answered: You heard me. For two weeks I was afraid to go eat in my canteen in the SQM building. And I finally only got an appointment with the psychologist at the EP Medical service one month later. The man is still around, sometimes staring aggressively at me. I'm not even sure if this is a harassment or not, but I find it disturbing that he still looks at me through his forehead and shakes his head as if I was a piece of shit to be thrown that can be thrown in the waste bin.

(Source: MeTooEP)

The writer's choice of title – '*The time I was at lunch*' – states a trivial event, a 'lunch', with no mention to the aggression she went through or the man who assaulted her. She starts her narrative – 'I was at the entrance of the canteen of my building with a colleague one day. It was 12:00 o'clock, there was no one around yet. Just me and my colleague chatting before entering the canteen.' – by situating the readers, telling them where, what time and with whom she was when the assault took place. Then she wrote 'A man approached and physically pushed me aside just to reach the compartmental waste bin to throw his chewing gum. I asked him why he thought it was necessary to push me.' Although she does not express any type of emotion, she states that he 'pushed her aside *just* to reach the waste bin'. By the use of 'just', and also by

the rest of her narrative, it is possible to infer that she disapproved of the way the man acted to achieve his goal. Therefore, it reports a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety.

In The stretch ‘I asked him why he thought it was necessary to push me’, there is an attempt at understanding the aggressivity used, pointing out to how women tend to look for a reason that would explain the violence exercised. And her question is met with more violence, this time verbal, ‘He then verbally assaulted me by telling me that I didn’t know how to behave like a lady, that I was just a cunt.’. The highlighted parts show two negative judgements of social sanction in propriety, this time the aggressor evaluating the writer’s propriety. It is important to emphasize that the woman asked a question about the reason for the aggressivity and she was addressed with even more aggression than before. There is shock expressed in this testimony in ‘I was in shock’, and I proceeded to ask him what kind of language was he using. He answered: You heard me.’. This reaction reports a negative affect of insecurity as a surprise, a mental state in reaction to another.

In the stretch ‘For two weeks I was afraid to go eat in my canteen in the SQM building.’ the highlighted part reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other. It denotes insecurity, since the narrator declares to be ‘afraid’ of eating in the place she was assaulted. This exemplifies the trauma that can take place in people’s lives after going through violence, which can affect their quality of life and how they exist/perform in the world. In the sentence ‘The man is still around, sometimes staring aggressively at me.’ the highlighted part reports a negative judgement of social esteem in terms of normality, and also a negative judgement of social sanction in terms of propriety. While the writer is the one who has to deal with the aftermath of the violence, the aggressor appears to feel entitled to his anger because she decided not to just ignore his behavior, but confront it. This is an indicator of why many women consider it easier to simply ignore the violence than to speak up about it.

The first assertion the writer makes – ‘I’m not even sure if this is a harassment or not’ – alludes to something that has already been tackled in this research, how many people are unsure about what can be considered assault, harassment, rape, and other types of gender violence and sexual violence. If a person does not know if what she is going/went through is violence, she will probably not look for help. In the stretch ‘I find it disturbing that he still looks at me through his forehead and shakes his head as if I was a piece of shit to be thrown that can be thrown in the waste bin’ the writer reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in quality and also a negative judgement of social esteem in normality, since she is criticizing the performance of the aggressor, therefore, criticizing him as well. To better understand the reach



of sexual violence, it is crucial to consider how often women have to deal with violence. Taking this testimony as an example, the woman not only goes through one traumatic experience in the cafeteria, she relives it every time she considers going to the canteen, and she still has to deal with the man's aggressiveness when she sees him around. It is easy to try to comfort victims of violence by saying that everything is going to be ok because that 'one' event is over, but they still have to live with it every day inside of them, no matter how long ago the assault took place.

Testimony B2 – *The time I received an unwanted hug* (April 24, 2019)

*During my first week of my internship at the European Parliament, I was warned that a certain MEP (also known as a head of a religious organization) is a "harasser" and that I should try to avoid being alone with him. Sometime later, I was chatting with another intern in my mother tongue in the elevator. Suddenly the MEP that I had been warned about entered the elevator. He looked at me and wanted to know who I am, who I work for and chatted me up in other ways. Before I could leave the elevator, he gave me a hug without asking for my permission. He was later fired from the position at his church for repeated sexually inappropriate behaviour.*

(Source: MeTooEP)

It is possible to start the analysis with the title 'The time I received an unwanted hug', which reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in quality, and also a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety, considering that the victim is criticizing the performance of the aggressor, therefore, criticizing him as well. The title refers to the writer – I – and to the disapproving action – unwanted hug. She starts her narrative by informing when she was 'warned' about a MEP that was known as being a harasser and then she tells the event that occurred to her. Therefore, people knew about the man being improper in a place of work and still that was not enough reason for him to get fired earlier. Throughout her narrative she does not report open emotions or even her state of mind during the event, but actions in a chronological order. However, she reports a covert emotion in the sentence highlighted – he gave me a hug without asking my permission –, therefore, an 'unwanted hug', as the title presents, which can be analyzed as, again, a negative judgement of social sanction.

The writer informs in her last sentence – ‘He was later fired from the position at his church for repeated **sexually inappropriate behaviour.**’ – the fact that the men who assaulted her was later fired for his ‘repeated sexually inappropriate behaviour’ indicates a negative judgement of social sanction of propriety. The writer does not specify whether she reported his behavior towards her or not. The fact that when she started working at the European Parliament the man was already known as a harasser is evidence that his inappropriate behavior was already known and yet it took a while before he was fired.

Testimony B3 – *The one who wanted to show off his dance moves* (April 2, 2019)

A couple of months ago, me and my colleagues were having a drink at our own office. After a few drinks, my colleague started **to make flirty remarks**. At first, I did not take much notice of it. However, when the evening turned into night and after a few more drinks, **he started to dance around me**. He even tried **to hump me**, and he obviously got somewhat aroused.

**I felt very uncomfortable, and had to push him away. Still, he did not get the message, so I had to defend myself and tried to push him away.** Finally, he took off. The next day he pretended as if nothing happened. **This encounter left me with a deep sense of unease,** and I am still dealing with these feelings up to this day.

(Source: MeTooEP)

The writer of this testimony chose to mention in the title the assailant and, instead of referring to the violence she endured, she mentioned what he did as if it was not an act of violence, as if he was only trying to show off his dance moves – ‘The one who wanted to show off his dance moves’.

She starts her narrative by situating the reader in terms of context: ‘A couple of months ago, me and my colleagues were having a drink at our own office.’. When she wrote the testimony it had not been more than a few months since it had happened. Through this stretch she informs when it happened, where they were (the office) and what they were doing (drinking). Also, in the previous stretch the writer informs she was having a drink with her colleagues, therefore, more than one person was there. However, the rest of her narrative refers only to the assailant and no one else, giving the impression that she was alone with him. Something that adds to the assumption that she was alone is the fact that she wrote next

(referring to the violence) ‘my colleague’, she did not say ‘one of my colleagues’ for example, which would indicate more people. Despite those inferences, this testimony is being considered as if she was around more people and not just the assailant, given her first sentence that mentions more than one colleague,

Next, she states ‘After a few drinks, my colleague started **to make flirty remarks**. At first, I did not take much notice of it. However, when the evening turned into night and after a few more drinks, **he started to dance around me**.’ She informs the reader that she ‘did not take much notice of it’, she does not say why though. It is possible to assume that maybe she thought he was joking or maybe that was not the first situation in which he ‘made flirty remarks’. However, when it became darker outside and he started dancing around her that took her notice. It is probable that it was not only the dancing that made her notice his behavior more, but specially because he was dancing around her

Taking into consideration only the title of her testimony, we could assume that the violence was him dancing around her, since she focuses her title on him showing off his dance moves; however, her next sentence proves this assumption wrong ‘He even tried **to hump me**, and he obviously got somewhat aroused’. To this point the writer had not reported any type of emotion, but then she wrote ‘I felt **very uncomfortable**, and **had to push him away**’. The word ‘uncomfortable’ reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other because she was feeling uncomfortable due to him trying to hump her and getting ‘somewhat aroused’. And the ‘push away’ reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a behavioral surge in a reaction to other. Although she did not verbalize the fact that she was not satisfied with his attitude, her pushing him away is a manner of conveying that message in a non-verbal form. She then narrates the need to push him away once again ‘**Still, he did not get the message**, so I had to **defend myself** and **tried to push him away**.’. When she said he did not get the message she probably meant he did not stop dancing around her and/or humping her. And adding to that she said ‘I had to defend myself’, reporting a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other, by saying she had to defend herself she is conveying the message that she did not feel safe, therefore, the need to defend herself.

She ended her testimony by stating that ‘Finally, he took off. The next day he pretended as if nothing happened.’. The word ‘finally’ indicates relief and that she was waiting for his

departure somewhat anxiously. The writer did not specify the amount of alcohol they had both consumed, but she clearly did not forget what happened. Her aggressor acting as if nothing had happened is something that acts in his favor, since by pretending nothing happened, he can resume their relationship without having to acknowledge that he had overstepped the limits of their work relationship, and also without the need to change, although this is only in regards to him, since it did change things for her. As the writer remarks ‘**This encounter left me with a deep sense of unease**, and I am still dealing with these feelings up to this day.’ The expression ‘sense of unease’ reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other, since her uneasiness is caused by his behavior towards her. And she ended this stretch by stating that, even though the event occurred over a couple of months prior to her posting of the testimony, she is ‘still dealing with the feelings up to this day’. This part is an example of how the marks an act of violence (no matter the type) can be carried by the victims over days, months, years on end. It does not matter if the occurrence is in the past or if the victim does not suffer any other violence from the hands of the same aggressor, she still has to relive what happened and deal with the emotions left by that violence.

Testimony B4 – *The time I felt trapped* (March 19, 2019)

It happened when I had started as an intern. I went out with a group of colleagues and my partner. We had drinks and then headed out to a bar, all was fine. But **when I was left alone**, whilst others were getting drinks or at the toilets, one particular colleague came up from behind me and **put his hands under my top and grabbed me on my bare skin**. This was **totally unwelcome**, I hadn’t even spoken to him and **I was angry**, so **I pushed him off me**. I avoided him all night, walking off whenever he attempted to talk to me, but at no point could I get my partner alone to tell him. Then, when the time came for us all to get taxis home, he forced his way in to the taxi that my boyfriend and I were sharing. But instead of sitting in the front, he insisted on sitting in the back with us. I was in the middle between the two. **Then out of nowhere**, he started caressing my leg, again with no dialogue, just **touching**. I clung on to my boyfriend who hadn’t noticed as it was dark, **I felt trapped because I couldn’t escape such an uncomfortable situation**. It was **great relief** when the taxi dropped him off first.

Later on **I was angry** at myself for having not said anything in the taxi, but I think **I was so shocked** having never experienced something like that. The next week at work, he

came looking for me, but I wasn't in my office at the time, instead a colleague was. He had asked if I had had his coat, almost framing it in a way, as if we had gone home together that night.

(Source: MeTooEP)

The title of this testimony 'The time **I felt trapped**', remarks on an emotion the writer had during the violence she narrated in her testimony. It reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process, just by the title it is not possible to say if it is as a reaction to other or an undirected mood. However, taking into consideration what is already known through the rest of her testimony, it can be said it is in reaction to other, since it is the presence of the aggressor that put her in that state of mind. In her title the writer puts herself as the subject of the sentence and she describes how she felt during the aggression, without referring to the aggressor at all.

The writer starts her narrative by situating the reader – 'It happened when I had started as an intern. I went out with a group of colleagues and my partner. We had drinks and then headed out to a bar, all was fine'. She informs the reader that she just started her job as an intern, therefore, not yet a member of the European Parliament. She pointed out that the violence started once she 'was left alone'. She said 'one particular colleague came up from behind me and **put his hands under my top and grabbed me on my bare skin.**'. It is possible to assume that she did not see the man approaching her, since she states he 'came up from behind'. Even if she does not specify which parts of her body he touched, she openly stated not having allowed or accepted such approach in her next sentence 'This **was totally unwelcome**', which reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in quality with the addition of the intensifier 'totally', and also a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety.

The writer clarifies that '[she] hadn't even spoken to him and [she] **was angry** so [she] **pushed him off** [her].'. At no time had they exchanged words, yet the man felt comfortable enough to approach her and touch her body as if he were entitled to it. In this sentence, the writer reports a negative affect of unhappiness as antipathy, as a mental process in reaction to other with the word 'angry' and then a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other by using the phrase 'I pushed him off'.

Following that part, the writer informs the reader ‘I avoided him all night, walking off whenever he attempted to talk to me, but at no point could I get my partner alone to tell him.’. The way she informs the reader of the actions she took to prevent the aggressor from approaching her shows that she demonstrated her dissatisfaction through action (at least she did not inform the reader on anything she might have said as well). Despite her attempts at keeping her distance, he kept trying to orbit around her anyways. Through her narrative it can be inferred that her objective was to inform her boyfriend about the assailant’s behavior so he would keep an eye on him as well or would do something about it. But she did not find the opportunity to talk to her boyfriend. Interesting enough, the writer was sexually assaulted by one of her colleagues at a public place with other people around, and despite her being in her right to call him off in front of others she kept trying to be discreet about informing it to her boyfriend.

She continued her narrative by saying that when getting taxis home ‘he forced his way in to the taxi that [her] boyfriend and [she] were sharing. But instead of sitting in the front, he insisted on sitting in the back with [them]. I was in the middle between the two.’. Inside the taxi the writer again assaulted by the aggressor ‘**Then out of nowhere, he started caressing my leg, again with no dialogue, just touching.** I clung on to my boyfriend who hadn’t noticed as it was dark, **I felt trapped because I couldn’t escape such an uncomfortable situation**’. She pointed out two things for a second time since she started her narrative. First, she reinforced that the aggressor again just touched her without saying anything, and second, that she was, in a way, trying to reach her boyfriend for safety. When at the bar, she tried talking to her boyfriend, unsuccessfully, about the assailant; and in the taxi she reached over to him, even if she was not trying to say something verbally, she was reaching for him in the way she could. When the writer wrote ‘Then out of nowhere’, although she does not report any overt emotion in this stretch, the fact that she used the expression ‘out of nowhere’ implies surprise, therefore, reporting a negative affect of insecurity as surprise, as a mental state in reaction to other.

The writer wrote ‘I felt trapped’ reporting, then, a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other. And she also used the term ‘an uncomfortable situation’ which reinforces the emotions reported previously.

Her next paragraph reports her first and only positive emotion, which is in relation to her assailant getting out of the taxi – ‘It **was great relief** when the taxi dropped him off first.’. The term ‘a great relief’ reports a positive affect of happiness as cheer, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier ‘great’. Her relief apparently was a momentarily emotion, considering that she stated next ‘Later on I **was angry** at myself for having not said anything in

the taxi, but I think I **was so shocked** having never experienced something like that.’. In this sentence through the use of the term ‘angry’ the writer reports a negative affect of unhappiness as antipathy, as a mental state in reaction to other. And then, through the use of the phrase ‘I was so shocked’, she reports a negative affect of insecurity as surprise, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier ‘so’.

Another thing to be noted in her testimony is the fact that she stated not having experienced something like that before. Considering the other writers who have referred to being in a state of ‘shock’ as well, it can be inferred that these victims sometimes did not react or did not know exactly what to do because they were caught off guard. Taking as example the writer of this testimony, who was not thinking that she might be sexually assaulted by a colleague at a place full of other people, including her boyfriend, therefore, explaining the shock. Despite the shock they feel the majority of times the victims opt not to report the aggression nor during neither after it takes place. This points to the fact that even though something that should not have happened did happen, the victims do not feel comfortable enough to disclose the aggression or to speak up about it. This emphasizes the need there is for a safer environment in which the word of the victim is not questioned at every step, in which the fact that the victim suffered violence is enough without others pointing out why maybe she misunderstood the aggressor. In addition to that, there is also the fact that many male behaviors are often excused as jokes, as a man being a man, as a man not being able to control his impulses in the presence of a desirable woman.

The writer was angry at herself for ‘not having said anything in the taxi’. Here, it is possible to note again the victim feeling guilty for what she underwent, since she stated being angry at herself and not at the man who assaulted her. Of course, she was also angry at the aggressor, as she reported previously in her testimony. However, in the aftermath of it, she did not report negative feelings towards him, only towards herself, illustrating how it is natural for the victim to blame herself for not having done more, for not having reacted differently, for not having said something. The negative feelings towards themselves are more often in the aftermath of the occurrence when compared to the negative feelings towards the aggressor. And although she might still have negative feelings towards the aggressor in the aftermath, even though she did not write about it, it can be assumed that the negative feelings towards herself



were more intense, that is why she does not end her narrative reporting more negative feelings towards the aggressor.

Testimony B5 – *The time he humiliated me publicly for saying “enough!”* (November 15, 2018)

I’ve been working now for several years in the Parliament. I work in a male dominated policy area.

**I have a colleague who for many years, insists on kissing my cheek every time he sees me**, be it crossing each other in the corridor or at the snack bar.

Cheek kissing is common in my country, but in his it is not done, especially not every day within a workplace context.

**Many times he used the “cheek kissing opportunity” to touch something else**, such as playfully touching my neckline. **I always felt very disgusted.**

Even though I do not work directly with him, he has good relations with many of the other people, mainly men, who I work with.

One day, when he was alone, I told him that I did not want to cheek kiss anymore, as I believed that the EP was not the right place for such behaviour.

Today I was sitting in a meeting with several men he knows. He came and shook their hands. **When I offered mine, he refused.**

**Then, in front of all my colleagues, he told me that he was not shaking my hand because I said that I would not accept more cheek kissing.**

I replied by saying that **he was being impolite**, and that I would not accept **such humiliation**. He was using the cheek kissing as a pretext **for touching me in an inappropriate way**, which **made me feel uncomfortable** and I told him this.

He pulled me aside and accused me of lying, forbidding me to say anything to the other men present. He then turned to my colleagues and continued his accusations about me.

**Later, he accused me of standing up for myself because of the environment in the Parliament brought about because of this blog.**

When he finally left, my male colleagues applauded me for my reaction **to such an uncomfortable situation**. I’m sure at least one of them believed I was exaggerating by not letting the guy cheek kiss me, but the rest were very supportive.



I feel frustrated, but at least I feel also relieved for not accepting to have someone impose themselves upon me.

(Source: MeTooEP)

In the title of this testimony – ‘The time he humiliated me publicly for saying “enough!”.’ – the writer opted to refer to the assailant, to one of the acts of violence endured, and to why the violence took place. She put the aggressor as the subject of the sentence and herself as the object. She reports a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety, since she is judging his behavior towards her – ‘he humiliated me publicly’.

The writer begins her testimony by stating how long she has been working at the Parliament, and then, she talks about the colleague/assailant – ‘I have a colleague who for many years, insists on kissing my cheek every time he sees me’. She declares in this statement that she had been enduring this type of violence for many years, and she also points out that the assailant ‘insisted’ on cheek kissing her despite (as mentioned later) such cultural practice not being common in his country as it was in hers. Furthermore, she says that the colleague used the cheek kissing as a pretext for touching other parts of her body – ‘such as playfully touching my neckline’. She then reports her second overt emotion – ‘I always felt very disgusted’. She employs intensifiers – ‘always’ and ‘very’ – in addition to the adjective ‘disgusted’, which combines affect and judgment (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005). Therefore, the highlighted stretch presents a negative affect of unhappiness as antipathy, as a mental state in reaction to other and also a negative judgment of social sanction in propriety.

Next the writer decided to point out that she does not work directly with the aggressor and that the assailant has good relations with the people – ‘mainly men’ – with whom she works. She does not explain why she made this observation, but it can be inferred that it might be a justification for why she had been tolerating the assault for years. It can also be inferred that in a male dominated area the woman felt intimidated by confronting her assailant, since he had good relations with the other men; and also she did not have a refuge at her workplace, because men support other men, and she did not narrate having a group of women coworkers who could be her support, she was the minority. This adds to the risk of suffering from sexual violence, when women work at a male dominated area and men perceive women as preys, as fair game because women represent the minority in those environments.

She specifies that she waited a moment when the assailant was alone to talk to him and explained that she no longer would accept the cheek kissing as she believed it not to be an appropriate workplace behavior. After setting limits to their workplace interaction, she narrates a specific occurrence – ‘Then, in front of all my colleagues, he told me that he was not shaking my hand because I said that I would not accept more cheek kissing.’ –. Although, in this specific stretch there are no reported emotions – overtly or covertly – it’s possible to connect it to the humiliation she refers to back in the title. Considering that the assailant talked in front of all her colleagues about the matter she had made a point to discuss in private with him, being respectful by not doing it in front of others. He, on the other hand, did not grant her the same respect. And also considering the emotions she reports in the next stretch when she decided to reply to him ‘by saying that he **was being impolite**, and that [she] would not accept **such humiliation**’.

The adjective ‘impolite’, highlighted above, refers to the assailant, therefore, it is a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety. The second adjective ‘humiliation’ refers to how she viewed his behavior towards her, and although it does not report an overt emotion it can be inferred that it is a behavior she is dissatisfied with, therefore reporting a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a mental process in reaction to other. She also said to him that ‘he was using the cheek kissing as a pretext for touching [her] in **an inappropriate way**, which made [her] **feel uncomfortable**’. In this part she reports two emotions, of which the first one, reported by the use of the adjective ‘inappropriate’, refers to a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety. The second, reported by the use of the adjective ‘uncomfortable’, refers to a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other.

The next paragraph of her testimony presents the biased behavior of her assailant ‘He pulled me aside and accused me of lying, forbidding me to say anything to the other men present. He then turned to my colleagues and continued his accusations about me.’. He felt justified to accuse her in front of others, but felt victimized when she made her point also in front of others. This refers back to what has been discussed, back in the subsection ‘2.3.4 Gender, discourse and language’, about the fact that there was a time when public speaking was not done by women (BEARD, 2017). Although Beard was referring to something that was common years ago, it does not mean that it does not have roots that reach till this day. And the fact that the man in question felt entitled to silence his female colleague’s voice when she was using the same right to speak up about things, it is just another example of the influence those roots have in women’s lives when they speak up in male dominated environments.

The next stretch analyzed is not significant just because of the emotions reported, but especially because of the mention to the reaction of the male colleagues present in the occurrence. The writer says that ‘when he finally left, my male colleagues applauded me for my reaction to such **an uncomfortable situation**. I’m sure at least one of them believed I was exaggerating by not letting the guy cheek kiss me, but the rest were very supportive’. She reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other by the use of ‘uncomfortable situation’. By bringing the attention back to the colleagues mentioned in this paragraph, two things become clear. First, as narrated by woman assaulted, the ‘male colleagues’ applauded her **after** her assailant left the room. While he was present the other men respected his presence and his authority over their female coworker and, in a way, supported him by not reacting whatsoever. Then, when he left, they made a point of applauding her, but during the occurrence they respected the ‘male code’. This notion of men respecting other men but not women is discussed by Cameron (2020) and named ‘gender respect gap’. And second, she noticed that at least one of the man present thought she was exaggerating. One reason to explain why “men [are more likely] to believe that women fabricate or exaggerate sexual-harassment claims [...] [is] their lack of empathy for the victim or the victim group due to a failure to consider their perspective.” (BONGIORNO et al, 2019, p. 12). It is well-known that women are more likely than men to suffer from gender violence, therefore, men’s lack of empathy and ability to see things from women’s perspective leads them to see as an exaggeration when women make complains about the violence they are suffering.

In the last part of the testimony – ‘I **feel frustrated**, but at least I **feel also relieved** for not accepting to have someone impose themselves upon me.’ – the writer reports, with ‘I feel frustrated’, a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a mental state of an undirected mood, since she does not specify what caused her frustration. And the second emotion reported in the previous sentence is the first positive emotion reported by the writer. The stretch ‘I feel also relieved’ reports a positive affect of satisfaction as pleasure, as a mental process in reaction to other, to the fact that she stood up to herself instead of just accepting how things were.

Testimony B6 – *The time he insisted I visit his dark, remote office* (November 13, 2018)

My MEP held an event inside the EP and there was a problem with one of the services provided. After submitting a complaint, I received a phone call from the person in charge of the services, who apologised and informed me of what steps the unit would take by way of an apology.

My office phone screen was on so he could see me. **He then invited me to come for a meeting in his office, even though the telephone call were having was sufficient enough to solve the problem.** I told him this, but he was quite insistent that we meet face to face.

I **felt a little weird** and I asked my female colleague, a finance officer, to join me, which she kindly did.

**His office was located at a very remote part of the Parliament.**

During the meeting he told me that **he wanted to meet with me because he thought that I was “nice looking” and that his boss had joked that he should take me out to dinner by way of making amends for the problem with the service provided during my MEP’s event.**

In that moment, I **felt very glad** that my colleague was with me. I did not consider myself to be in immediate danger but **I felt incredibly uncomfortable and powerless.** He **was intimidating.**

**I tried to leave a couple of times but he kept striking up new conversation in a very domineering way.** Each time I would attempt to politely wrap up the conversation and leave, he would start a new conversation.

Finally **I stood up to move towards the door and he also stood up and moved forward.** At this point, my colleague and I announced more firmly than before that we were leaving and **exited quickly.**

**Once we got far away from the office, my colleague and I shared our mutual discomfort** and I voiced my gratitude to her for accompanying me.

I do not consider this to be an extreme or violent case of harassment in the EP and I count myself **incredibly lucky** that I have not experienced something far worse, as many others have.

His behaviour and intent may not have been deliberately intimidating. **I think he considered it to be cheeky, risqué, off-the-cuff.** But in a professional context he should not have commented on my appearance and he should not have joked that taking me out to dinner would suffice as an apology. **He managed to sexualise a professional encounter.**

**I now fear running into him again, and I feared writing this story because I didn't want him to see it as I imagine that he will know who submitted it. But it is important that if this story is posted and if he sees this he should know that sexualising professional relationships is unacceptable.**

The women on the receiving end of your sexualisation probably don't think it is a joke, as you may do. For them, it is reductive and threatening. Joking about exchanging romantic/sexual favours with a woman significantly younger than you in an office buried in a quiet, remote part of the building is not most women's idea of a laugh.

(Source: MeTooEP)

This testimony does not report many emotions but it does exemplify again other gender problems and situations a woman goes through at her workplace, things that happen more often to women than to men. This title – ‘The time he insisted I visit his dark, remote office’ – does not report any emotion. It mentions that it left her with a feeling of discomfort. The writer put the aggressor ‘he’ as the subject of the active voice clause and her as the object. Therefore, it can be interpreted that she assigned the responsibility of the action onto him, instead of leaving the sentence open for interpretation or ambiguous and by using the aggressor as the subject of the clause she also puts focus on her aggressor and what he did instead of herself.

She starts her narrative by explaining how she came into contact with her assailant to solve a problem with a service. She, then, wrote ‘My office phone screen was on so he could see me. **He then invited me to come for a meeting in his office, even though the telephone call were having was sufficient enough to solve the problem.** I told him this, but he was quite insistent that we meet face to face.’. Although there is no emotion reported in this passage, it does show a man using a work-related situation to get a woman into his office for something that could be solved through a call or email. The writer ‘**felt a little weird**’ about it and that is why she asked a ‘female colleague’ to accompany her to his ‘his office [...] at a very remote part of the Parliament’. The stretch ‘I felt a little weird’ reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other, with the intensifier ‘little’ which downplays how she felt.

When she arrived for the meeting at his office the assailant confirmed that ‘**he wanted to meet with [her] because he thought that [she] was “nice looking” and that his boss had**

**joked that he should take [her] out to dinner by way of making amends for the problem with the service provided during my MEP's event.'** Therefore, the assailant confirmed the victim's suspicion that the meeting had nothing to do with the problem he needed to fix, but it had all to do with his desire to use the moment as an excuse to ask her out. First thing to notice is that he felt comfortable to compliment her appearance at a workplace and also to use the work-related problem as an excuse to have the woman he was attracted to in his office as if it was an appropriate thing to do. Second thing is that he was encouraged by his boss (whose gender is not disclosed) to do so. There is no way of being certain if his boss was truly joking or if they actually believed he should ask her out 'to dinner by way of making amends for the problem'. However, the assailant did use that as an excuse to ask her out without compromising himself so much by mentioning that the idea came from a person in a higher position than his own, thereby, sanctioning his decision of asking her out by using a work-related problem as the excuse.

In the next paragraph she reports a few emotions – 'In that moment, I **felt very glad** that my colleague was with me. I did not consider myself to be in immediate danger but **I felt incredibly uncomfortable and powerless**. He **was intimidating**.'. Her first emotion is regarding her colleague's presence which can be assumed to have made her feel somewhat more at ease despite the uncomfortable situation. She says 'I felt very glad' reporting a positive affect of satisfaction as pleasure, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier 'very'. The writer declared she did not feel like she was in any immediate danger but she still felt 'incredibly uncomfortable and powerless', reporting than a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet as a mental state in reaction to other, intensified by the adverb 'incredibly'. And she ends the paragraph by stating that 'He was intimidating' reporting a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety.

Then, the writer states that she '**tried to leave a couple of times but he kept striking up new conversation in a very domineering way**. Each time [she] would attempt to politely wrap up the conversation and leave, he would start a new conversation.'. When she says 'in a **very domineering way**' she is reporting, through the adjective 'domineering', a negative appreciation as a reaction in quality with the intensifier 'very' and also a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety. Despite the fact that the assailant had already (1) invited her to an unnecessary meeting; (2) commented on her appearance inside the workplace; (3) asked her out to compensate her for a workplace problem; (4) made her feel uncomfortable and powerless, (5) disregarded her attempts to leave, she continued acting professionally and 'politely' in order

to leave his office. In the previous paragraph, although the writer did not directly say that the man interrupted her, the interruption is implied since she used the verb ‘attempt’, indicating she was not successful in trying to leave because he ‘would start a new conversation’, which conveys the idea that the aggressor interrupted her attempts to talk and leave.

She eventually was able to leave his office with her colleague – **‘I stood up to move towards the door and he also stood up and moved forward.** At this point, my colleague and I announced more firmly than before that we were leaving and **exited quickly.**’ –. In the sentence she narrates the act of leaving his office, she points out ‘my colleague and I announced more firmly than before [...]’, in this phrase she uses the intensifiers ‘more’ and ‘firmly’, this last one referring to an up-scaled vigor in regards to manner. It is noticeable that the writer specified the manner in which they (she and her colleague) left the assailant’s office ‘exited quickly’, she could have said that they exited without further information, however, she opted to state the hurry in which they were to leave his office. The hurry can be inferred to be due to the uncomfortable situation as well as to the concern with the possibility of the assailant trying to strike up more conversation. Therefore, the highlighted part is reporting a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other.

As they were far away from his office the writer wrote **‘my colleague and I shared our mutual discomfort** and I voiced my gratitude to her for accompanying me.’. The adjective ‘discomfort’ reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other. The writer of the testimony was not the only one uncomfortable with the occurrence her colleague who accompanied her felt uncomfortable as well. The writer then states that she did ‘not consider this to be an extreme case of harassment in the EP and I count myself **incredibly lucky** that I have not experienced something far worse’. The highlighted part reports a positive affect of security as confidence as a mental state in reaction to other, considering that she informs the reader she thought something worse could have happened but it did not.

In this paragraph it is noticeable that the writer qualified the violence she endured as ‘not extreme’. There is a common-sense belief that unless a woman had been violently touched or threatened, she should count herself lucky for not having endured something worse. However, every type of violence leaves a mark in the lives of the victim, no matter if it was a drastic occurrence or something in which the assailant did not touch the victim, violence is violence and it leaves marks that sometimes can accompany the victim throughout her life,



influencing her quality of life. This point about the marks any type of violence leaves on the life of the victim is exemplified in this testimony when she said ‘**I now fear running into him** again, and **I feared writing this story** because I didn’t want him to see it as I imagine that he will know who submitted it. But it is important that if this story is posted and if he sees this he should know that sexualising professional relationships is unacceptable.’. In the beginning of this paragraph the word ‘fear’ is used twice which reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other. Despite the fact that the occurrence was ‘not extreme’ (as declared by the writer), it affected her quality of life inside and outside the work place, since she feared running into the assailant (inside the workplace) and she also feared writing her testimony (outside the workplace). And these are the remarks she chose to disclose, there are probably other examples of how the occurrence affected her life, examples which she did not write about.

Something else to observe is that the writer wondered about the assailant’s view of the violence ‘His behaviour and intent may not have been deliberately intimidating. **I think he considered it to be cheeky, risque, off-the-cuff.**’, in this bit of the testimony, despite everything she went through, she tries to understand and excuse his attitude in a way by viewing it from his perspective as if he did not have the intention to make her feel uncomfortable. It is curious to notice how even the victim is quick to justify a man’s behavior as not ill intended. However, her need to try to understand her assailant may also be due to her fear that he might read her testimony and know who wrote it. The writer first tries to see things from her assailant’s perspective before saying what he did was wrong ‘But in a professional context he should not have commented on my appearance and he should not have joked that taking me out to dinner would suffice as an apology. **He managed to sexualise a professional encounter.**’.

Through the reading and analysis of this testimony it is possible to say the writer was aware that what she went through was improper, wrong, and an act of violence. However, she tries to excuse the assailant’s behavior by understanding that he might have had a different perspective of the occurrence, or that he might have considered it a joke of sorts. Her last paragraph shows the writer commenting that what might be seen as a joke to men is not necessarily seen the same way by women ‘The women on the receiving end of your sexualisation probably don’t think it is a joke, as you may do. For them, it is reductive and threatening. Joking about exchanging romantic/sexual favours with a woman significantly younger than you in an office buried in a quiet, remote part of the building is not most women’s



idea of a laugh.’. It can be assumed that the writer directed this last paragraph to her assailant, as if she was writing it directly to him, since she uses the pronoun ‘you’ instead of ‘he’.

#### **4.2.1 Conclusion for cluster B**

The emotions reported throughout the six testimonies in cluster B are also mainly negative, but this fact is something to be expected considering the nature of the testimonies. These time there were four positive affects reported, in the last three testimonies. The emotions from B4 and B5 regard relief, the first due to the fact that the aggressor left the taxi in which he was with the victim and her boyfriend, and the second is relief for speaking up against the violence the victim was facing. The third and fourth positive emotions are present in B6 and the victim reported happiness for being accompanied by a friend in a situation of violence and security for knowing that something worse did not happen.

In this cluster all of the testimonies, except B2, have several emotions reporting both insecurity and unhappiness. Four of the testimonies reported discomfort, two reported shock, one fear, and there were two mentions to inappropriate behavior. This illustrates the increase in negative emotions in matters of amount and in scale.

There were reports of both judgement of social sanction and judgement of social esteem, all negative. And also, a report of appreciation, also negative. There was a significant increase in the amount of insecurity reported and also in the amount of judgement reported in comparison with the previous cluster.

None of the writers belonging to cluster B informed whether they reported their violence or not. Half of the victims mentioned how the violence left marks on them that they deal with even after it happened; and half of them did not say if it did or not. However, none of them disclosed if they changed something in their behavior in order to avoid running into the aggressor or to prevent further violence.

### 4.3 CLUSTER C – testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened when they were alone with the aggressor

In this section it is presented and analyzed the testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened when they were alone with the aggressor.

#### 4.3.1 Alone somewhere

Testimony C1 – *The time I received an unwanted kiss* (June 25, 2019)

I was an assistant at the European Parliament from 1994 until 1999. On one occasion, several German CDU MEPs went to Restaurant Maxburg. When I went downstairs to the toilet, a male MEP came and gave me an unwanted kiss on my mouth. I was completely shocked.

(Source: MeTooEP)

As the title of testimony B2 ('The time I received an unwanted hug') this writer's title 'The time I received an unwanted kiss', also reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in quality, and also a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety, considering that the victim is criticizing the performance of the aggressor, therefore, criticizing him as well. The writer puts herself as the subject of the sentence using the active voice, she is the subject of an action performed by someone else. Although she is using the active voice in her title, she is concealing the aggressor from her clause by using the verb 'receive', therefore, not assigning responsibility onto anyone over what happened. And by concealing the aggressor she is putting focus over herself and what happened, but not the perpetrator of the violence. This writer starts her narrative with who she was when she was sexually assaulted by stating her job title, place and the period in which she worked at the European parliament, 'I was an assistant at the European Parliament from 1994 until 1999. On one occasion, several German CDU MEPs went to Restaurant Maxburg'. Therefore, first narrating details that situate the reader on who she is/was, where she was and for how long. This testimony was posted online in 2019; however, through her narrative it can be inferred that her assault occurred at least 20 years before. This is evidence to the fact that women usually do not report sexual violence immediately, and it exemplifies how some women may take years to be ready to come forward about their violence.

The narrative – 'When I went downstairs to the toilet, a male MEP came and gave me an unwanted kiss on my mouth.' – indicates that the aggressor only approached the woman

when she moved away from the ‘several German CDU MEPs’ to go to a different space – toilet –, a presumably less crowded area where the aggressor followed and assaulted her. The writer is specific about the kiss, declaring that the man kissed her on her mouth. In this part she chose to structure her sentence with the man as the subject of the clause and herself as the object, bringing the focus to the aggressor, something she had not done in her title. The highlighted part ‘an unwanted kiss on my mouth’ reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in quality, and also a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety.

In her last sentence ‘**I was completely shocked**’ the writer reports a negative affect, given the previous narration of the event, since the adjective ‘shocked’ can be interpreted either as a positive or a negative mental state, depending on what caused it. In this case, it expresses a negative affect of insecurity as surprise, as a mental state in reaction to other.

Testimony C2 – *The time he wanted to trade his signature on an amendment for the possibility to grope me* (March 12, 2019)

I went to the office on an MEP to get a signature for amendments. He asked me to have a seat since he has a coffee and asked if I want something. **I thought it was a bit odd**, but I told him that I came to get the signatures. **He said he would get a heart attack from my beauty and asked me not to look at him since it would be embarrassing If he died when seeing me. My stomach felt bad at that moment** and I said that I really need to go. He said I was a very attractive woman and that **he has noticed me many times**.

I took my phone and said that my MEP was calling me and I needed the signature immediately. He signed and said we should go for lunch sometime. I thanked him and refused.

He gave me his hand for a hand shake. I thought that at this point he may ask for an apology for **his inappropriate behavior**. **With tears in my eyes** I shook his hand, when **he pulled me towards him and grabbed me...**

**I pushed him and I started to cry and ran out of the office.**

**I felt miserable the entire day and feel bad every time I see him in the corridor.**

(Source: MeTooEP)

The title – ‘The time he wanted to trade his signature on an amendment for the possibility to grope me’ – does not report any emotion or reaction but an exposition of what happened in a brief way. The writer put the assailant ‘he’ as the subject of the active voice clause. In this case the writer of the testimony is putting the focus of her title onto the aggressor and the violence by using ‘he’ as the subject of the active voice clause, therefore, in a way assigning responsibility over the violence onto the perpetrator of it.

The writer starts her story declaring what she was doing and why ‘I went to the office on an MEP to get a signature for amendments. He asked me to have a seat since he has a coffee and asked if I want something’. The following sentence is the first moment she reports emotion ‘**I thought it was a bit odd**, but I told him that I came to get the signatures’, in which she narrates her impression of his behavior. The noun phrase ‘a bit odd’ indicates a negative judgment of social esteem in normality, which is an indicative of the writer’s criticism to the *MEP*’s (Member of the European Parliament) behavior in the appointed situation.

Next, she wrote ‘**He said he would get a heart attack from my beauty and asked me not to look at him since it would be embarrassing**’. The first clause pointed out the emotions reported by the *MEP*. There is an indication of reaction to other, when he comments on the victim’s beauty. And in the second clause there is also an indication of reaction to other, but in this case to how ‘embarrassing’ it would be if he died when seeing her.

Then she wrote ‘**My stomach felt bad at that moment** and I said that I really need to go.’ reporting her physical response to what had been said to her and to the situation as a whole. ‘My stomach felt bad’ can report two types of negative affect depending on how it is analyzed; it can report a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other, considering that she was in an uncomfortable situation which put in jeopardy her safety. Or it can be reporting a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other, considering that she was not satisfied with the path of their conversation.

Then the victim wrote ‘He gave me his hand for a hand shake. I thought that at this point he may ask for an apology for **his inappropriate behavior**’ reporting, through the highlighted part, a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety. This sentence also shows the hope the victim still had that her aggressor might apologize for his behavior. However, he did not as she narrated next ‘**With tears in my eyes** I shook his hand, when **he pulled me towards him and grabbed me...**’. Although the writer does not report directly how she was feeling, the phrase ‘with tears in my eyes’ indicates a physical reaction triggered by everything she went through. Thus, considering that the writer is narrating an uncomfortable situation, the

phrase demonstrates a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other.

Her reaction to the violence narrated in the previous stretch is announced next with two behavioral surges illustrating her emotions ‘**I pushed him and I started to cry and ran out of the office.**’. The first highlighted part ‘I pushed him’ reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a behavioral surge in a reaction to other. Then, ‘I started to cry’ was triggered by the fact that the writer had been pulled and grabbed without previous warning. Therefore, it reports a negative affect of unhappiness as misery, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other, given the context, it also indicates insecurity. The last highlighted part ‘ran out of the office’ illustrates her need to get away quickly. Therefore, it reports, a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other.

In her last paragraph the writer reports two other emotions of negative affect ‘**I felt miserable the entire day** and **feel bad every time I see him in the corridor.**’. The first highlighted part indicates a negative affect of unhappiness as misery, as a mental state in reaction to other, considering also the use of the adjective ‘miserable’, which can be classified as possessing greater intensity when compared to the adjective ‘sad’, for example. And the second highlighted part above reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a mental process in reaction to other, since she declares ‘feel[ing] bad’ every time she sees him. It is worth noticing that every affect and judgement expressed by the writer in this testimony is of negative content.

From an analysis of the gender issues present in this narrative, we can notice that the woman writer was ignored twice when asking for the signatures she needed. She was only heard when she said her *MEP* was calling. There is no evidence on her testimony that allows the assumption of the gender of the *MEP* that was calling her. However, it is possible to say that her request was only answered when a third person, a person of the same rank as the assailant was involved in the situation. In both situations in which her request was ignored the present *MEP* made comments on her appearance and the fact that he had noticed her, even though they were in their workplace.

Fairclough (1993) discusses the relation between discourse and ideology and the fact that “the ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalized, and achieve the status of ‘common sense’ [...]” (FAIRCLOUGH, 1993, p.87). This

helps us understand better why the narrator only allowed herself to react openly to the violence when it became physical, but she did not react the same way when it was verbal/symbolic. Considering also that invasive and aggressive male behavior towards women is often excused and seen as a compliment or a joke, it is challenging to see verbal harassment, for example, as harassment. Usually, physical aggressions are easier to be accepted as violence, because they are more difficult to pass as unintentional. However, there are

[More difficult to expose and criticize are] the less consciously recognized forms of harassment and oppression such as street remarks and subtle gender norms; the latter include requests that girl children and women be more polite, smile, take sexist remarks as innocent jokes or flattery, and conform to heterosexual conventions. (DEFRANCISCO, 1997, p.44).

Testimony C3 – *The time I didn't feel safe* (March 5, 2019)

At the European Parliament, I got to know a man who always felt the need to compliment me. He would tell me how good I look, what an impeccable style I have and how much he admires me.

I didn't read much into it, until on several occasions he would touch my arm for no reason. **His behaviour became increasingly inappropriate** when one day we were in the lift together and he commented on the fact that I had lost weight. **He made an indecent gesture to refer to my breasts and told me that he prefers it when my "shapes are rounder"**.

One day, he called me in to his office to ask for changes on a piece of work I had written. It felt like this was just a pretext to have me in his office. Before I left, I actually told my boss that if I don't return in five minutes, he is probably raping me because **I felt that uncomfortable.**

When I arrived at his office, **he made me sit at his computer and manually correct part of the text while he stood by and watched.**

Then, he approached me and asked me if I was doing ok **touching my shoulders.** I immediately corrected the (inexistent) mistake and **I jumped on my feet and quickly approached the door.**

I opened the door wide and talked to him from the doorway. Then, **I left in a hurry. I really felt like had I stuck around, I would have been close to being assaulted in an office in the EP.**

Every time I see him getting into an elevator, **I feel scared** and if there is no one else in the elevator with him, I always grab the next one. **I feel genuinely scared that he might physically hurt me one day, as he is known to be very aggressive.**

(Source: MeTooEP)

The writer entitles her testimony ‘The time **I didn’t feel safe**’ reporting a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state, through only the reading of the title is not possible to say if it is in reaction to other or an undirected mood, but having the knowledge of the whole testimony, it can be said that it is in reaction to other, since she did not start feeling unsafe for no apparent reason. She structured her title with herself ‘I’ as the subject of the sentence referring to how she felt through the occurrence and making no mention of the violence or its perpetrator.

She starts her narrative by talking about her assailant and the behavior he had towards her – ‘I got to know a man who always felt the need to compliment me. He would tell me how good I look, what an impeccable style I have and how much he admires me.’ –. Although in this part the writer did not report her emotions, she did report a positive judgement her assailant made about her.

Something else to note in her first sentence is the illustration of the male need to compliment women. This behavior of complimenting women on how they look, dress, or present themselves reinforces the idea that women’s value is on their appearance more than anywhere else. And also reinforces the idea that women should feel accomplished by having attracted the male gaze and should welcome any type of compliment done by males in whatever kind of environment.

The fact that men complimenting women, or commenting on women’s appearances, or staring at them in the workplace is a standardized behavior is exemplified by the writer’s next sentence ‘I didn’t read much into it, until on several occasions he would touch my arm for no reason.’. The compliments were not something that made her think his behavior was odd or uncalled for, she only started feeling uncomfortable about it when, in addition to that, he started touching her for no reason. This can be reported back to Testimony A2, in which a similar sentiment was presented. The writer of testimony A2 was used to the always present look of older men in the European parliament, until something ‘more annoying than usual’ happened.

This testimony, therefore, is the second example in which a victim has been through uncomfortable situations but not beyond what she was used to, until something else happened. This does not mean that the other situations were not a type of violence, it exemplifies, though, how gender violence can be disguised and tolerated as common male behavior.

Next, she states that ‘**His behaviour became increasingly inappropriate** when one day we were in the lift together and he commented on the fact that I had lost weight.’. The highlighted part ‘inappropriate’ indicates a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety, in addition to the adverb ‘increasingly’ as an intensifier. Again, the second part of the previous sentence exemplifies the standardized behavior of men commenting on women’s appearance as an acceptable conduct on a workplace environment. The writer, then, proceeds to narrate a few other acts of violence she endured in his hands. In the following sentence – ‘**He made an indecent gesture to refer to my breasts and told me that he prefers it when my “shapes are rounder”.**’ – she goes on telling what else happened in the elevator. The term ‘indecent gesture’ reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in impact and also a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety, since although the adjective ‘indecent’ is qualifying the noun ‘gesture’, the gesture was an action done by the aggressor, that is why it can be read as a judgement as well. It is necessary to note that the assailant felt comfortable to make an ‘indecent gesture’ towards her and also comfortable enough to say how he prefers the way she looks, as if his opinion on her body was valid enough and/or relevant enough for him to speak up about it. The writer did not report any emotion that could be categorized as affect in this part, therefore, not openly saying how the behavior of the aggressor in the lift made her feel.

The next stretch narrates another occurrence, when he called her into his office to make changes in a text she had written. Apparently so far, she did not know if he called her on his office because it was necessary for work or if he had something else in mind, but for her ‘It felt like this was just a pretext to have [her] in his office’. And due to how she felt ‘[she] actually told [her] boss that if [she didn’t] return in five minutes, he is probably raping [her] because [she] **felt that uncomfortable**.’. The way she felt in regard to the aggressor was intense to the point that she decided to warn someone else about her whereabouts in case something happened. According to the previous stretch from her testimony, she verbalized what type of violence (rape) she feared could happen. Still analyzing the previous stretch, that is the first situation presented in which she openly reports how she felt ‘that uncomfortable’, reporting, then, a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other, due to the previously narrated assailant’s conduct around her.



Already at his office she said **‘he made me sit at his computer and manually correct part of the text while he stood by and watched.’** Although in this sentence the writer did not report any type of emotion it can be already inferred that the aggressor asked her to go to his office as a pretext to have her there, since the correction of a text can be solved through the exchange of emails or even a phone call. This is another example of a man in a high position using his authority for personal reasons. Another example of this was seen back in Testimony B6.

In the next paragraph – ‘Then, he approached me and asked me if I was doing ok **touching my shoulders.** I immediately corrected the (inexistent) mistake and I **jumped on my feet** and **quickly approached the door.**’ – the writer describes another occasion when the assailant touched her. She also remarked that she ‘corrected the (inexistent) mistake’, confirming what was previously inferred here about the fact that there was no need of her attending his office, it was just a pretext. By how the writer narrates her movements – ‘I jumped on my feet and quickly approached the door’ – her hurry to leave the aggressor’s office is noticeable, reinforcing the discomfort she mentioned previously and her need to leave his office as quickly as possible. This hurry is also reported in her next sentence in which, after reaching the door, she wrote ‘I opened the door wide and talked to him from the doorway. Then, **I left in a hurry.**’. The illustration of her hurry and her need to be away from the aggressor’s office and away from him as soon as possible reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other.

Next, the writer narrates her concerns by stating in bold letters **‘I really felt like had I stuck around, I would have been close to being assaulted in an office in the EP.’**. This is an example of how women do not feel safe even in their workplace. And this writer’s feeling of insecurity in her workplace is not a one-time occurrence, it is something that she has to deal with every time she encounters her assailant, ‘Every time I see him getting into an elevator, **I feel scared** and if there is no one else in the elevator with him, I always grab the next one.’. The highlighted part reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other.

The previous stretch and the next one – **‘I feel genuinely scared that he might physically hurt me one day, as he is known to be very aggressive.’** – points out to how the writer has to change her ways, make choices, and so on, in order to avoid being physically hurt,

since that is something she fears. Again, there is the use of the word ‘scared’ which reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other. In her last sentence she says ‘**he is known to be very aggressive**’. Here she reports a negative judgement of social esteem in tenacity (‘aggressive’), with the intensifier ‘very’. This is the only mention to the assailant’s temperament. The phrase ‘he is known to be’ indicates that not only does the writer think he is aggressive, but also that more people at her workplace had commented on it, but she does not say who or why he is known to be aggressive (if for the same reasons as hers or others).

Testimony C4 – *The time I was harassed for saying no to a relationship* (November 9, 2018)

I used to work for someone who would shout at me whenever he was stressed out, or for meaningless things, such as not printing documents.

It was difficult to work like that, however one day it got worse. He came into my office and **pressed a part of his body against mine while I was sitting in my chair. I felt really shocked**, and froze and said nothing. After that, he left.

After this, **he would sometimes stand behind me for a while while I was working on the computer, staring. It used to make me feel really uncomfortable.**

When I finally decided to leave, he shouted at me for a very long time.

The other day, he found me and apologized for everything. **He said that he got himself into a personal relationship with me, and asked me to start a relationship. He said he could be good.** I refused.

**I filled a complaint, but did not receive much support.** They seemed to believe me but due to lack of proof, they could not help me, or they did not want to help me. **There were some witnesses but they were not taken into account.** During the procedure I felt like the trauma that I experienced, and my pain was not proof enough of somebody’s abusive behaviour.

I would encourage everyone who went through harassment and sexual harassment to take care of his or her mental health. Let the time heal you and create a space of love inside you. Only when we are healthy can we think clearly and become stronger inside and fight for ourselves. We think we have lost something, and that power has been taken away from us but in reality, we became richer through a bad experience.

I feel like next time, I can protect myself much better and react with fierceness. **I would never let anyone treat me that way again.** I still fight anxiety, but I am getting better every day and want to be listened to and believed. I want to have a voice.

(Source: MeTooEP)

This writer chose to use the word ‘harassed’ in her title – ‘The time I was harassed for saying no to a relationship’ –, therefore naming what she went through and why. She did not mention the perpetrator directly on her title, although, his existence is implied since being harassed implies a perpetrator behind it. She put herself ‘I’ as the subject of the passive voice clause. The writer chose in this case the passive voice and she also hid the aggressor from the title, therefore, not assigning responsibility over her violence onto anyone.

She initiated her narrative by stating the type of person to whom she used to work for ‘I used to work for someone who would shout at me whenever he was stressed out, or for meaningless things, such as not printing documents.’. The violence she endured is referred already in this first paragraph. The writer talks about it in general terms, not describing any specific situation, but the recurring violence in her boss’ behavior. She did not report any kind of emotion regarding herself. However, the writer used the expression ‘shout at me’. ‘Shout’ is defined as speaking loudly, differently from ‘scream’, which is just making noise without the need of transmitting a message. By shouting her boss transmitted an unspoken message that he wanted his voice and words to be the loudest thing she could hear at that given moment. This can be considered a form of silencing, especially because if she wanted to be heard, she would need to shout even louder than him. However, he was her boss, and the hierarchy was probably a factor in her decision not to shout back at him. Considering that her boss was also aware of this line of thought, he was shouting at her knowing/expecting that she would not be able to talk back due to her lower job title, for that reason it can be inferred that he was silencing her. And, as argued by Freed about the silencing and the interrupting of women, “[t]he continued occurrence of such incidents in the twenty-first century confirms the tenacity of the social and institutionalised power inequities between women and men.” (FREED, 2020, p.12). The way women are treated in comparison to how men are treated, be it in the public space be it in the domestic space, reinforces the conclusion that social, financial, sexual, and/or family conditions are not enough for the independence of women while ideological discourses about women’s ‘place’ in society still exist and are still believed by many.

On her next paragraph the narrator stated ‘It was difficult to work like that, however one day it got worse.’. She considered ‘difficult’ to work in the situation she was in, but the way she wrote implies that it was still manageable to a certain point, also considering that she added ‘one day it got worse’. This can be related with two previous testimonies A2 and C3, in which a similar situation happened. It is necessary to point out that, so far, the violence had been verbal. So far, the writer had not narrated a situation in which her boss was physical towards her.

Then, she specifies on what happened that day when things got worse – ‘He came into my office and **pressed a part of his body against mine while I was sitting in my chair. I felt really shocked**, and froze and said nothing. After that, he left.’. Through the use of ‘really shocked’ the writer reports a negative affect of insecurity as surprise, as a mental state in reaction to other with ‘really’ as an intensifier. She was surprised by what happened, hence the shock and not being able to utter a word. He became physical towards her, pressing himself on her. This victim did not visit any remote office, she was not at a bar, an elevator, or a canteen, she was at her office working when her boss entered and pressed himself on her. It is crucial to point out that by no means the fact that other writers were in different kinds of environment justifies the violence.

Then, she said ‘After this, **he would sometimes stand behind me for a while while I was working on the computer, staring**. It used to make me **feel really uncomfortable**’. In this sentence, the writer does not mention the aggressor physically touching her, however, he does hover around near her ‘staring’. She did not specify what he was staring at, therefore, he could be staring at what she was doing on the computer or he could be staring at her. Considering that the writer said ‘It used to make me really uncomfortable’, and also that this is a narrative of gender violence, it is possible to assume he was staring at her and not at her work. Through the use of ‘really uncomfortable’ the writer reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier ‘really’.

Next, the writer wrote ‘When I finally decided to leave, he shouted at me for a very long time.’. In the first part of her sentence – ‘when I finally decided to leave’ – there are two possible interpretations of what she said, she could have meant when she decided to leave the office or when she decided to leave her job. However, considering that she had just written about an uncomfortable situation while she was working, in which he was standing behind her, we can assume she meant when she decided to leave the office. And her action was accompanied by more violence from him. Then she wrote ‘The other day, he found me and

apologized for everything. **He said that he got himself into a personal relationship with me, and asked me to start a relationship. He said he could be good.** I refused.'

In the next paragraph she wrote about filling a complaint and not receiving much support for lack of proof and despite the witnesses. She encourages victims to take care of their mental health and she ends with the sentence 'We think we have lost something, and that power has been taken away from us but in reality, we became richer through a bad experience.'. The last part of the sentence is troublesome, since it is not necessary to go through trauma to become stronger, better, or to improve as a person in any way. Seeing a traumatic experience through the lenses of learning is also a form of excusing the aggressor because it can be interpreted that thanks to him the victim has grown as a person. There are many other healthy ways to become a stronger, better and improved person which do not require traumatic experiences. However, it is also important to remark that believing that 'we become richer through bad experiences' is also a way of facing the violence endured, of making peace with oneself, and of feeling that the victim did not suffer for nothing, because there is a major reason for it.

Then she begins her last paragraph with 'I feel like next time, I can protect myself much better and react with fierceness.'. By writing 'I feel like next time', if consciously or not, the writer already assumes there will be a next time, there will be another event of gender violence that she might have to endure. That is the reality of many women, to whom going through different types of violence is a daily occurrence, as many of the testimonies have exemplified. In the next the part when she states 'I can protect myself much better with fierceness' she is implying that when the violence narrated in her testimony happened, she could not protect herself and be fierce, therefore, indirectly placing the blame for the violence (even if partially) on herself, as if she had been fiercer or if she had protected herself better things would not have been the way they were. And her following sentence reinforces that idea '**I would never let anyone treat me that way again**', here she is implying that the way she was treated in the violent scenario she narrated is due to the fact that **she let it** happen, she was not strong enough yet, as if what happened was her fault and not the aggressor's fault, as if he just acted according to what she allowed him to do. In the latter stretch, the highlighted part reports a covert emotion, reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as displeasure, as a mental process in reaction to other.

She ends her last paragraph with ‘I still fight anxiety, but I am getting better every day and want to be listened to and believed. I want to have a voice’. Here the writer is exemplifying again the marks left behind by the aggression, no matter if she no longer works with the aggressor, she deals with the remaining feelings that violence left in her, affecting her quality of life.

Testimony C5 – *The time I was assaulted on an official EP Mission* (October 9, 2018)

I was send on an official mission and decided to share my airbnb with a colleague.

One night, I was in bed when I heard a knock on the door. I was tired so I did not answer. The door suddenly opened, and my colleague walked in, in just his underpants.

**I got angry** and insisted he leave. Instead, he barged got into my bed. **I was so scared** that **I curled up in a little ball** and begged him to leave me alone.

But rather than respect my wishes, he chose to assault me.

He touched my breasts and **violently twisted** my nipples. It hurt, but he would not stop. After that he proceeded to rub himself on my thigh. He was erect.

After five minutes of this, he must have **become sick of me** pleading with him to stop, so he rebuked me for not being receptive and **to my great relief finally left**.

I filed a complaint with the competent authority on 3rd October 2017.

**I am still waiting for their answer.**

(Source: MeTooEP)

The writer entitled her testimony ‘The time I was assaulted on an official EP Mission’, she put herself as the subject of the sentence using the passive voice, then she named the violence she suffered and in which situation it happened. The choice of using the passive voice concealed the perpetrator of the violence from her title, therefore, not assigning responsibility over the violence onto anyone, and she also put the focus on herself and on her assault by hiding the aggressor from her sentence.

She started her narrative by explaining ‘I was send on an official mission and decided to share my airbnb with a colleague.’, through which she reported no emotion. Then she started narrating the assault ‘One night, I was in bed when I heard a knock on the door. I was tired so I did not answer. The door suddenly opened, and my colleague walked in, in just his

underpants.’. This assault happened outside of the workplace but during a work event. The writer did not say why she ‘decided to share [her] Airbnb with her colleague’, maybe because it would be a cheaper and more practical choice, but that information is not disclosed. Then she wrote ‘**I got angry** and insisted he leave. Instead, he barged got into my bed. **I was so scared** that **I curled up in a little ball** and begged him to leave me alone.’. Through the use of ‘I got angry’ the writer reports a negative affect of unhappiness as antipathy, as a mental process in reaction to other. Next, through the use of ‘I was so scared’ she reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier ‘so’. And then, by using ‘I curled up in a ball’ she reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as ennui, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other.

The writer continues her narrative by stating ‘But rather than respect my wishes, he chose to assault me.’. Then she proceeds narrating the ways in which he assaulted her ‘He touched my breasts and **violently twisted** my nipples. It hurt, but he would not stop. After that he proceeded to rub himself on my thigh. He was erect’. The highlighted part reports a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety, although she is criticizing how the action was done, and the action was done by the aggressor, therefore, a judgment. He chose to not listen to her asking him to leave her alone and to stop, he kept on assaulting her. Until ‘After five minutes of this, he must have become **sick of me** pleading with him to stop, so he rebuked me for not being receptive and **to my great relief finally left**’. The first highlighted part reports a negative affect of disinclination as displeasure, as a mental state in reaction to other. And the second highlighted part shows the first positive emotion in this testimony, ‘great relief’ reports a positive affect of happiness as cheer, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier ‘great’. And her relief is associated with him ‘finally’ leaving her room.

Another thing to be noted about the previous stretch is the fact that the aggressor felt entitled to ‘rebuke [...] [the victim] for not being receptive’ to his violence, As if he was not the improper one but her.

The writer ends her narrative informing the date she filled a complaint, which was almost a year before she posted her testimony on the *MeTooEP* website, and by affirming ‘**I am still waiting for their answer.**’



### 4.3.2 Alone in the elevator

Testimony C6 – *The time the elevator stopped* (April 30, 2019)

It happened during the peak of the #metoo debate: I stepped inside an elevator in the ASP building which was full. A young man wearing a suit stepped in, walked past me and then brushed my hair. I initially thought he might have caught my hair accidentally. At the next floor, all the people leave the elevator and I am left alone with the man. He smiles at me, steps closer to me and says: “*Don’t worry, I don’t harm women, not even beautiful ones.*” A little startled, I uttered an ironic “*well, that’s good to know.*” To which he replies: “*you never know as a man these days, I could get arrested for touching a woman.*”

(Source: MeTooEP)

This writer decided to omit herself, the perpetrator and even the aggression from the title ‘The time the elevator stopped’. It is intriguing to notice that she did not say directly in her narrative that the elevator stopped. There is, however, a moment in which it is evident that the elevator stopped, which is when she declares ‘At the next floor, all the people leave the elevator’. This part of the narrative does not provide the reader with any type of emotion from her, it is just one event that led to another. Therefore, it is possible to infer that her title is not referring to this specific event. And considering that there is no other reference to the elevator stopping (except for when she steps inside of it when it is still full) it is assumable that she was referring to her own perception of the interaction with the perpetrator that left her ‘a little startled’.

She starts her narrative by pointing out that the aggression happened when the #metoo movement was at its peak. She proceeds to narrate her entering the then full elevator and next she describes the perpetrator as ‘a young man wearing a suit’. This statement openly suggests that (1) she did not know the man; (2) he was probably younger than her (considering that people rarely refer to another person as ‘young’ unless they themselves are older than the one they are referring to); and (3) he was wearing a suit. In this testimony there is no issue over hierarchy when considering job titles, because apparently neither of them knew each other, or when considering age, assuming that she was older. However, it is still a man being invasive of a woman’s personal space, and this is a type of gender hierarchy. When describing the man, the writer did not pass any judgement on his looks, either positive or negative, she only stated that he was wearing a suit. Which is intriguing to reflect on why she considered it worth mentioning what he was wearing, when they were at a work place where suits are probably common attire.



The first direct contact that happened between them is when she says ‘[he] walked past me and then brushed my hair’. She is not clear about which part of his body brushed her hair, if he did it with his hand or shoulder or something else. Whichever possibility might be the truth, she thought it was an accident, instantly dismissing the occurrence.

The event is followed by everybody leaving the elevator and, as she declares ‘I am left alone with the man’. Among the other options of sentences, she could have used: *we are left alone in the elevator; everyone exits leaving only us; everyone exits leaving only me and him*. However, she does not put him in the same situation as her, or her in the same situation as him, she says ‘**I am** left alone’ ‘with the man’. She is the one left alone inside the elevator despite there being another person in there. But that other person is a man, and even though so far in her narrative he had done nothing to concern her, experience teaches women to be insecure whenever they are alone with a man (men). When considering the situation in reverse, a man alone with a woman is not ‘left alone’ with her, he is alone with her, since men do not go feel insecure or fear violence around women.. In this case, it is worth to signal that “while [power] is sometimes overtly manifested in the workplace, power may also be constructed in more subtle and complex ways” (HOLMES, 2007, p.33). Still considering the stretch featured above, although the writer did not report any type of emotion, this gender differentiation is perceived.

The understanding that they were not in the same situation (she was **left** alone with him and he **was** alone with her) was noticed even by him, considering what he says in the following stretch ‘He smiles at me, steps closer to me and says: “*Don’t worry, I don’t harm women, not even beautiful ones.*”’. It is noticeable the victim’s emphasis on the aggressor’s actions directed openly at her: “He smiles **at me**, steps closer **to me** and says [...]”. She draws a definite line between her and him, indicating that she felt invaded, because he crossed an established line of professional behavior. Then he said ‘don’t worry’ comforting her, as if she had reasons to be worried about being alone with a man in an enclosed space and demonstrating that the aggressor himself was aware of how she might feel. He says he does not ‘harm women’ leaving room open for further interpretation: *does he harm other people or other beings?*. And the part ‘not **even** beautiful ones’ implies that beautiful women would be the ones more tempting to harm if he did harm women at all.

Her next sentence ‘.’ **A little startled**, I uttered an ironic “*well, that’s good to know.*”’ presents the first moment an emotion is reported openly by the writer, the highlighted part

reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a surprise and as a mental state in reaction to other. She finishes her testimony with a sentence uttered by the perpetrator (presumably the last one): “*you never know as a man these days, I could get arrested for touching a woman.*” This sentence leaves another opening for interpretation. By analyzing what he said he is implying that he does not harm women not because he is a respectful human being, but because of the consequences touching a woman could have. In the same sentence, he indirectly downplays the seriousness of sexual assault by saying ‘I could get arrested for touching a woman’, since he probably knows it is not touching women that can lead to an arrest, but doing it against their will or without their consent.

The writer of this testimony opted not to make any judgments or further remarks about her impressions of the man (except for the ones mentioned above). She kept her narrative short and objective and, besides saying she was ‘startled’, there is no other open mention of her emotions during or after the aggression.

Testimony C7 – *The time he was excited by my lactating* (October 16, 2018)

I was on mission abroad accompanying an official EP delegation.

I was breastfeeding at that time, which sometimes results in uncomfortable situations, such as milk spots.

I was going back to my official hotel room after the day and got stuck alone with an MEP in the elevator.

He approached me, touched my breast and asked whether he could “suck my tits”.

I was terrified, went out and received follow up suggestive messages during the mission.

I never took the elevator on my own, checked three times whether my door was locked and stuck to my fellow colleagues for the rest of the days.

I went back and never disclosed the information to anyone, fearing for my contract. That was some years ago.

**This MEP is still in office.**

(Source: MeTooEP)

This writer's title – 'The time **he was excited** about my lactating' – referred to the assailant as the subject of the sentence, and, although she put the focus of her title onto the aggressor, she also, in a way, concealed the violence from her title by saying 'he was excited', instead of referring to the violence itself or how invasive he was, for example. She reported his emotion through 'he was excited'. Thus, she focused her title on the assailant, what he did and why. Then, she starts her narrative by stating what she was doing, where and with whom – 'I was on mission abroad accompanying an official EP delegation.' – . Then, she started telling what she had unraveled the violence, which was her breastfeeding 'I was breastfeeding at that time, which sometimes results in **uncomfortable situations** such as milk spots.', and she also exemplifies what she considered to be an uncomfortable situation when she wrote 'such as milk spots'. In this part 'uncomfortable situations' reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other.

Next the writer started narrating her violence 'I was going back to my official hotel room after the day and **got stuck alone with an MEP in the elevator.**'. The writer wrote 'I got stuck alone', this is another example of a victim that, through her choice of words, demonstrated her discomfort in being alone in an enclosed space with a man. She did not write 'I was alone' or 'I was left alone', she wrote 'I got stuck alone', implying that she felt like she could not get away from the situation. Therefore, with 'stuck alone' the writer reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other.

In the next paragraph the writer talked about the violence she suffered in the form of steps the aggressor took, she used short phrases each with one thing he did '**He approached me, touched my breast and asked whether he could "suck my tits".**'. This is another example of how unsafe women feel and are when alone with a man specially in an enclosed space. Next, she wrote '**I was terrified, went out and received follow up suggestive messages during the mission.**'. With the use of 'I was terrified' she reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other and graded as an emotion of high kind, considering the choice of adjective. She left the elevator but the violence continued through texts.

Her next paragraph – '**I never took the elevator on my own, checked three times whether my door was locked and stuck to my fellow colleagues for the rest of the days.**' – exemplifies the changes the writer made on her routine to avoid going through that violence

again. Her security measures included not going alone in the elevator, checking her door more times and avoiding being alone in general. when women tell them about this type of violence in which the man did not point a gun to the victim's head; or the victim was not raped; or the victim was not visually injured, people frequently tend to think it was not that bad or that other people got worse or at least it did not happen again, it was a one-time thing, man are like that. People who tend to think this way do not know what the victims have to endure afterwards. Even if in this case the victim did not narrate any second violent encounter with her aggressor, it does not mean what happened just affected her at that moment in time. It did not. And she exemplified that fact by narrating what she did to feel safe afterwards (if a person takes measures to feel safe it means they are not feeling safe) and also when she wrote further on that she did not report it because she feared for her contract. These are all things she went through because of the violence in the elevator.

Then the writer wrote 'I went back and never disclosed the information to anyone, **fearing for my contract**. That was some years ago.'. With 'fearing for my contract' the writer reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other. In this stretch the writer also remarks that by the time she wrote her testimony some years had gone by since the aggression, exemplifying the victims that take some time to disclose their violence for whatever reasons. And she ended her testimony with the sentence '**This MEP is still in office.**'.

Testimony C8 – *The time I was asked to “taste his pancakes”* (October 9, 2018)

In December 2017 I started my internship in the European Parliament.

In the first days of my new appointment, I got into the elevator and inside was a man I did not know.

He looked at me up and down and then proceeded to tell me that there weren't many beautiful women in the European Parliament, and that since I was new I should take the opportunity to “taste his pancakes”.

I looked at him, **quite stunned** by what I had just heard him say. He didn't seem to care about **my obvious discomfort** and kept getting closer and closer to me **He then told me that “pancakes should be eaten in the morning” and that I should absolutely taste them in his place.**

I was so stunned, I could not find it within myself to reply. I was paralyzed with fear.

Luckily, the elevator doors opened just at this moment and I dashed out of the doors, even if it was not the level I planned to get out on. I just wanted to get out of there.

(Source: MeTooEP)

This writer entitled her testimony ‘The time I was asked to “taste his pancakes”.’. She put herself as the subject of the sentence by using the passive voice. She chose not to mention the aggression on her title, but she referred to the aggressor by the use of ‘his’. Her use of the passive voice hid the aggressor from her title, even if she refers to him by using ‘his’. And put herself as the focus of the title as well as the violence.

The writer started her narrative by stating the period in time she was and what she was doing – ‘In December 2017 I started my internship in the European Parliament.’ –. Next, she informed ‘In the first days of my new appointment, I got into the elevator and inside was a man I did not know.’, again an unknown man at a workplace environment is involved in a violence. She made no judgement of him beyond him being unknown to her. She then, wrote what happened, ‘He looked at me up and down and then proceeded to tell me that there weren’t many beautiful women in the European Parliament, and that since I was new I should take the opportunity to “taste his pancakes”.’. In this part the writer did not report any emotion apart from an assessment that refers to the assailant’s speech ‘beautiful women’. This excerpt exemplifies another situation in which a man feels entitled to comment on a woman’s look, the same happened on testimonies .....

In the next paragraph she wrote ‘I looked at him, quite stunned by what I had just heard him say. He didn’t seem to care about my obvious discomfort and kept getting closer and closer to me. He then told me that “pancakes should be eaten in the morning” and that I should absolutely taste them in his place.’. In this part through the use of ‘quite stunned’ the writer reported a negative affect of insecurity as surprise, as a mental process in reaction to other with the intensifier ‘quite’. And by the use of ‘obvious discomfort’ she reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other .

In her next paragraph she wrote ‘I was so stunned, I could not find it within myself to reply. I was paralyzed with fear.’, reporting again a negative affect of insecurity as surprise, as

a mental process in reaction to other by the use of ‘so stunned’ with the intensifier ‘so’, and by the use of ‘I was paralyzed’ she reported a negative affect of insecurity as surprise, as a mental state in reaction to other as well, and ‘with fear’ reported a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other.

She ended her testimony by writing ‘Luckily, the elevator doors opened just at this moment and I dashed out of the doors, even if it was not the level I planned to get out on. I just wanted to get out of there.’ Although she did not report any overt emotion, through the use of ‘I dashed out of the doors’ and ‘I just wanted to get out of there’ the writer reported again a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a behavioral surge (for the first example) and as a mental process (for the second) in reaction to other, illustrating her discomfort, her insecurity and her need to be away from the uncomfortable situation and her assailant.

#### **4.3.3 Conclusion for cluster C**

The emotions reported throughout the eight testimonies in cluster C are again mainly negative. There were only two positive affects, however, only one will be counted, since the one found in C7 is reporting the aggressor’s feelings and not the victim’s, so this one will not count as a positive feeling in the evaluation of how the victims reported their emotions. Therefore, only one positive emotion reported in C5, which is again about feeling relief when the aggressor left the victim’s bedroom, this is the second time relief is used for the same reason.

All the testimonies have at least one emotion reporting insecurity, two of them report unhappiness, there are also examples of dissatisfaction, two of appreciation and several judgements of social sanction and one of social esteem, all negative. Compared to the previous cluster, there was an increase in the amount of insecurity reported. And a significant decrease in the amount of judgment reported. The decrease in the amount of judgement may be due to the fact that most of the violence reported in cluster C did not happen in the presence of other people, and the victims tended to criticize the behavior of the aggressor more when the aggressor acted in a disrespectful manner in front of others, not just in front of the victims.

Four of the testimonies reported shock, four reported feelings of discomfort, and there were two mentions of inappropriate behavior. In this cluster it was possible to see again an increase in the number of negative feelings and an increase in scale as well, considering the

appearance of the adjectives ‘miserable’ and ‘scared’, and the adverb ‘violently’, for example. There is also an increase of emotions reported through behavioral surge.

Five writers did not inform whether or not they report their violence; two informed they did make a complaint but they did not get a reply from it, and one informed she did not report it. Half the writers did not inform lingering feelings post violence, nor did they inform whether they changed their behavior in order to avoid further violence or running into the aggressor. Half of them informed lingering feelings post violence and three of those informed change in their behavior, even if one of them only implies that change.

#### 4.4 CLUSTER D – testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened when they were alone with the aggressor and rape was a factor

In this section it is presented and analyzed the testimonies of sexually assaulted victims in which the violence happened when they were alone with the aggressor and rape was a factor. In this cluster the testimonies D3 and D4 had their paragraphs numbered to facilitate the analysis. This is only done in these two testimonies because they are lengthy in comparison to the others, and the paragraphs are numbered so paragraphs that are not thoroughly analyzed can be mentioned without the need of citing them partially or entirely.

##### Testimony D1 – *The time I was raped by a colleague* (October 22, 2018)

A few months after starting working here I was raped by a colleague.

It was violent and terrifying. I was very young. I did not want to speak to anyone as I was so scared but after my injuries healed I chose to speak out and after several months he lost his job.

I am happy not to work next to him but I have been offered no support. It hurts to work by his office.

I hoped to be a politician one day but I have no more energy. No confidence to even speak some days. We work hard in committees and plenary to keep this incredible House working so well.

**Don't forget about us.**

**We are still hurting.**

(Source: MeTooEP)

The writer chose to entitle her testimony 'The time I was raped by a colleague' putting herself as the subject of the sentence, using the passive voice and expressing the type of violence she went through and through whose hands. In this case, despite using the passive voice, she chose not to conceal the rapist when she wrote 'by a colleague'. But the choice of the passive voice put the focus of her title onto herself and the rape itself, despite the aggressor being revealed, because 'by a colleague' is not a part of the main clause, it is just a complement to it.

She started her narrative by writing 'A few months after starting working here I was raped by a colleague.', the writer, differently than the previous ones, decides to state more or less when it happened and what happened to her, without many information of where it happened or what were the circumstances. Next, she wrote 'It **was violent** and **terrifying**. I was very young.', the first highlighted part reports a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety and the second reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other.

She continues 'I did not want to speak to anyone as **I was so scared** but after my injuries healed I chose to speak out and after several months he lost his job.'. The highlighted part reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier 'so'. This is another example of a victim who was only able to disclose her violence a while after it happened and she did it despite being scared. In her next paragraph '**I am happy** not to work next to him but I have been offered no support. **It hurts to work by his office.**', the writer reports her first positive emotion which is related to the fact that she does not have to work next to her rapist anymore, therefore 'I am happy' reports a positive affect of happiness as cheer, as a mental state in reaction to other. And that positive emotion is followed by a negative, when she wrote 'it hurts to work by his office' she reports a negative affect of unhappiness as misery, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other, in this case to work by the rapist's office. The paragraph presented above also exemplifies the aftermath of a violence, how it follows the victim years after it happened.

She no longer refers directly to the event of her rape or her emotions attached to it, what follows is a declaration of how she feels on her work environment '**I hoped to be a politician one day but I have no more energy. **No confidence to even speak some days.**** We



work hard in committees and plenary to keep this incredible House working so well.’. She declares to have ‘no confidence’, therefore, reporting a negative affect of dissatisfaction as ennui, as a mental state of an undirected mood, an undirected mood because she did not specify what is the reason why she has no confidence.

She ends her testimony with ‘**Don’t forget about us. We are still hurting.**’. It can be assumed that the ‘we’ and ‘us’ in her sentences refers to women who have suffered from sexual violence. The highlighted part reports a negative affect of unhappiness as misery, as a behavioral surge of an undirected mood, since it refers to a group of people whom have gone through violence.

Testimony D2 – *The time he invited himself in* (March 26, 2019)

I joined the EU institutions at **the age of 22**. My first boss was an **over 50 year old** French male. He immediately created a flirtatious, joking atmosphere. He paid special attention to me, **winking at me** in unit meetings, making compliments in French to which I did not even have the language skills to reply, and **commented on my legs**. I thought this meant I was performing well, that this was harmless, and part and parcel of having a French boss.

One evening after work a fellow intern and myself were having a drink on a terrace. My boss spotted us and joined us. **We felt flattered that someone of his status would want to get to know us better**. He insisted on ordering several bottles of wine. We became inebriated. We wanted to take taxis home but he insisted on driving us himself despite having consumed a dangerous amount of alcohol himself.

He dropped my fellow intern off first. Once we were left alone in the car, **he put his hand on my thigh, and kissed me**. He said we should go inside my house so that no one sees us. He followed me in. I vaguely remember **feeling ashamed**. **Inside he sexually assaulted me**.

**No was not an option.**

The next morning he texted “**nice tasting**” to me and proposed to take me on a holiday which I refused. He continued messaging me and **proposing sex on subsequent work missions**, making **humiliating jokes** in front of the rest of the team. **The other (male)**

**colleagues always laughed which encouraged him on.** Over the years **I have learnt to smile less**, to call out **inappropriate behaviour**, and to name what is happening.

**But I never reported this first case of abuse because I believed it was my fault.**

Since then he has been promoted to Director and is currently in charge of high profile files.

(Source: MeTooEP)

The writer entitles her testimony ‘The time he invited himself in’, putting the rapist as the subject of the sentence and referring to the aggressor’s actions that preceded the assault. Although she put the rapist as the focus of her title she made no direct reference to the violence, she opted to leave the sentence in a way unfinished and opened for interpretation. But she also put the responsibility of the action onto the rapist by using the active voice in her clause. Her title can be inferring a double meaning, since she did not complete the sentence ‘he invited himself in’ could be in the house, could also mean inside her.

She starts her narrative by stating how old she was when she joined the EU institutions and who her boss was ‘I joined the EU institutions at **the age of 22**. My first boss was an **over 50 year old** French male.’. Continuing she informs about the atmosphere of working with this boss, especially for her, ‘He immediately created a flirtatious, joking atmosphere. He paid special attention to me, **winking at me** in unit meetings, making compliments in French to which I did not even have the language skills to reply, and **commented on my legs**.’. Although this paragraph does not report emotion, it illustrates how a man, who is a boss, feels comfortable enough to comment on and compliment his subordinate’s appearance, who is a woman, in a workplace environment (the same factor also appeared in testimonies A2, B6, C2, C3 and C8). The writer did not say if this boss treated male subordinates the same, but it can be implied that he did not.

The writer then writes ‘I thought this meant I was performing well, that this was harmless, and part and parcel of having a French boss.’. It is possible to wonder if the writer thought her boss’ attention and comments on her appearance meant she was performing well because he was French or because she had already internalized that if a man (especially an older man who is a boss) notices a woman, it means she is doing her work well, no matter if her job involves her body or her mental abilities.

Next the writer starts narrating the situation that led to her rape ‘One evening after work a fellow intern and myself were having a drink on a terrace. My boss spotted us and joined

us. **We felt flattered** that someone of his status would want to get to know us better.’. The highlighted part reports a positive affect of satisfaction as pleasure, as a mental state in relation to other. The victim was in the company of another coworker when the boss joined them, and his interest in getting to know them better (considering it was an informal situation) led them to feel flattered. The victim continues to narrate what happened next, with the boss ‘insist[ing] on ordering several bottles of wine’ and consequently the writer stated ‘We became inebriated. We wanted to take taxis home but he insisted on driving us himself despite having consumed a dangerous amount of alcohol himself.’. It can be presumed that it might have been the boss’ intention to get them inebriated explaining, then, his insistence in getting ‘several bottles of wine’ and also his insistence on driving them home himself, ‘despite having consumed a dangerous amount of alcohol himself’.

Then ‘He dropped my fellow intern off first. Once we were left alone in the car, **he put his hand on my thigh, and kissed me.**’. Through this passage it can be implied that the aggressor assaulted the victim right after her ‘fellow intern’ left the car, since she declared ‘once we were left alone’, indicating the immediacy of the assault. The immediacy to which he assaulted her can be seen as a suggestion to his intention all along to be alone with her in his car. With the victim being inebriated (as she declared earlier in her testimony) and inside her assailant’s car demonstrates the vulnerable situation in which she was in. The assailant, probably aware of it, suggested going inside the victim’s house, as she wrote in the following sentence ‘He said we should go inside my house so that no one sees us. He followed me in. I vaguely remember **feeling ashamed.**’. The highlighted part reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as ennuï, as a mental state in reaction to other. The writer did not inform the reader why specifically she felt ashamed, whether because of the assailant inside her house or because she was the one to let him in or some other reason, but her ‘feeling ashamed’ was definitely not an undirected mood, it had everything to do with what she was going through.

By writing ‘I vaguely remember’ she indicates again her state of inebriation, however, this is not a suggestion that what happened to her happened because she was drunk or that it might have not happened if she was sober. It is easier to criticize the victim for her conduct and blame her for the violence suffered, but the focus here is that her boss/aggressor knew she was inebriated, he encouraged her to be by ordering lots of wine, and he continued being violent towards her, not despite her being drunk but because she was drunk. His conduct was the

improper one, not hers, and the focus should be in that, since violence is the responsibility of the aggressor and not of the victim.

Next, she stated matter-of-factly ‘**Inside he sexually assaulted me. No was not an option.**’. This victim opted to be clear and direct about what happened to her without going into details of the assault. But the violence she went through did not happen only on that day, it happened in other forms as well in the following morning and following days, as she narrated ‘The next morning he texted “**nice tasting**” to me and proposed to take me on a holiday which I refused. He continued messaging me and **proposing sex on subsequent work missions**, making **humiliating jokes** in front of the rest of the team’. He proposed sex as if that was ok between them, as if he had not just raped her, and he continue on messaging her ‘**proposing sex on subsequent work missions**’, exemplifying here a man using his work position and work-related matters for personal reasons, specifically to assault women (the same is also present in testimonies A2, B6, C3). The highlighted part ‘humiliating jokes’ she reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in impact and also a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety, because, although the adjective ‘humiliating’ is qualifying the noun ‘jokes’ they were ‘humiliating jokes’ made by her assailant, therefore, it is also criticism of his behavior.

A significant point about the stretch above is the fact that it was the writer of the testimony who named the harassment speech she heard from her boss as ‘jokes’. This signals to the internalized idea that if the speech is delivered in a jokingly way and others are laughing at it, and if someone expresses disagreement or discomfort with ‘the joke’, the person making the joke can simply reply ‘it is just a joke’, counting on the cultural notion that through jokes it is possible to freely insult a person and to take away their (or anybody’s) right to complain about it.

Still on the previous paragraph took from the testimony, the following stretch exemplifies men respecting the male code (which also appeared in testimony B5) ‘**The other (male) colleagues always laughed which encouraged him on.**’. While the rapist made humiliating jokes regarding the victim in a workplace environment the other men present laughed which demonstrates their support of the rapist’s behavior. The stretch also exemplifies how standardized it is making humiliating jokes about women, even at a workplace environment, since no one bothered to empathize with the victim and then masking sexual harassment as jokes, which is something that has been already discussed in section 2.3.4 Gender, discourse and language.

The writer affirms that ‘Over the years **I have learnt to smile less**, to call out **inappropriate behaviour**, and to name what is happening.’. The highlighted part reports a negative judgement of social sanction in propriety. This sentence shows another victim changing her behavior to protect herself from further violence. Unfortunately, it is easier for women to change their behavior in order to avoid gender and sexual violence than to hope men will stop being violent. Many women change after they go through a violent occurrence, but this is similar to blaming the victim. Women might change after a violent occurrence because they believe in some level that they could have acted differently to avoid being assaulted. But it is not what women wear, how they act, what they say, what they do, or who they are that make them susceptible to violent men. It is the impunity and the excuses that are given to violent men that give them endorsement to keep on being violent.

Confirming the assumption that the writer of this testimony thought at some level that the assault was her fault she affirms ‘**But I never reported this first case of abuse because I believed it was my fault.**’. Because she believed it was her fault is one of the reasons why she changed her behavior to prevent further violence. She also informs the reader that she ‘**never reported this first case of abuse**’, by the use of the word ‘first’ it can be implied that there were other cases of abuse, which she might have reported, since she did not say for example ‘I never reported any case of abuse’, on the contrary, she is specific about the case she did not report.

She ends her testimony with the sentence ‘Since then he has been promoted to Director and is currently in charge of high profile files.’. The life of the rapist did not change because he assaulted a woman (probably not the only one), it did not get worse, in this case it got better. The victim’s lives are the ones that are changed forever, be it because they chose it to prevent further violence, be it because the event affects them for years.

Testimony D3 – *God was in the car too: surviving sexual assault with my faith in tact*

1. For the first two nights, I slept in my car. I parked in the empty rows of my apartment complex and no one noticed me. I laid in the reclined middle row of my Toyota Highlander and the security officer never saw me when he made his rounds.

2. As I laid there unable to envision a day I **would feel safe** in my own home again, I wondered why God hated me so much.

3. My mother had died a year and a half before and, here I was, sleeping in my car because, somehow, I managed to experience the one thing she spent her entire life protecting me from.

4. It was my fault and I knew it. I had no business inviting him into my home; I didn't even really know him that well. I didn't know him at all, actually. He **was a fine,** chocolate brother who answered the AAA call to jump my car battery. He flirted and, though **a little apprehensive,** I responded in kind. I thought that would be it. I didn't even give him my number; he took it from the service call. When he texted me and told me he was interested in getting to know me better, I didn't know what to do.

5. I was only a few weeks removed from the official end of the relationship I thought would last forever. I wasn't ready to be serious with anyone let alone allow them to get to know me better. But my friends insisted it was time. My ex had moved on rather hastily and, according to my girls, I shouldn't sit **at home crying over him** when he was already in someone else's face. Reluctantly, I conceded. After a few calls, texts, and FaceTime conversations, I agreed to a date.

6. It was never my intention to invite him to my place. Honestly, that was the furthest thing from my mind. We began discussing my dog, Langston, and he told me he grew up with mastiffs. He hadn't been around one in years and would love to meet him. Looking back, he pressed in ways I noticed but dismissed. Maybe he's overeager. Maybe he really likes me. Maybe I'm too jaded right now to know what genuine interest looks like. What could be the harm? Plus, I thought about those curtain rods. The curtain rods my ex promised to hang for me, but never did. While it may sound crazy to some, allowing someone else to install those curtain rods meant I was finally ready to let go of the hopes I had for our future. When he agreed to hang them while meeting Langston, I didn't see some happily ever after for us. I did, however, see myself taking the first steps toward healing my heart. When it was over, I laid on the floor beside those still unopened curtain rods wondering where I put the receipt.

7. Those days in the car were among the hardest of my life. I racked my brain, racing through every mistake I could remember, wondering which one I forgot to ask forgiveness for. There I was coming to terms with being raped and blaming myself.

8. Everything I'd heard in church about the wrath of God in our lives being our fault came back and I believed it all.

9. God was punishing me for refusing to be contrite about something I'd done in my past; that was the only plausible explanation.

10. Looking back, I can't fault myself for believing I was to blame. When something terrible happens, we want answers. And though answers never make anything better, we believe we need them so we make some up. But believing that I'd brought this unspeakable horror into my life did very little to stop the pain. I was sleeping in a car, applying medicated ointment to the burn he left on my right breast, and to the wounds I'd created from a scalding hot shower and my attempts to scratch his touch from my skin. If I was the reason this happened to me, why didn't God give me a chance to make things right before this happened? Why did God hate me? It was the question I would ask over and over again.

11. It would take time to realize God was crying with me in the car. As I laid there with **tears in my eyes** and **rage in my heart**, God endured my accusations of hatred. The maker of Heaven and Earth had very little in the way of defense. Some things are indefensible. Rape is one of them. As I pressed, God had no words. Only tears. Somehow, those tears would be enough for me. In time, I would come to understand the presence of God in my darkest hour as both apology and assurance.

12. There is evil in this world and someone I'd shown kindness to leaned into that evil and caused me great pain. For that—for endowing humanity with the beauty of free will which had destroyed me, God was deeply sorry. And God wasn't going anywhere.

13. No matter how long it took to trust God again, trust myself again and believe safe space could be mine, God would be there. And God was. And God is.

14. This didn't happen overnight. It was the product of steady, consistent steps. Weekly appointments with my therapist. Weekly survivors' group counseling meetings. Daily doses of antidepressants. I met with and read the accounts of other women who went through this and drew strength from them. Each tool was an opportunity to encounter God in new and healing ways. I refused to allow the experience to break me anymore than I'd already been broken and I was committed to doing the work to be whole and well.

15. Necessary to my survival was the rejection of dangerous theologies suggesting one can't pray and worry. I did both. All the time. As a victim of sexual assault, my safety had been compromised and **I was fearful of everyone** and everything around me. It was nonsensical to believe I could just pray away that fear. Worry was a natural response to this



trauma and the God who was with me in the car made room for my anxiety over my current circumstances and for my expectations of divine protection. I believed and God helped my unbelief.

16. I made the decision not to press charges against my rapist. Admittedly, I was ashamed and afraid. I couldn't see myself enduring the questions of why I'd allowed him in my house. I didn't want a defense attorney to subpoena my text messages and contort flirtatious banter into invitation and permission. I didn't want my identity as a sex-positive Christian, which was well documented in public essays and posts, to be held against me. I know what happens to women when we come forward and I couldn't endure that. There was no way I would survive the harsh scrutiny, especially without my mother.

17. When I told a friend what happened, he insisted that if I didn't go to the police, I was saying it was okay for my rapist to do this to another woman and, as a Black feminist, I was contradicting every principle I proclaimed. Though it was the ugliest thing anyone ever said to me, deep down, I believed it. How could I say I would do everything to ensure the safety of girls and women if I wouldn't hold the man who shattered my own sense of safety and peace accountable? It was in a group meeting where a fellow survivor told me no friend would ever say anything like that.

18. They also told me that, though I may have not pursued legal accountability, I was doing what I needed to heal and that mattered more than anything.

19. After asking permission, they hugged me and wiped my tears. They reminded me that putting myself first was no reason to feel ashamed.

20. They helped me see prioritizing my healing journey, allowing it to take shape however it needed, was a holy act.

21. This year makes three from that experience and those nights spent in my car. Healing is a process. There are days when I'm fine and feel like my old self. Then, there are days when the weight of what I experienced is still crippling. Though I have experienced beautiful physical intimacy that has been healing in itself, I can also look to instances where the impact of sexual assault has shaped my interactions and created relationship strain. I am still learning myself in light of this. I am still grieving who I once was, honoring who I am and shaping who I can become.

22. This is a painful page in the chapters-long story of my life. And while this one page shaped parts of the story, I refuse to let it craft the ending. There is so much possibility, joy and wonder to be found in this life. I feel them now and will abound in them even more



as my life unfolds. On the darkest days, when the memories try to defeat me, I am able to overcome—not because I am hated, but because **I am loved. I am loved** by God and God’s love is consistent, whole, and is present with me through it all.

(Source: me too.)

Considering the length of this testimony not all parts of it will be included in the analysis and the paragraphs have been numbered to facilitate the location of the part mentioned. The main focus is to present the emotions reported and other discourses present that add to the whole of this research. This testimony is structured differently than the previous ones because this is the first one from the *me too.* website, the second and last is the following one that will be analyzed next.

The title of this testimony ‘God was in the car too: surviving sexual assault with my faith in tact’ puts God as the center of it, which is fitting considering that the writer wrote a lot more about her relationship with God through her way of dealing with what happened to her, than she did write about the rape, the rapist and her emotions regarding it. Through her title it is possible to assume that the focus of her testimony is not only God but also ‘surviving sexual assault with [her] faith in tact’.

Differently than all the previous testimonies, this writer opted to start her narrative talking about after the violence happened. At the beginning of the testimony the reader only knows that she was sexually assaulted because of her title, since she only names what she went through on her seventh paragraph. She only names it after writing about the rape. Therefore, her first paragraph is the writer saying that ‘For the first two nights, I slept in my car’ in the parking space of her apartment complex.

In her second paragraph she wrote ‘As I laid there unable to envision a day I **would feel safe** in my own home again, I wondered why God hated me so much’. The highlighted part refers to her first reported emotion. The writer chose to not say ‘I feel unsafe at my own home’, instead she reports her emotion by saying that she was ‘unable to envision a day [she] would feel safe’, therefore, reporting a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other, the other being the fact that she was raped at her own home. She also presented her wondering why God hated her, because she believed (as she also affirms later on) that it was God who allowed her to be raped, because of something bad she did in her past, as she

confirms in paragraph 8 ‘God was punishing me for refusing to be contrite about something I’d done in my past; that was the only plausible explanation.’.

The writer not only believed (before coming to terms with what happened to her) that God had allowed her violence to happen, she also blamed herself for letting it happen, as she wrote in paragraph 3 ‘My mother had died a year and a half before and, here I was, sleeping in my car because, somehow, I managed to experience the one thing she spent her entire life protecting me from.’. And also, in paragraph 4 ‘It was my fault and I knew it. I had no business inviting him into my home; I didn’t even really know him that well. I didn’t know him at all, actually.’, as if her letting the rapist in her house was reason enough for her to be raped.

She continues her narrative by talking about the assailant and how she met him ‘He was a fine, chocolate brother who answered the AAA call to jump my car battery. He flirted and, though a little apprehensive, I responded in kind.’. The ‘AAA call’ she refers to is a roadside assistance that works 24 hours. In the first highlighted part the writer reports a positive judgement of social esteem in normality, she also makes a reference to the color of his skin by the use of ‘chocolate brother’. And the second highlighted part reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier ‘little’. She was a probably ‘a little apprehensive’ to flirty back, maybe because she was just out of a serious relationship as she informs the reader in paragraph 5 ‘I was only a few weeks removed from the official end of the relationship I thought would last forever’.

Then she wrote that he contacted her after that, getting her contact information from the service call, and he informed her of his interest on her, to which she wrote ‘I didn’t know what to do.’. Her friends encouraged her to give him a chance because ‘it was time’ since ‘[her] ex had moved on rather hastily and, according to [her] girls, [she] shouldn’t sit at home crying over him when he was already in someone else’s face.’. The highlighted part reports a negative affect of unhappiness as misery, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other, but this is referring to her suffering after the end of the relationship she ‘thought would last forever’. Then, she informs the reader ‘Reluctantly, I conceded. After a few calls, texts, and FaceTime conversations, I agreed to a date’. Maybe the fact that she was not really into going out with someone just yet added to her feeling guilty, since she did not listen to how she felt about going out with someone new.

In paragraph 6 she highlights that ‘it was never [her] intention to invite him to [her] place’, but told her he grew up around dogs the same breed as hers and ‘He hadn’t been around one in years and would love to meet him.’. Then she reflects that ‘Looking back, he pressed in

ways I noticed but dismissed'. She noticed that 'he pressed' to meet her dog and despite noticing it she dismissed thinking of reasons why he was pressing the matter as excuses for his behavior. But this addition only reinforces what she had already written, that she blamed herself for the assault, she may have wonder 'what if I hadn't dismissed that', 'what if I had listened to my perception'.

The writer keeps on giving the reader, and herself, justifications to all the things that added up inside of her in order for her to allow him inside her house 1. he asking to meet her dog; 2. her mental excuses of his odd persistence on meeting her dog; 3. maybe she did not know anymore what 'genuine interest looks like'; and then, (maybe what was the breaking point for her to say yes to him visiting her dog) 4. 'allowing someone else to install those curtain rods meant I was finally ready to let go of the hopes I had for our future'. Her ex-boyfriend had promised to hang the curtain rods for her but he never did.

The writer, then, explains that the rapist's acceptance of hanging the curtain rods for her did not mean she saw 'some happily ever after' for them, but for her it meant 'taking the first steps towards healing her heart'. Instead of doing what he said he was ok doing it (hanging the curtain rods) and instead of meeting her dog and maybe playing with it a bit, he chose to rape her. He chose to take advantage of the situation. Subsequently, the writer informs the reader that she was raped, but she did not use the word for it just yet, she did not say how she felt, and she did not describe how he attacked her, instead she wrote 'When it was over, I laid on the floor beside those still unopened curtain rods wondering where I put the receipt'.

The stretch above points out to where her mind was right after being raped. Although it may seem surreal that she had just been raped and was thinking about something else entirely, it can be presumed that maybe the thought of what she had gone through had not processed in her conscious mind yet, or maybe her mind was finding something else to think about, because thinking about anything else is better than having to deal with the reality of what just had happened. Maybe she associated those curtain rods to why she was in the situation she was in, because perhaps if she did not want someone else hanging them as a step towards healing her heart that wouldn't have happened. But the fact is that the only person to blame for an aggression is the aggressor himself. He should have not taken advantage of her, he should never have raped her, there is nothing that can excuse someone raping someone else. However, as many testimonies have been illustrating, women tend to blame themselves or their behavior for

the violence they suffer, not just because there is a culture of victim blaming but it can also be because that is something that is under their control, whereas the aggressor's behavior is not.

Next, she writes 'Those days in the car were among the hardest of my life. I racked my brain, racing through every mistake I could remember, wondering which one I forgot to ask forgiveness for.' Here she confirms that she was reviewing 'every mistake' she made and the fact that she was naming her attitude as 'mistakes' and that she was asking forgiveness for them indicates she was blaming herself and this is confirmed again on her following sentence 'There I was coming to terms with being raped and blaming myself.'

She then starts talking about how she was dealing with her rape through the lenses of religion, how some teachings added to her certainty that she was the guilty one for being raped 'Everything I'd heard in church about the wrath of God in our lives being our fault came back and I believed it all' 'God was punishing me for refusing to be contrite about something I'd done in my past; that was the only plausible explanation.'. The writer of this testimony kept her faith intact (as her title suggested it) despite the blame the religion she knew added to her blaming herself, but this testimony reinforces how much some religious teachings can be harmful, especially towards women. The belief in God is not what can harm people, but the guilt added through religious teaching of what a person of God can or cannot do, of what will be the consequences of not following the religious principles.

She pointed out that 'believing that [she]'d brought this unspeakable horror into [her] life did very little to stop the pain.', it probably added pain to her life thinking that her actions (something she can control) was the reason for her rape. And in the midst of blaming herself she was also angry at God for allowing her to go through it without giving her 'a chance to make things right before [it] happened'. Her recurring question was 'Why did God hate me?'

Then the writer starts to narrate that 'It would take time to realize God was crying with me in the car. As I laid there with **tears in my eyes** and **rage in my heart**, God endured my accusations of hatred', pointing out to her, eventually, coming to terms with God. By the use of 'with tears in my eyes' she reports a negative affect of unhappiness as misery, as a behavioral surge of an undirected mood. And by the use of 'rage in my heart' she reports a negative affect of unhappiness as antipathy, as a mental state of an undirected mood. In both cases it is of an undirected mood since she did not clarify what was the trigger of those feelings, since it could be, for example, the rape itself or her unhappiness with how she behaved leading up to her rape.

'As a victim of sexual assault, my safety had been compromised and **I was fearful of everyone** and everything around me.' Reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as

mental state in reaction to other. Her safety was put in jeopardy since her rape and not being safe added to the fear of people and things, she explains that ‘worry was a natural response to this trauma’.

After narrating the hate and discontent thoughts about God she uses paragraphs 11, 12 and 13 to preach about God’s goodness and to explain the shift in her understanding of God as she wrote ‘I would come to understand the presence of God in my darkest hour as both apology and assurance’.

In paragraph 14 the writer explains that the shift in her understanding of God and regaining trust in him and in herself was a process that took time and help from others (therapist, survivors’ group meetings, medication, other victims). Her dealing with her trauma is always narrated in addition to her trust in God.

In paragraph 15 she wrote ‘As a victim of sexual assault, my safety had been compromised and I was fearful of everyone and everything around me.’ The highlighted part reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as mental state in reaction to other. Her safety was put in jeopardy since her rape and not being safe added to the fear of people and things, she explains that ‘worry was a natural response to this trauma’.

The writer wrote in paragraph 16 ‘I made the decision not to press charges against my rapist’, she then explains ‘Admittedly, I was ashamed and afraid.’, the first highlighted part reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as ennui, as a mental process in reaction to other (the other being going through rape), and the second reports a negative affect of insecurity as disquiet, as a mental process in reaction to other (the other being what she narrates next). She then, explains what she was afraid of

I couldn’t see myself enduring the questions of why I’d allowed him in my house. I didn’t want a defense attorney to subpoena my text messages and contort flirtatious banter into invitation and permission. I didn’t want my identity as a sex-positive Christian, which was well documented in public essays and posts, to be held against me. I know what happens to women when we come forward and I couldn’t endure that. There was no way I would survive the harsh scrutiny, especially without my mother.

She affirmed knowing what happens to women when they come forward about cases of sexual assault, and what happens is what has already been mentioned previously, that the justice system, which should help victims find justice, often revictimizes them through the

whole process it takes from reporting to *maybe* the punishment of the aggressor. For some women, that is too great a price to pay for the *chance* of having justice done.

The writer was, in paragraph 17, revictimized when confiding to a friend and the friend criticized her choice of not reporting the rape ‘When I told a friend what happened, he insisted that if I didn’t go to the police, I was saying it was okay for my rapist to do this to another woman and, as a Black feminist, I was contradicting every principle I proclaimed.’. Therefore, even though she did not report to avoid being put through something she was not ok to do, her friend (someone she trusted) was not supportive and put her in a position she did not want to be seen at. She then writes ‘Though it was **the ugliest thing** anyone ever said to me, deep down, I believed it. How could I say I would do everything to ensure the safety of girls and women if I wouldn’t hold the man who shattered my own sense of safety and peace accountable?’. The highlighted part reports a negative appreciation as a reaction in quality. She evaluated his speech as negative, but that did not prevent her from believing in him, condemning herself, and adding up that knew perspective of her character to all the guilt she was already carrying. The rape was one type of violence, and her friend judging her for not coming forward about something she could not face is another type of violence. When the people who should support victims revictimize them they are just making them go through violence all over again

The writer talks about how going to a support group helped her understand that what her friend said was not ok since ‘no friend would ever say anything like that’, and that the important thing is that she ‘was doing what [she] needed to heal’.

Then, in paragraph 21, in the stretch ‘This year makes three from that experience and those nights spent in my car. Healing is a process. There are days when I’m fine and feel like my old self. Then, there are days when the weight of what I experienced is still crippling. Though I have experienced beautiful physical intimacy that has been healing in itself, I can also look to instances where the impact of sexual assault has shaped my interactions and created relationship strain.’ the writer verbalizes a lot more than previous victims, how being sexually assaulted affected her life even three years after it happened. It did not affect only how she viewed herself and the event but also possible relationships and connections. She clarifies that there are days and days, but she still senses what she experienced as a ‘crippling’ sensation that takes her off guard.

In the first sentence of her last paragraph the writer stated ‘This is a **painful page in the chapters-long story of my life**. And while this one page shaped parts of the story, I refuse to let it craft the ending.’. By the use of ‘painful page’, the writer reports a negative affect of

unhappiness as misery, as a behavioral surge in reaction to other. This victim's testimony surrounded healing and her belief in God, throughout her whole testimony she associates what she went through with God and she ended her testimony the same way ' . On the darkest days, when the memories try to defeat me, I am able to overcome—not because I am hated, but because **I am loved**. **I am loved** by God and God's love is consistent, whole, and is present with me through it all.' . She ended her testimony by linking God to her ability to overcome 'the darkest days'. The highlighted part 'I am love' reports a positive affect of happiness as affection, as a mental state in reaction to other.

Testimony D4 – *Considering Tamar: A survivor-centered healing approach for the Christian Church*

1. I was raped by the cousin of someone I called “friend” when I was 23 years old. After living through childhood sexual abuse, this added breach sent me on a long, winding journey of trying to figure out how to be fully and authentically myself when most of the time **I felt incredibly “out of my skin.”** I didn't report what happened. The rape advocate I'd been assigned when I went to the hospital never returned my phone calls. After confiding in my friend what her cousin had done, she told me that it was my fault and listed a litany of things I'd done wrong while alone with him. After that, it would take many years before I'd confide in anyone else. It would take me almost two decades to get the support I needed to truly come to terms with that traumatic experience.

2. Even though I was a person of faith and a regular church attendee, it never occurred to me to go to my church about the assault. Maybe it was because **I felt an overwhelming amount of shame** about what happened. Better said, **I was scared** out of my mind. In hindsight, I know that somewhere in my mind, I didn't view the church as a safe place to bring this particular kind of pain. I'd seen friends deal with church mothers who asked them, “What did you expect wearing what you did?” I'd heard deacons and pastors elude to those ridiculously myopic questions of “why did you wait so long?” or “why didn't you fight back?”

3. Not to mention the numerous inappropriate touches and words that many women I knew, including myself, had experienced at the hands of men (and women) in the church. No, the Christian church—the Western evangelical variety, in particular—was definitely not on my list of places to seek refuge from the weight of my trauma despite the fact that, at its core, that’s exactly what the church should be. The Christian church has a responsibility to support survivors, even more so than other institutions, because of the mandate of care and demonstration of accountability that Jesus asserts to His disciples both 2,000 years ago and today.

**We must do better.**

4. The story of how people of faith respond to women who have been sexually assaulted is as old as the biblical text itself. Tamar, a daughter of King David, was raped by her brother Amnon (see 2 Samuel 13). Her violator was not a stranger, and the violation did not occur behind some random, olive tree in the Middle East. Worse, what’s demonstrated in this rarely preached or taught text is the same kind of responses that we see even today in our churches when a person speaks out about their assault. Silencing. Tamar’s loss of agency. Sympathy for the perpetrator. And what I often call emotional injustice—no reconciliation of the heart for the survivor because of all the impediments to their healing put in place by those who were supposed to love and serve her.

5. So how does the church make this right? How do we do better at holding space for the Tamars in and out of our congregations? Here are a few steps Christian churches can take to walk alongside survivors on their healing journey:

**Space to give it air.**

6. Churches must create a culture and community that allows survivors to feel safe to share their stories. Make available a myriad of pathways to healing for those who need it. If we truly believe that “death and life is in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21)” and “we overcome by the blood of the Lamb AND the word of our testimony (Revelation 12:11, emphasis mine)” then we must equally believe that we should help restore life in survivors by allowing them the space for sharing. Giving our stories air diffuses the power of the trauma in our hearts. It breaks the chains of the traumatic memory; chains that can hold our bodies, minds, and destinies hostage. Churches claim to want freedom for their members, so the church should be a vessel for that to happen.

7. “Giving it air” also means choosing to not be silent in the face of sexual harassment and assault. There are numerous scriptures that support the church’s role in standing up for



those who have been wronged (see Micah 6:8, Psalm 82:3, Luke 11:42, Isaiah 1:17) and yet, many times women and men who come forward about their violations are told to keep quiet. Or, they are ostracized because they broke the code of silence that already existed. This has got to end.

8. It's an interesting paradox that the church has everything to say about a woman's sexuality in terms of with whom and when she should have sex—according to specific interpretations of scripture—and yet is silent when forced to confront the violation of that same sexuality. That in and of itself can be a kind of violence. Alone, the defense of the bible as a guide for sexual ethics is problematic at best. The fact that those alleged sexual ethics do not always translate into care for those who are sexually traumatized is beyond devastating. Author, storyteller, and artistic theologian, Alexis Rhone wrote about this contradiction in an essay found in the anthology, *Sex and the Church Girl*,

9. *"I do not vote for the Bible as a guide for a sexual ethic that transcends time and place. In fact, I believe biblical narratives often check the 'it's complicated' box. The Bible, however, does offer assurance of God's concern for abusive, unchecked power and rampant injustice. To that end, the scriptures are clearer: God's not playing with us. For many women of faith who feel the weight of powerlessness sustained by their silence, the scriptures remind us we're endowed with an innate ability to be tactical."*

10. The church must eschew silence in favor of helping victims of sexual violence build a strategy for survival.

#### **Facilitate a strategy for healing survivors**

11. So what does "helping build a survival strategy" look like? Tangibly it means opening the pulpit to the discussion and denouncing of sexual assault. Since leadership in many traditional Christian churches is still incredibly centralized, there has to be a clear message of zero tolerance for sexual violence of any kind delivered from pastors and ministers. There is no gray here. There is no "maybe she could have..." or "let's wait for all the facts..." or "maybe he didn't know..." We can certainly build a pathway for true repentance and reconciliation for a person who engages in this kind of violence—as the church, we must—but the first step on that path must be accountability and consequence.

12. The church should also facilitate the formation of support groups led by trained therapists to help survivors navigate the aftermath of their traumatic event—no matter if that

aftermath is two days or thirty years later. While I would never have willingly wanted to be a part of a community of sexual assault survivors, I'm clear that having a network and home base of people who have walked through similar experiences has helped facilitate my own healing journey.

**Build it into the teaching**

13. Finally, I would encourage churches to consider the development of biblically-centered curriculum that helps everyone in the congregation to wrestle and make sense of biblical texts like Tamar's that reference sexual assault but also outlines the ways in which the community can support those who have experienced this kind of trauma. Part of that curriculum must include extensive work with young boys around the nature of consent. So much of the nuance and complexities injected into public discourse around sexual assault and violence boil down to a clear misunderstanding of what constitutes consent in a relationship. Sure, the church can continue to preach against pre-marital sex and fornication, if that's part of the doctrine a particular congregation prescribes to. But that doesn't mean that we don't equally invest in teaching what meaningful sexual relationships should look like no matter the context. Believe it or not, those two things are not mutually exclusive; they can live side by side.

14. One of the immediate benefits of offering safe space for survivors, especially women-identified survivors, to give their stories air and heal from their trauma is that it frees us to not have to internalize misogyny in order to exist in a space that is supposed to offer spiritual grounding. When I was raped, it wasn't a man who discredited me, it was a woman. There are stories of young girls who go to women in the church about something that made them uncomfortable, only to be chastised and shamed by that woman. Part of this has to do with women who have bought into the narrative of their insignificance and who feel they have to protect the pastor, church, or perpetrator in question. Part of the pervasiveness of rape culture is the fact that there are often unhealed women, sometimes even survivors themselves, who co-sign sexual violence by being the ones who facilitate the silencing of other women. This is entirely too common in the Christian church. Women who have resigned that "boys will be boys" are, yes, complicit in the perpetuating of sexual trauma, but usually have only resorted to this as a form of survival because of their own insecurities within Church culture. When Church leaders shift that culture by allowing survivors to share, holding perpetrators accountable, and putting supports in place, this kind of internalized behavior becomes less and less prevalent. As the Church invests in teaching young boys the nuances of consent and

the integrity of being responsible for their actions, we must also teach women and girls to believe other women and girls. To not weaponize each other's pain in order to survive ourselves.

15. I have to believe that change is on the horizon for the Christian church. I have to believe that some of the exposure and upheaval we see in leadership across multiple denominations and sects is because of organizations and movements like 'me too.' that are shifting the conversation and creating a safe space for survivors to tell their stories and get the healing they need. Aaron Earls writes in a study conducted by factsandtrends.net that, of pastors who had heard of #MeToo, many said that "it has brought changes to their church. Almost 6 in 10 (58%) say their congregation is more aware of how common domestic and sexual violence is. Sixty-two percent say their congregation now has more empathy toward those experiencing domestic and sexual violence." In that same article, writer, speaker, and survivor, Trillia Newbell says,

16. *"Christian organizations can no longer ignore the issue. They are being forced to make decisions and to implement change to start thinking through this topic and how it relates to the church."*

17. There is no other option. The church must shift its approach if we truly desire to uphold the central tenets of our faith: To love God (the God who tells us to "maintain love and justice" – Hosea 12:6) and to love our neighbors as ourselves (inclusive of Tamar and all who has walked a similar path).

(Source: me too.)

As the previous testimony connects its story with her religious link, her title is the first clue towards that fact 'Considering Tamar: A survivor-centered healing approach for the Christian Church'. The difference between this testimony and the previous one in that sense is that the previous writer talks more about her relationship with God, whereas this one talks more about her relationship with the Christian Church and her view on how they are dealing with victims of violence.

Another thing to be noticed in this title is the use of the word 'survival' to refer to victims of violence. This and the previous testimonies were the ones to refer to victims as survivors. I would like to argue here that calling a victim a survivor is a way of diverting the focus of a violence away from the perpetrator and towards the person who suffered it, it is also

the same as telling victims to get together and heal themselves and move on with their lives, leaving behind the pain and suffering inflicted on them, as if there were always a path towards healing if you really tried it.

Of course, the term ‘victim’ sometimes is a title people do not want to bear because it indicates frailty, it puts the person in a position of vulnerability, of not taking responsibility. But victims of violence are indeed victims, because thinking that they could have done something to prevent the violence from happening is like saying the violence is at least partially their fault, when the responsibility is entirely the perpetrators’. And seeing victims as survivor is focusing on what they have done to overcome trauma as if it is something positive that they found a way to cope with it, as if it is good they have learned from it, there are way better ways of learning things that do not require going through trauma. And it also puts focus on the victim as a person who survived despite it all. Throughout all of that where is the perpetrator accountable? It is crucial to give support to victims, to help them heal, to help them cope with life after violence, but it is also crucial to never forget that violence keep on happening all around for lack of punishment for those to the assailants, for lack of rules that favor the victim and not the aggressor. While the justice system keeps on revictimizing the victim when they already have to deal with so much, there will be no good reason to report a sexual assault if the victim is not supported and the perpetrators punished.

The writer divided her testimony in four subtitles ‘**We must do better**’; ‘**Space to give it air**’; ‘**Facilitate a strategy for healing survivors**’; and ‘**Build it into the teaching**’. Therefore, even without reading the testimony it is possible to notice that her testimony is directed at church leaders, people who have a say on how things are done inside churches. Although she does write her testimony talking about her violence, her main focus is reaching churches to do better so victims can see churches as safe places to go find the support they need.

The writer starts her testimony by stating at once what happened to her, who did it, and how old she was at the occurrence ‘I was raped by the cousin of someone I called “friend” when I was 23 years old.’. She reported no emotions, she stated it as a matter of fact.

Then, on paragraph 1, she writes ‘After living through childhood sexual abuse, this added breach sent me on a long, winding journey of trying to figure out how to be fully and authentically myself when most of the time I felt incredibly “out of my skin.” I didn’t report what happened’. The highlighted part reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as ennui, as a mental state in reaction to other with the intensifier ‘incredibly’. Although the stretch does not report an overt emotion, it does signals to her state of mind. The classification of the emotion

was done considering what she wrote previously to the affirmation of having a feeling of being ‘out of my skin’, that part indicates that her feeling of being out of her skin meant not recognizing herself anymore, not feeling herself anymore. And also, the fact that she wrote ‘winding journey of trying to figure out how to be fully and authentically myself’ indicates that she was not satisfied with her current state of mind, therefore, reporting the emotions mentioned above. In the same stretch she also informed the reader that she did not report her rape, however she did not say why.

Then she says that ‘The rape advocate I’d been assigned when I went to the hospital never returned my phone calls. After confiding in my friend what her cousin had done, she told me that it was my fault and listed a litany of things I’d done wrong while alone with him.’. First, she did not get support from the professional whose job is to support victims of rape, then, when confiding on a friend she suffered another violence. Considering how her friend reacted to her talking about her rape explains why the use of quotation marks around the word ‘friend’ and considering that she wrote ‘someone I called “friend”’ pointing out to the fact that she thought the woman was her friend, but after the event narrated above she came to realize she was wrong. The fact that the friend is a woman is indicated in the use of ‘her cousin’ and ‘she told me’. The stretch illustrates the repercussion of rape myths, considering that the friend was listing the things the victim had done that lead to her rape, therefore, it was her fault.

In paragraph 2 she writes about the fact that she did not think about looking for support on her church ‘Maybe it was because I felt an overwhelming amount of shame about what happened. Better said, I was scared out of my mind.’. She reported two emotions, the first through the use of ‘overwhelming amount of shame’ reports a negative affect of dissatisfaction as ennui, as a mental process in reaction to other (the other being going through rape). And the second, ‘I was scared’ reports a negative affect of insecurity as a disquiet, as a mental state in reaction to other. Therefore, although the church is a place that people go to when they need support going through hard times (whatever it means for each individual), the writer of the testimony did not think of her church for that purpose for her case. She also narrates that she felt like that because she had ‘seen friends deal with church mothers who asked them, “What did you expect wearing what you did?” I’d heard deacons and pastors elude to those ridiculously myopic questions of “why did you wait so long?” or “why didn’t you fight back?”’. All the examples of speech written above are illustrations of the propagation of rape myths and victim

blaming, and this is even more alarming when considering that this type of speech is being disseminated even on places and among people who should be supportive and understanding.

Added to the previous violence towards victims the writer said “Not to mention the numerous inappropriate touches and words that many women I knew, including myself, had experienced at the hands of men (and women) in the church.’. The highlighted part reports a negative judgment of social sanction in propriety. Illustrating other types of violence inside a place that should be a safe heaven. She knew about this violence also because she was one to suffer from it. She finishes paragraph 3 writing about the Christian church not being a place that she would look for support and reinforcing how it is the responsibility of churches to support ‘survivors’.

In paragraph 4 she talks about how sexual assault is viewed and she uses an example from the bible. She pointed out that the reaction to speaking up about the violence, illustrated in the text ‘2 Samuel 13’ ‘we see even today in or churches [...]. Silencing. Tamar’s loss of agency. Sympathy for the perpetrator.’. This writer opted to talk about sexual violence and focus on how churches should do better at supporting victims. And then from paragraph 5 on, she lists ‘[...] a few steps Christian churches can take to walk alongside survivors on their healing journey:’. When talking about what church member should do, she includes herself in it as well. Considering that after paragraph 5 her testimony is a list of steps directed at churches and she only writes about her rape once in that part, there will not be a thorough analysis of the rest of the testimony, because the focus of this dissertation is the victim writing about her violence, and this testimony is the victim writing about ways in which the church can change to be a better place for women and people who go through violence.

The last mention to the rape is done in paragraph 14, when the writer said ‘When I was raped, it wasn’t a man who discredited me, it was a woman. There are stories of young girls who go to women in the church about something that made them uncomfortable, only to be chastised and shamed by that woman.’. She opted to say that ‘One of the immediate benefits of offering safe space for survivors, especially women-identified survivors, to give their stories air and heal from their trauma is that it frees us to not have to internalize misogyny in order to exist in a space that is supposed to offer spiritual grounding.’, she apparently believes that support groups would instantly free women from internalized misogyny, and although it would definitely help women understand the violence they went through and help them to not spread rape myths and/or victim blaming. It would not instantly free women from internalized misogyny, but it would be a step towards it. Saying that support groups could immediately free

women from internalized misogyny is oversimplifying a problem that is rooted and spread throughout different societies and cultures and it is not so simply solved, but that would definitely be a way to start.

#### **4.4.1 Conclusion for cluster D**

The emotions reported throughout the four testimonies in cluster D are also mainly negative. These time there were four positive emotions reported, one in D1, which is related to the victim not having to work next to her aggressor any longer; one in D2 related to a good feeling regarding the aggressor before the violence, it was mainly based on an impression of him; and two in D3, the first regarding the aggressor before the violence, also based on an impression of the victim related to the aggressor, and the second has nothing to do with the aggressor, it is about the victim's relationship with God. Testimony D4 only reported negative emotions.

From the four testimonies, all reported dissatisfaction, three reported insecurity, three reported judgement, two reported unhappiness and two reported forms of appreciation. Compared to the previous cluster, there was an increase in the amount of reported unhappiness, which is significant considering that cluster C encompasses eight testimonies and cluster D four. There was also a decrease in the amount of insecurity reported, also a significant decrease considering the difference in number of testimonies in each cluster, while cluster C had 24 reported insecurities, cluster D had 7.

In terms of reported violence, all the writers informed whether or not they reported the rape. Three of them reported and one did not. Three out of the four writers reported lingering feelings after the violence, which affected their quality of life, and three reported, even if implied, change in their behavior after the violence. All the testimonies in cluster D talked about shame, while from the other clusters only testimonies B4 and C4 talked about it as well. The writer from C4 did not use the word 'blame', but she indicated it in the end of her testimony.

#### 4.5 ANALYSIS OUTCOME

Summing up the findings of the analysis, cluster A (containing two testimonies) reported two negative affects as dissatisfaction and two negative judgements of social sanction (one in veracity and one in propriety) as well as two negative appreciations and one negative affect as unhappiness. There were no affects reported as insecurity.

Cluster B (containing six testimonies) presented a considerable increase in the report of negative affects of insecurity in which 17 were found. There is also an increase in the number of negative judgements being 14 reported in cluster B, from those nine are negative judgements of social sanction in propriety. Cluster B is the one with the majority of negative judgements reported. This may be linked to the fact that cluster B contains the testimonies in which the victims' suffered violence in the presence of others beyond herself and the aggressor. Therefore, it can be inferred that criticizing one's behavior when surrounded by others (and when in a social/formal environment) is something that happens more often than when the victim is by herself with the aggressor. There were also four negative affects as dissatisfaction reported as well as four negative appreciations. And three negative affects of unhappiness. These time there were four positive affects reported, in the last three testimonies of cluster B. The emotions from B4 and B5 regarded relief. The third and fourth positive emotion are present in B6 and the victim reported happiness in both cases.

Cluster C (containing eight testimonies) also presented an increase in the report of negative affects of insecurity in which 24 were found. Cluster C is the one with the majority of negative affects of insecurity reported. There is a considerable decrease (in comparison with the previous cluster) in the number of negative judgements reported, which can be associated to the fact that this cluster contains the testimonies in which the victims were alone during their violence, therefore, criticizing someone else's behavior when there are no one else around happens less often. There are six negative judgements reported from which five are negative judgements of social sanction in propriety. There are six negative affects of dissatisfaction reported, as well as three negative affects of unhappiness and two negative appreciations. And there is only one positive emotion reported as a positive affect of happiness as cheer which is related to the aggressor leaving the victim's room.

Cluster D (containing four testimonies) has seven negative affects of insecurity reported, presenting a decrease in the report of this emotion when in comparison with the two previous clusters. There is also six negative affects of unhappiness reported making cluster D



the one with the majority of negative affect of unhappiness reported within all the clusters. There are also five negative affects of dissatisfaction. Four negative judgements all being negative judgements of social sanction in propriety. And there are also two negative appreciations. There are four positive emotions reported, one in D1, which is related to the victim not having to work next to her aggressor any longer; one in D2 related to a good feeling regarding the aggressor before the violence, it was mainly based on an impression of him; and two in D3, the first regarding the aggressor before the violence, also based on an impression of the victim related to the aggressor, and the second has nothing to do with the aggressor, it is about the victim's relationship with God. Testimony D4 only reported negative emotions.

13 out of the 20 testimonies reported negative judgements of social sanction in propriety (A2, B1, B2, B4, B5, B6, C1, C2, C3, C5, D1, D2, D4). This indicates that the victims reproach the behavior of the aggressor in the sense that, socially, there are unspoken rules of how to behave in a social environment and by making a judgement in the sense of propriety they are criticizing the aggressor for not adhering to those social rules. This also emphasizes how men tend to feel superior to women, especially in workplace environments that are largely populated by men, therefore, the adherence to social rules is frequently seen as optional in relation to women. This can be supported by the fact that from those 13 negative judgements of social sanction in propriety only two referred to the aggressors' behavior away from a social situation (C5, D1).

From the 20 testimonies 12 of them did not mention reporting the violence or not; four of them mentioned not reporting it; and four mentioned reporting it, and from these four that mentioned reporting it, two informed not hearing back from anyone. This data points out to the low number of cases of violence reported, especially among victims of rape. The three victims who chose not to report their rape are also the ones to bring to their discourse feelings of shame.

In half of the testimonies (B1, B3, B6, C2, C3, C4, C7, D1, D3, D4) the victims reported lingering feelings after the violence happened; and in six testimonies (C3, C4, C7, D2, D3, D4) the victims reported (even if implicitly) change in their behavior because of the violence, from not entering an elevator alone with the assailant to smiling less. These results show a decrease in the victims' quality of life because of the violence.

Eight of the testimonies (A1, A2, B3, B5, C2, C3, C4, D3) show the writers talking about something uncomfortable happening before the violence they will narrate (which are also

acts of violence). And then they narrate an event that went beyond what they were, in some way, used to. This shows how some types of violence are normalized (especially in the workplace), to the point that women tend to endure it until they no longer can, or until the harassment becomes more than what they are used to. This ‘something more’ may be the addition of an unnecessary touch, for example.

Six testimonies (B1, B4, C1, C4, C6, C8) reported negative affect of insecurity as surprise, which indicates the victims were caught by surprise, either because they did not expect an abuse from that specific man or because they did not expect it to happen in the environment they were in. Six testimonies (A2, B6, C2, C3, C8, D2) illustrate men complimenting women in the workplace. Although we found no data regarding whether or not male coworkers give each other compliments on their appearances at the workplace, it is possible to assume they do not, since that is not a common male behavior even outside the work setting.

Yet, there are also six testimonies (A2, B6, C2, C3, C4, D2) exemplifying men using their position, authority, or a workplace related thing to compliment the victim’s appearance with sexual overtones (in the case of this research: acting violently towards women). There is even one of them in which a boss ‘endorsed’ the forwardness of the aggressor, as if it were all right to use a work-related issue to be forward with female colleagues.

Something else that is repeated in four testimonies (B6, C2, C3, C8) is the need, reported by the victims through behavioral surge, to flee the scene, as well as to distance themselves from the aggressor as quickly as possible.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Throughout the testimonies and also through the choice of dividing them in clusters, the variety of environments in which the women suffered violence is highlighted. Some were in their workplace, some at bar, inside elevators, at home, some it is not clear where they are, but what is necessary to emphasize here is the fact that women can go through violence anywhere. Women cannot feel safe anywhere, they might be working and go through violence, they might be sleeping and go through violence, they might be just existing and go through violence. The thing is that it is much easier to blame women for the violence they go through when thinking that they can take precautions, but another constant in the violence narrated through the testimonies is that most of the people who act violently towards women are men. Of course, this research gathered only testimonies in which that is the configuration, however, even during the collection of the testimonies it is noticeable that the majority of them were written by women and had at least one man as the aggressor.

Although this research focused on the women's emotions and perceptions, it does not mean that what happened to them has to do with them entirely. It was never their fault; it is always the aggressors' fault. The focus is on their emotions for the need to translate to others (who have not gone through violence or who are not women) the rollercoaster of feelings the victims go through, all the feelings that linger even after the violence, and even the victim's change in behavior in the hopes of not suffering violence again. It is important to bring that about because in cases of sexual violence, it is common to think of all the things the woman could have done to prevent the violence, but people do not worry so much about the victim's feelings. It is easier to think that if women are careful about what they wear, do, perform, or how they behave, and where they go, they will be safe from violence because they are not asking for it. However, women are not safe anywhere, just because they are women, and because men are taught to feel entitled to do whatever they want regarding women, and have their behavior excused by society, by judges, by the police, by their families. Even the victims sometimes excuse their aggressors' behavior because for women who are victims it is easier to change the way they act, dress, perform, where they go, than to have their aggressors' behavior changed or punished.

Now, answering the research questions: a) How do the women, writers of the testimonies, structure their narratives to talk about the aggression suffered? The majority of them structured their narrative in a chronological order, from who they were at their workplace or where they were or how long they had been working at the place before the violence. Then, they start narrating the situation until the violent action, a couple of them reported positive emotions about their assailant before the violence happened. Then they write about the event and a little bit about the after (although not all of them write about after). However, three writers choose to structure their testimonies differently, and the three testimonies have rape as a factor. Maybe the difference in the structure of their narrative is due to their nature. In testimony D1 the writer specified when the rape happened and wrote at once what happened, then summarizing how she felt during and after. In testimony D3 the writer started writing about the feelings after the violence, then, she recollects the order of events leading to her rape. A lot of her testimony surrounds her relationship with God. And, in testimony D4 the writer also said she was raped right at the beginning of the narrative, and she wrote about the feelings after the violence, she did not report feelings regarding before or even the day of the rape. The majority of her testimony discussed church leaders and what could be done to make churches a safe place for people looking for support.

b) How do the writers of the testimonies report the emotions that the event, the aggressor, and themselves evoked? Depending on the type of violence, the presence or not of other people during the violence, and the environment where the violence occurred, the emotions reported varied. Giving the nature of the testimonies, it was expected that the majority of them would be classified as negative, but there were still some positive emotions reported, some even in relation to the aggressor (as mentioned previously). The testimonies in cluster A did not report feelings of insecurity, for example, and only one reported unhappiness. In comparison to cluster B, the change is noticeable. Although cluster B contains four more testimonies in comparison to A, there is an evident increase in the report of affects of insecurity and in the report of judgements. Cluster B is the one with the majority of reports regarding judgement, this may be linked to the fact that this cluster contains the testimonies in which there were more people present during the violence, which may influence the criticism of the aggressor's behavior, since there were more people witnessing it and yet the aggressor was violent towards the victim, in one case (B5) the aggressor's behavior was even supported by other men present (respecting the male code).

Now, cluster C is the one with the majority of affects of insecurity, this may be linked to the fact that the testimonies in cluster C are the ones in which the victim was alone with the aggressor. Cluster C is also the one with the majority of affects of dissatisfaction. The number of judgements is relatively lower in comparison to cluster B, which reinforces the possibility that the reproaches about the aggressor's behavior are heightened when there are others present. And, then, Cluster D is the one that reports the majority of affects of unhappiness, which are mainly connected to the feelings of after the rape.

c) Are there myths about sexual assault in their testimonies? Yes, myths about sexual assault appear in five testimonies (B4, C4, D2, D3, D4). In D2, D3 and D4, the writers did not approach these myths as if they believed in them, but nevertheless they talked about them in their testimonies. One of them (the writer of D2) said she learned to smile less, which implies that if she had smiled less before she would not have been raped, a covert form of victim blaming. Victim blaming was something present in some testimonies (B4, C4, D2, D3), mostly the victims feeling guilty about what had happened to them as if they were responsible or as if they had behaved differently the violence would not have happened. It is interesting to notice that the majority of the testimonies that tackled blame are the ones with rape as a factor.

Of course, analyzing written data is completely different from listening to a victim and understanding what she went through, but this data points out what people forget to talk about, which is how much the violence affects the lives of the victims. Then, since women suffer from violence daily in whatever environment they are, it is also crucial to consider how much that violence impacts on their quality of life, since violence is not a one-time event in the lives of women.

Something else to note is that throughout the testimonies, despite having reported the violence or not, the fact that the women-narrators expressed negative emotions towards the perpetrator or the situation they were in is more than enough proof that it should not have happened, that it was a violence, that it was a violation of their rights as human beings, that they have the right to speak up about it. Regardless of understanding or not the different definitions of sexual violence, how women feel is a sign that communicates clearly that the situation is not acceptable and they can announce that.

Another relevant point observed regards the fact that in eight out of the 20 testimonies (A1, A2, B3, B5, C2, C3, C4, D3) the writers talk about something uncomfortable happening

before the violence they narrate, and that something was also violence. This emphasizes how women are used to going through violence daily; they are used to ignoring things to a certain degree because those things are common; they excuse male behavior to a certain extent because that is not the first man and will not be the last one to behave inappropriately towards them. This also illustrates why women tend to wait for something more severe to happen before reporting or doing something about the abuse they have been experiencing. An example of the micro-violence women are exposed to daily is the expression “the always present look by older men” written by one of the women. Being stared at, being objectified, being uncomfortable in places with men is a constant issue in women’s lives.

This work intended not only to help clarify how traumatic sexual violence is, and how much the violence women go through affects their lives during and after it. The results also point to behaviors that have become acceptable, yet they are not. It brings forward the matter that women deal with violence daily and it does not matter if it is ‘just a joke’ or something that takes their lives away, none of it is acceptable. It demonstrates that women know when something is a violence, they need only to listen to their feelings and emotions, they do not need a book defining every way possible of being violated to know they have been violated.

There are several ways in which to further expand this research through the use of victim’s testimonies, such as analyzing the influence some religious teachings have on placing blame on the victim; examining why the majority of negative affects of unhappiness appear mostly in testimonies where rape is a factor and mostly after the violence happened (which also points out to the decrease in women’s quality of life); examining the lack of anger reported towards the aggressor and the presence of anger reported towards the victim by the victim; and so on. This is certainly a topic which will not go away and which deserves as much study as we can give it.

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