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Voices overlooked:

a study of emotional reactions to misrecognition and
epistemic injustices in #MeToo testimonies from
Sweden and the United States.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the emotional responses to experiences of misrecognition and epistemic injustice as expressed in #MeToo testimonies. Through a comparative analysis of testimonies from Sweden and the United States, the study investigates two questions: (1) What emotions can be identified within testimonies of sexual assault that demonstrate denial of social recognition and experiences of epistemic injustices? (2) Are there any observable differences or similarities in the expressions of emotions resulting from denial of social recognition and experiences of epistemic injustice expressed by survivors in #MeToo testimonies from Sweden and the U.S., and what do they teach us about each country's emotional regime? Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition and Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, the study employs an abductive approach and narrative analysis to interpret survivor testimonies. The findings identify a range of emotions: anger, frustration, fear, shame, empathy, disappointment, courage, relief, sadness, pride, and disgust. Thus, #MeToo is not only a platform for disclosure but also for a collective protest that can enable more positive and empowering emotions, even in the face of misrecognition and epistemic injustice. Swedish narratives display a broader emotional spectrum—including emotions of relief, sadness, pride and disgust, that were absent in U.S. testimonies—suggesting a more supportive cultural climate for emotional articulation. While both Swedish and U.S. testimonies reflect shared emotions, such as anger and shame etc., they differ in narrative emphasis, Swedish testimonies often express emotions linked to not being heard, indicating relational misrecognition, whereas U.S. testimonies highlight not being believed, reflecting deeper epistemic injustices. These findings underscore how emotional regimes, including national, cultural and institutional contexts, shape the emotional reactions to social disdain.

Keywords emotions, emotional regime, epistemic injustice, social misrecognition, MeToo

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1. Introduction

In 2017 a spark in the form of a tweet ignited a movement that spread globally. Namely *#MeToo*, which gained momentum when the actress Alyssa Milano shared a tweet urging individuals who had experienced sexual assault to share their stories using the hashtag “MeToo”. Although, the term was coined already in 2006 by Tarana Burke, who was dedicated to highlight, in particular black girls’ experiences, of sexual assault and harassment. Nonetheless, *#MeToo* being brought to light on social media resulted in millions of responses within hours, on twitter alone 1.7 million tweets contained the hashtag from 85 different countries (Park, 2017), illuminating the pervasive issues of sexual assault and revealing the extent of these problems within society.

The *#MeToo* movement emerged in the U.S. and materialized into a powerful response to widespread sexual assault, revealing deep-rooted issues of gender inequality, which is reflected in various social, economic, and political spheres (Sweeney, 2020). The inequality has connotations to gender stereotypes and norms, where women are ascribed as less valuable than men in various aspects of life, both private and public (Ellemers, 2018). Further, women are disproportionately affected by sexual assault, which is not limited to the U.S. The prevalence is tied to societal norms that perpetuate power imbalances between genders, where women’s voices are often marginalized (Ellemers, 2018). However, the *#MeToo* movement inspired discourses and actions. Not only did it encourage survivors to share their stories, it also fostered a sense of solidarity among those who had faced similar experiences. The collective empowerment highlighted the need for systemic change and accountability, leading to increased awareness and discussions about consent. This phenomenon indicated that the issues of sexual harassment and gender inequality are not confined to one culture or country but are, in fact, a global concern¹.

¹For instance, it spread to countries such as South Korea and Japan, both with cultures permeated of stigma and silence regarding sexual assault, also where legal consequences have been lacking (Hasunuma & Shin, 2019). Although, it developed differently in the respective countries. In Japan a relatively low number of people came forward and plenty preferred to remain anonymous, meanwhile in South Korea this was not the first time a movement protesting against sexual violence against women prospered, and it fostered discourses of the widespread problem (Hasunuma & Shin, 2019). *#MeToo* illuminated the problems of sexual assault, although due to the ingrained patriarchal structures it remains considerable work towards a more gender equal society (Hasunuma & Shin, 2019). Moreover, *#MeToo* prompted revelations and engagement in other parts of Asia, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Australia etc., which is signified by the extensive cover of it and testimonies shared, as well as the the adoption of local subgenres of “MeToo”, such as *#MosqueMeToo*, *#AnaKaman*, *#YoTambién*, *#BalanceTonPork*, to mention only a few (Innis & Schulze, 2024; Shagufta & Shagufta, 2023; Yin & Sun, 2021). Hence, in numerous countries *#MeToo* rendered a discussion about sexual assault and violence, it united victims and created a protestation against the contemporary unjust conditions.

In Sweden, the #MeToo movement sparked significant public discourse, with numerous women coming forward to share their experiences of assault, which had often been silenced or dismissed. The rapid creation of about 80 subgenres of the hashtag reflected the extensive and diverse nature of these experiences across different sectors, including entertainment, politics, and academia (Lindqvist & Lindgren, 2023). In contrast to the U.S. and other parts of the world, Sweden is often regarded as a leader in gender equality, which made the revelations associated with #MeToo more shocking than elsewhere (Carroll, 2021; European institute for gender equality, 2023). The expectation of a high standard of gender equality may have contributed to a dissimilar development surrounding the movement in Sweden (Carroll, 2021). However, the MeToo movement was prevalent and extensive. While the country has made significant strides in promoting gender equality, the emergence of #MeToo exposed that sexual assault is still a prevalent issue, even if Sweden prides itself on its progressive stance (Carroll, 2021). This juxtaposition between Sweden's reputation and the experiences shared in #MeToo testimonies highlighted a dissonance between perceived equality and actual lived experiences.

#MeToo has also received backlash (KAU, 2023; Nau et al., 2022), for instance from misogynists, anti-feminist groups and ideologists attempting to undermine victims and their credibility (Nau et al. 2022). This resistance has, in some cases, manifested in legal action—such as an increase in defamation cases following the public naming of alleged perpetrators (Carroll, 2021)—and in public discourse that casts doubt on survivors' legitimacy. There is a problematic aspect of not acknowledging survivors' testimonies of sexual assault as legitimate and questioning their credibility because it can lead to further trauma and isolation for those who have experienced sexual assault (Lamade et al., 2024). Which has been, and persists to be, an issue which is illuminated by its high underreporting (Luce et al., 2010; Sweeney, 2020; Spohn & Tellis, 2012). When survivors' accounts are dismissed or questioned, it undermines their experiences and can discourage others from coming forward (Lamade et al., 2024). This skepticism can perpetuate a culture of silence, stigma and shame around sexual violence, making it more difficult for survivors to seek support and justice (Kennedy & Prock, 2018). Moreover, questioning the credibility of survivors often reflects broader societal biases and stereotypes about gender, power dynamics, and victimization (Epstein & Goodman, 2018). It can reinforce harmful narratives that suggest survivors are not trustworthy or that they are somehow responsible for the

violence they endured. This not only impacts individual survivors but also contributes to a systemic issue where sexual assault is minimized or ignored, allowing perpetrators to evade accountability. Hence, failing to recognize the legitimacy of survivors' experiences can hinder progress towards addressing the root causes of sexual violence and creating a more supportive environment for those affected. Acknowledging and validating survivors is crucial for fostering healing, justice, and societal change (Lamade et al., 2024).

The tendency to disbelieve or discredit victims can be further understood through the lens of social recognition theory (Honneth, 1995) and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). According to Honneth, denial of social recognition occurs when an individual's identity, contributions, or very existence is not acknowledged or affirmed by others—whether by society at large or by specific social groups. Such denial can lead to profound emotional consequences, including feelings of invisibility, diminished self-esteem, and social alienation, as individuals find their experiences and identities invalidated or dismissed. Similarly, Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice refers to a wrong done to someone in their capacity as a knower or a contributor to knowledge. This occurs when individuals or groups are unjustly prevented from sharing their knowledge, having their experiences recognized, or being taken seriously in public discourse. These injustices frequently manifest in contexts where survivors of sexual violence are disbelieved, silenced, or seen as lacking epistemic authority. A term that can describe these experiences of disrespect is “social disdain” which is a result of being denied social recognition or experiencing epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995).

This study draws on the theories of misrecognition (Honneth, 1995) and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) as central analytical frameworks. These theories will be further developed in the theoretical section but serve here to underscore the emotional and structural dynamics at play in the experiences shared through social disdain in #MeToo sexual assault testimonies. In addition, the concept of emotional regimes (Reddy, 2001) will be employed to explore how emotional expressions in these testimonies are shaped, interpreted, and regulated within different cultural and national contexts. Emotional regimes refer to the historically and socially constructed norms that govern which emotions are deemed appropriate, credible, or intelligible in a given society (Reddy, 2001). As such, they provide a valuable lens for examining the affective dimensions of testimony. By engaging with these theoretical

perspectives, this study investigates the emotional consequences of misrecognition and epistemic injustice in the context of #MeToo, and how such expressions are shaped within the emotional regimes of the U.S. and Sweden. Studying the emotional and structural dynamics of misrecognition, epistemic injustice, and emotional regimes in #MeToo testimonies is crucial for understanding how societal disbelief and cultural norms undermine survivors' credibility, perpetuate trauma, and hinder justice, thereby revealing the need for systemic change in how sexual violence is addressed and survivors are supported.

1.1. Aim & Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to develop an understanding of the emotional consequences of denial of social recognition (Honneth, 1995) and epistemic injustice (2007) in sexual assault testimonies, considering previous research reveal that victims of sexual assault often describe experiencing epistemic injustice and denial of social recognition (Bogen et al., 2021; Engdahl et al., 2021; Hänel, 2022; Nutbeam & Mereish, 2022; Schnider & Carpenter, 2020). More precisely, this study aims at pointing out differences and similarities between Sweden and the U.S. in emotional reactions to misrecognition and epistemic injustice in #MeToo testimonies, as well as aspects of the emotional regimes of each country.

Research suggests there are limited studies that focus on the #MeToo phenomenon in multiple cultural contexts while scrutinizing emotions (Innis & Schulze, 2024; Mendoza, 2021; Nau et al., 2022). Therefore, a comparative study of #MeToo across different nations can reveal significant insights into how societal norms and values shape the understanding of issues of sexual harassment and assault. This study can thus contribute to illuminate the complex relationships between culture, emotions, and social dynamics related to the #MeToo movement, and how these factors interact to influence survivors' emotional reactions to denial of recognition and epistemic injustice. The following questions are asked in the thesis:

1. What emotions can be identified within testimonies of sexual assault that demonstrate denial of social recognition and experiences of epistemic injustices?
2. Are there any observable differences or similarities in the expressions of emotions resulting from denial of social recognition and experiences of epistemic injustice

expressed by survivors in #MeToo testimonies from Sweden and the U.S., and what do they teach us about each country's emotional regime?

2. Literature review

This section presents the concept of sexual assault and reviews previous research on the #MeToo movement, including its influence on public discourse, responses on social media, survivor testimonies, and the emotional consequences associated with these experiences.

2.1. Sexual assault

The #MeToo testimonies consists of individuals who has experienced sexual assault; thus it is valuable to understand what this term encompasses. Sexual assault and harassment are terms that lack an established or universally determined definition (Latcheva 2017; Bondestam & Lundqvist 2018; Penttinen, Jyrkinen & Wide 2019). Nonetheless, it ultimately implies a range of behaviors that violate an individual's autonomy and can result in significant physical and psychological harm (Cockburn, 1991). These terms encompass various forms of unsolicited comments, advances, or verbal, alternatively non-verbal, behaviors of sexual nature, also including sexual coercion and violence (MacKinnon 1979; Cockburn 1991; Kensbock et al., 2015; Bondestam & Lundqvist 2018); with the prerequisite that the endurer perceives it as a hostile or threatening situation. Understanding the broad and varied nature of sexual assault underscores the importance of examining how individuals articulate and make sense of these experiences. And this study explores the emotional responses articulated in #MeToo sexual assault testimonies, particularly those that reflect experiences of social disdain. To do so, the analysis is informed by the theories of social recognition (Honneth, 1995) and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), which will be introduced in the theory section, hereby a review of previous research is presented.

2.2. Previous research

#MeToo is a phenomenon that has been examined through multiple lenses and it has garnered scholarly attention in several disciplines, exploring its implications in areas such as sociology, psychology, law, and media studies, analyzing how the movement has influenced public

discourse (see Brünker et al., 2020; Kumar & Tarai, 2022; Stewart, 2019), policy changes (see Carroll, 2021; Shaw, 2023; Myers, 2020), and individual experiences of trauma and empowerment (see Carroll, 2021; Carpenter, 2021; Modrek & Chakalov, 2019) etc. However, it has not been extensively explored with regard to cultural contexts (Innis & Schulze, 2024; Mendoza, 2021; Nau et al., 2022) such as Sweden, known for its high gender equality (European institute for gender equality, 2023), and the U.S. where gender inequality is a widespread issue (Sweeny, 2020). Thus, this study will explore the cross-national contexts of Sweden and the U.S. using #MeToo testimonies as basis for the empirical material, scrutinizing emotional consequences of social disdain and comparing their emotional regimes and expressions.

Previous research on #MeToo and twitter posts have for instance focused on scrutinizing the content of English written tweets and the responses as well as reactions, for example Schnider and Carpenter (2020) did this and their findings revealed mainly negative sentiments expressed, although those who were of positive tone indicated support and validation. Similarly, Bogen et al. (2021) examined the content of discourses regarding shared stories in association to #MeToo, and what victims disclose in their testimonies, and the results implied victims sharing who, what, when, where, why as well as the emotional effects of the trauma. The responses to shared stories indicated positive and negative sentiments, with the latter including ridiculing and harassing survivors as well as declaring how victims “should” behave or act. Further, Nutbeam and Mereish (2022) performed a qualitative study on the #MeToo movement with the objective to enhance the understanding of attitudes concerning sexual assault and the movement, examining tweets that contained negative attitudes towards the movement and so-called accusers. The results implied six major themes, revealing attitudes and acts of invalidating accusations, claiming alternative motives of accusers, concerns of harming those accused and that it impairs male power as well as privilege and status, and finally, concerns of the legitimacy and integrity of the #MeToo movement (Nutbeam & Mereish, 2022). These studies inform the present research by highlighting the emotionally charged nature of online disclosures, the risks of misrecognition, and the varying degrees of epistemic injustice experienced by survivors in digital spaces. This study builds on that foundation by examining how these dynamics are shaped by emotional regimes in different national contexts, specifically Sweden and the U.S.

Earlier research also includes scrutiny of testimonies. Engdahl et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study of testimonies, more specifically #MeToo calls in Sweden, to highlight what victims communicate and how they experienced the assault, as well as its consequences. In line with Engdahl et al. (2021), my study focuses on #MeToo testimonies and emotional consequences. However, my study analyzes the emotional regimes and makes a comparison between the U.S. and Sweden. Engdahl et al. (2021) use Frickers theory of epistemic injustice and Honneth's theory of social recognition to analyze the testimonies. The results provide insights into social consequences; victims are withheld from social recognition and solidarity. Further, they are denied their rights through abuse, which consequently generates low self-confidence in the survivors. Exclusion transpires by not being taken seriously and leads to victims either removing themselves from the environment in which they have been subjected to sexual assault, or they are constrained when/from participating in certain contexts (Engdahl et al., 2021).

Johansson et al. (2018) focused on #MeToo testimonies and specific male dominated industries in a Swedish context, where they examined how the sexualization of social relations within the workplace perpetrates the male as the normative standard. The revelations revealed that women were perceived as sexual beings foremost, rather than professional actors and co-workers. This research adds depth to understanding structural patterns of gendered power, which also informs this study's interest in how emotional responses are conditioned by social environments and contexts.

Hänel (2022) examines the role of testimonial practices in the context of sexual violence, particularly in relation to the #MeToo movement. Hänel (2022) addresses the criticism from some who argue that the movement conflates different experiences of sexual assault, thereby undermining the seriousness of the "proper" cases. The study seeks to demonstrate why this criticism is problematic and to provide a philosophical framework for understanding the #MeToo movement as one that aspires to achieve conceptual progress. The author argues for inclusivity, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and validating all experiences of sexual violence, especially those from marginalized social groups, and highlights how the movement contributes to a broader understanding of sexual violence and promotes empowerment and healing for all victims. This is highly relevant to this study's emphasis on epistemic injustice and the legitimacy of emotional expression in public discourse.

Research on feminist movements, such as #MeToo, has also led to insights of online activism with its strengths and implications. Lindqvist (2023) conducted interviews with participants of feminist movements, to examine how the safety or risks of performing online activism is perceived and handled, i.e. how it affects them and the activism. She concluded that it involves labor navigating the hate and to avoid it, they strategically avoid certain platforms due to threats, therefore Lindqvist points at the necessity that platforms apply measures to increase safety for users. Moreover, Lindqvist and Ganetz (2020) scrutinized how media have covered the movement and how they represent and portray assault. The results revealed that the way women are portrayed in discussions about sexual assault often emphasizes their role as witnesses or heroines, which inadvertently places the responsibility on them to prevent such incidents. The authors implies that this framing can shift the focus away from the actions of perpetrators and onto the expectations of women, reinforcing the idea that they must take action to stop sexual assault. On the other hand, men are often depicted as sexual predators, which can create a distinction between criminal behavior and less severe forms of misogyny. This portrayal can lead to a narrative of male victimhood, suggesting that men are sometimes unfairly labeled or stigmatized. Moreover, the legal discourse surrounding these issues tends to be hegemonic, meaning it dominates the conversation and limits the exploration of broader, structural causes of sexual violence (Lindqvist & Garnetz, 2020). Instead, it often promotes individual solutions, such as women needing to act as witnesses. However, the results also indicate that movements like #MeToo and feminist discourse have influenced how (news) media represent sexual assault. They have expanded the conversation beyond the traditional concepts of consent and rape, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding sexual violence (Lindqvist & Garnetz, 2020). Although this lies somewhat outside the direct focus of this study, it provides valuable insight into the discursive frameworks through which sexual violence is discussed, and how these influence perceptions of credibility, responsibility, and emotional expression in the public sphere.

3. Theory

The concept of emotions and emotional regimes will be presented in this segment, preceded by the theories of social recognition and epistemic injustice, as they form the theoretical

foundation for analyzing the emotional consequences of misrecognition and epistemic injustice in the #MeToo testimonies. These theories allow for a deeper exploration of the relational dynamics at play in #MeToo testimonies and the emotional ramifications of epistemic injustice and being denied recognition.

3.1. Social recognition

Honneth (1995) offers a model of socialization that provides insights of the importance of social recognition for an individual's identity, development and social integration. More specifically he refers to three spheres of recognition; love, rights and solidarity. He posits that the forms of recognition are essential for a person's identity and the maintenance of it. Experiencing love in our closest relationships is necessary to establish self-confidence, rights as a citizen are required to develop self-respect, meanwhile solidarity fosters self-esteem. Hence, recognition is fundamental for self-realization and the relationship to oneself as well as other social relations.

Social disdain is a concept that implies that all or some of the forms of recognition are denied or disrespected. If recognition is denied it obstructs the positive relationship to oneself, i.e. self-confidence, self-respect or self-esteem. The consequences of this are various social pathologies, such as alienation, social conflict, and personal distress. It inflicts emotions of frustration, anger, shame, resentment, humiliation, indignation or disrespect (*Missachtung*). Honneth (1995) recognizes three forms of disrespect that disrupts one's relationship to oneself or others. First and foremost is the intrusion of physical integrity, which creates erosion on a deep personal level and risks destroying self-confidence, trust, as well as self-image. It can hinder the development and growth of the personal identity of the individual (Honneth, 1995). Due to this it can also impact on the way of interacting with others. This is connotated to the recognition of love. When individuals are denied love, they may struggle with feelings of isolation and worthlessness (Honneth, 1995). Furthermore, deprivation of rights entails damage to self-respect, which corresponds to the recognition of rights. Honneth emphasizes that rights are essential for individuals to engage in a social life where they can be recognized as equal members. Legal rights protect individuals from oppression and ensure that they can claim their place in society. However, if denied, the individual is deprived of their social status as a member of society and is excluded from the

sphere of law and therefore their moral capacity is diminished. A lack of recognition of rights can result in disenfranchisement and social inequality. Although, if they struggle for recognition and individuals or groups feel that their rights—or solidarity and love—are not being acknowledged or respected, they can engage in collective action to assert their claims (Honneth, 1995). Lastly, the final form of disrespect involves marginalization, stigmatization or devaluation of individuals or groups lifestyles. Social status is an important aspect for self-realization according to Honneth (1995) and having your life situation perceived as shameful or worthless affects one's self-esteem in the sense of not being socially accepted, which is correlated to the recognition of solidarity. It leads to ruination of confidence and doubt of abilities and competence (Honneth, 1995). Insufficient sense of solidarity can lead to sentiments of disconnection and marginalization.

In this study, Honneth's (1995) theory of social recognition is used as a theoretical lens to analyze and understand the emotional consequences of misrecognition as expressed in #MeToo testimonies. By considering social disdain—the analysis identifies various forms of disrespect, such as the violation of bodily integrity, denial of rights, social devaluation, and their emotional outcomes, as articulated in survivors' testimonies.

3.2. Epistemic injustice

Epistemic injustice refers to injustices related to knowledge (Fricker, 2007). It implies communicative practices of individuals being misinterpreted or its importance being devalued, systematic distortion of the content or unjustified distrust. Essentially it marginalizes voices and fosters exclusion and silencing. This highlights how social power dynamics can affect who gets to be heard and believed in discussions about knowledge and truth (Fricker, 2007).

Fricker (2007) identifies two types of epistemic injustices: testimonial and hermeneutical. The former refers to injustices related to lack of credibility due to social identity. For instance, if an individual from a marginalized group shares their experiences but is dismissed or doubted due to stereotypes, they experience testimonial injustice. This undermines their authority and knowledge. Hermeneutical injustice, on the other hand, arises when a gap in collective understanding prevents individuals from making sense of their experiences. This

often affects marginalized groups who lack the conceptual tools to articulate their experiences due to a dominant discourse that overlooks or misrepresents them. For instance, before the concept of “sexual harassment” was widely recognized, many individuals could not articulate their experiences of being harassed because the language and societal understanding to frame those experiences did not exist. This can lead to their suffering being overlooked or misunderstood.

Epistemic injustices can be perceived as a form of social disdain according to Fricker (2007). When individuals experience testimonial injustice, where their credibility is undermined due to their social identity, it can lead to feelings of self-doubt and internalized stigma. Also, sentiments of anger, frustration, resentment or humiliation. They may start to question their own experiences and knowledge, inciting sentiments of being insufficient or that their voice does not matter. This can create a disconnection between their lived experiences and how they perceive themselves, impacting one’s self-esteem and identity. Similarly, hermeneutical injustice can leave individuals feeling isolated and misunderstood. When they lack the language or frameworks to articulate their experiences, they might struggle to make sense of their own suffering. This can lead to a sense of alienation, as they may feel that their reality is invisible or invalidated by society. Victims of sexual assault are thus at risk of experiencing social disdain and developing negative sentiments and beliefs towards themselves and others. Yet healing can begin only when survivors share their stories and receive validation from others (Fricker, 2007).

In this study, epistemic injustice is used as an analytical tool to identify moments in the testimonies where survivors’ knowledge and experiences are dismissed or misunderstood. By first locating episodes of epistemic injustices in the material, I then analyze the emotional responses expressed in relation to these injustices. The theory thus guides the interpretation of how survivors emotionally react to being disbelieved or devalued etc.

3.3. Emotions

Honneth’s and Fricker’s theories show the emotional consequences of denial of recognition and epistemic injustice. Therefore, it is important to understand what emotions are. While there is no single agreed-upon definition (Cabanac, 2002; Feldman Barrett et al., 2016), in

sociology, emotions are socially constructed and culturally regulated experiences that are shaped by interactions, norms, and structures (Franks & McCarthy, 1989; Turner & Stets, 2009). Emotions are influenced by the roles we occupy, the expectations of a given social context, and the power dynamics within relationships and institutions. Emotions play a key role in how we experience and respond to the world around us (Averill, 1999) and emotions are not only personal experiences but are also embedded in and shaped by broader cultural norms, moral frameworks, and institutional arrangements (Franks & McCarthy, 1989; Turner & Stets, 2009).

Honneth's (1995) and Fricker's (2007) theories identify several emotions as consequences of misrecognition and epistemic injustice—including *anger, frustration, shame, fear, sadness, disgust, and disappointment*. While emotions such as fear, sadness, disgust, and disappointment are only implicitly addressed within these theories, I define them here to clarify their meaning, as they emerged in the sexual assault testimonies. In addition to these theoretically grounded emotions, the material also reveals other emotional responses arising from the lived experience of misrecognition and epistemic injustice. These include *pride, relief, courage, and empathy*. To ensure analytical clarity, I provide definitions for all of these emotions—both those directly associated with the theories and those inductively identified in the data. Below, I briefly discuss the significance of each:

- *Anger* is a strong emotional response that arises when someone feels provoked, hurt, or threatened. It often leads to feelings of discomfort or resistance and can involve both physical sensations and psychological reactions (Alia-Klein et al., 2020; Videbeck, 2006).
- *Frustration* is an emotional reaction that occurs when someone faces obstacles or opposition that prevent them from achieving their goals (Boyd, 1982; Crossman et al., 2009; De Botton 2013). It is often linked to feelings of anger, annoyance, and disappointment. Frustration tends to grow stronger when a person's efforts are repeatedly blocked or their desires are unmet (Boyd, 1982; Crossman et al., 2009; De Botton 2013).
- *Disappointment* is a form of dissatisfaction that occurs when expectations or hopes are not met (Kennett, 2018).

- *Fear* is a distressing emotion triggered by the perception of danger or threat (Öhman, 2000). Fear can arise from an immediate threat or the anticipation of a future danger. It leads to both physical and mental changes in the body. This emotion often results in behaviors like fighting back or escaping, known as the fight-or-flight response. In extreme cases, fear can cause a person to freeze and become immobilized (Öhman, 2000).
- *Sadness* is an emotional state of pain often linked to feelings of loss, disadvantage, despair, grief, helplessness, disappointment, or sorrow. It is a response to difficult or challenging experiences and reflects a deep sense of emotional distress (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, n.d.).
- *Disgust* can be described as an emotional reaction of strong dislike or revulsion, often triggered by something perceived as offensive, harmful, or unpleasant (Badour & Feldner, 2016). It typically involves a desire to avoid or reject the source, which may be seen as contagious, distasteful, or threatening (Badour & Feldner, 2016).
- *Shame* is a distressing self-conscious emotion linked to negative thoughts about oneself. It often involves feelings of inadequacy, defeat, or worthlessness, and can lead to a strong desire to withdraw or hide (Sedighimornani, 2018). Shame is experienced in relation to how one believes they are perceived by others (Sedighimornani, 2018). This emotion arises when individuals compare their actions or personal state to their own standards or societal ideals, leading to deep feelings of inferiority, unworthiness, or self-loathing. Consequently it impacts one's sense of identity and self-worth (Tracy et al., 2013).
- *Courage* is the decision and readiness to face difficult situations, such as pain, danger, uncertainty, or fear. It involves acting bravely despite the presence of risks or challenges (Putman, 2001).
- *Relief* is a positive emotion felt when a stressful, painful, or unpleasant situation either ends or does not occur as anticipated. It is often accompanied by a sense of release and comfort after the removal of a threat or worry (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, n.d.).
- *Pride* is an emotion that arises from feeling satisfied with one's identity, achievements, or actions. It involves a sense of fulfillment and confidence in what one has accomplished or who they are (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, n.d.).

- *Empathy* is the ability to understand and share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining yourself in their situation (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, n.d.).

3.4. Emotional Regimes

Emotional regimes provide further nuance to the comprehension of emotions; which are prevalent in the #MeToo testimonies. The concept of emotional regime implies that emotions, thoughts and expressions of them, are not exclusively personal but conditioned by societal expectations and modes, which are regulated by social or cultural contexts, institutions, and governments (Reddy, 2001). Emotional regimes consequently dictate which emotions are considered acceptable or desirable within a particular context. Thus, these regimes shape how individuals express their feelings and how these feelings are perceived by society (Reddy, 2001). In other words, an emotional regime sets the norms for emotional expression, often aligning with the values and objectives of the governing authority or dominant cultural narratives. Emotions that align with these norms may be encouraged and validated, while those that deviate from them can be viewed as inappropriate or repressed (Reddy, 2001). Regarding sexual assault, voices have been silenced and victims marginalized. For instance, a patriarchal society has predetermined expectations of who is considered a legitimate victim which affects the emotional responses and expressions from victims (Fohring, 2022). It is among other things based on gender roles, i.e. expectations of how men respectively women should act and behave (Fohring, 2022). Women are often expected to be submissive, nurturing, and emotional, while men are expected to be strong, dominant, and rational (Bourdieu, 2018). In a patriarchal structure, women are frequently devalued, and anything perceived as feminine—such as emotions—is considered inferior (Bourdieu, 2018). Emotions, especially for men, are often viewed as a sign of weakness (Farmer et al., 2024), while women may be socially expected to express their emotions—though within acceptable boundaries. This expectation can lead to the repression and undervaluing of their true emotions and experiences (Farmer et al., 2024). The stigmatization of women's sexuality further complicates their ability to express themselves, as their sexual behavior is more heavily scrutinized and controlled compared to men's (Bourdieu, 2018). Men, on the other hand, face societal pressure to uphold standards of strength and dominance, meaning that when they are assaulted, it directly conflicts with these expectations. As a result, both men and women who experience sexual assault may feel pressured to remain silent about their

experiences. These gender norms contribute to feelings of shame and guilt, making it difficult for victims to seek justice or support (Farmer et al., 2024; Kennedy & Prock, 2018; Lamade et al., 2024). Despite the backlash #MeToo faced, the movement successfully challenged these entrenched structures and the culture of silence surrounding sexual assault (McDonald, 2020).

In Sweden, gender equality is a central part of the national identity and policy-making, often framed within a progressive welfare state model (Eduards, 2002). The Swedish emotional regime around gender justice tends to validate emotional expressions linked to victimhood and structural critique, especially when *aligned* with institutional norms (Elman, 2001). State-sponsored campaigns and legal reforms have sought to create a climate where emotions such as outrage or sorrow over sexual violence are seen as legitimate drivers of social change. For instance, Sweden's comprehensive gender equality policies aim to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender, and have been recognized globally for their progressive approach (Carroll, 2021). In contrast, the U.S. presents a more fragmented emotional regime, where gender equality policy is shaped by polarized political ideologies, individualism, and a stronger emphasis on personal responsibility (Sweeney, 2020). Here, public emotional expressions—especially from women or marginalized groups—are more frequently met with skepticism, politicization, or moral judgment, particularly in conservative contexts (Cossman, 2018). These differing emotional climates affect how testimonies of sexual assault are received, the credibility afforded to victims, and the emotional costs of speaking out in public (Ahmed, 2014). For example, the U.S. ranks significantly lower than Sweden in global gender-equality rankings, highlighting disparities in policy support and societal attitudes toward gender equality (European institute for gender equality, 2023; Evertsson et al., 2009).

The emotional regime in Sweden has as mentioned been shaped by its high level of gender equality—or at least the perception and performance of equality (Olofsdotter et al., 2016). This has created a sense of comfort and moral confidence in the idea of equality, fostering a feeling of security, even if it is somewhat illusory (Olofsdotter et al., 2016). While Sweden prides itself on gender equality, the remaining issues of inequality are often shifted onto individuals, primarily women, who are expected to navigate and resolve these challenges on their own (Lane & Jordansson, 2020). This dynamic is further shaped by Sweden's

patriarchal structures, where men are still often perceived as superior to women (BRÅ, n.d.). As a result, women may find it difficult to assert themselves or report instances of sexual assault, as societal norms and power imbalances continue to influence their ability to stand up for their rights (BRÅ, n.d.). In addition, survivors may worry that their experiences will not be believed. Or there exists a lack of trust in the judiciary, which keeps victims silent. According to BRÅ (2025), 17.6% of women in Sweden aged 16–84 reported being victims of sexual violence during their lifetime, but only a small fraction of these cases are reported. Less than 10% of sexual assaults are reported to the police, and even fewer lead to prosecution and conviction—indicating a high level of hidden cases (BRÅ, 2025). The belief that Sweden is a model of gender equality can make it even more difficult for survivors to be heard, as their struggles may be seen as exceptions rather than symptoms of a deeper, systemic issue.

The emotional regime in the U.S. has been influenced by their long-standing gender inequality, conjointly with the broader cultural and legal landscape, which engender a complex tapestry of limits and directive of emotional expressions (Reddy, 2001; Sweeney, 2020). Furthermore, the U.S. is, just like Sweden, patriarchal which contributes to (re)producing the culture of silence and endurance of sex crimes (Sweeney, 2020; Weather, 2021). This is particularly evident in the context of sexual assault, as it is the most underreported violent crime in the U.S., less than 30% of cases reported, and even fewer result in arrests, prosecutions, or convictions (Sweeney, 2020). Survivors of sexual assault often experience fear of retaliation, not being believed, or being stigmatized as a victim, which has led to a culture of silence (Sweeney, 2020; Weather, 2021). The legal system, which often fails to prioritize survivors' lack of consent and imposes high burdens of proof, further exacerbates this fear. For instance, the “severe and pervasive” standard required to prove a hostile work environment has been interpreted in ways that exclude egregious behaviors like groping or forced kissing (Sweeney, 2020). This legal inadequacy, combined with the historical exclusion of marital rape and the emphasis on force rather than consent in many state laws, has left survivors feeling unprotected and vulnerable. Additionally, the legal system remains fraught with inconsistencies, such as varying state definitions of rape and the continued emphasis on force rather than consent (Sweeney, 2020; Waechter, 2021). Moreover, the low rates of prosecution and conviction for sexual violence, along with the

persistence of workplace harassment and discrimination, underscore the ongoing challenges and societal climate.

The pervasive stereotypes and double standards shape how women's, and men's, emotions are perceived and received both in Sweden and the U.S. (Olofsdotter et al., 2016; Reddy, 2001; Sweeney, 2020; Weather, 2021). For instance, women who express emotions like anger or frustration are often penalized more harshly than men. Assertive or emotionally expressive women are perceived as less competent, less likable, and are frequently dismissed as "overreacting" or "hysterical", further discouraging them from speaking out (Connor & Fiske, 2017; Wu, 2024). Furthermore, women are often expected to prioritize the emotions and needs of others over their own, a dynamic that can make it difficult for them to openly express their own feelings, especially if those feelings challenge the status quo or make others uncomfortable (Connor & Fiske, 2017; Wu, 2024). This fear can silence women and prevent them from advocating for themselves or others, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and emotional suppression (Lamade et al., 2024).

4. Material & Method

This section will describe the material, which consists of sexual assault testimonies on X, methodology, narrative analysis, abduction, and ethical considerations.

4.1. Material

The material is based on testimonies of sexual assault, presented in form of tweets, on the corpus X (previously twitter) containing the hashtag "MeToo". Regardless of the arrangement of capital or lowercase letters. Tweets are concise, user-generated texts disseminated via the social networking platform X. Originally limited to 140 characters, and expanded to 280 on November 7th, 2017, tweets serve as a medium for (real-time) communication and commentary. Further, delimitations are testimonies from Sweden and the U.S., the advanced search was utilized and provides the ability to limit tweets to Swedish respectively English. Further, tweets are limited by geolocation. This means that tweets include a geotag indicating where they were published. However, not all tweets in the search contained this information; therefore, only geotagged tweets were selected to ensure the material could be reliably

attributed to users in the U.S. and Sweden. Additionally, tweets were excluded that did not contain “MeToo” despite being testimonies. In addition, testimonies that were narrating or exclusively sharing someone else’s story were excluded. The tweets were manually selected and the search for Swedish testimonies were “*metoo (berättelse OR berätta OR story OR vittnesmål) (#metoo) lang:sv² until:2019-12-31 since:2017-10-15*” and the following search was made for the U.S. “*metoo (story OR stories OR testimony OR testimonies OR) (#metoo) lang:en³ until:2019-12-31 since:2017-10-15*”. The time frame is set to 2017-10-15 until 2019-12-31 with motivation that the movement emerged on the 15th of October in 2017, and the extent to 31st of December 2019 is due to the limited data available that fit the criteria of this study, i.e. testimonies from #MeToo containing episodes of epistemic injustice or misrecognition. Hence, a quite extensive time period was necessary to provide sufficient data. Ultimately, the material consists of 30 tweets from the U.S. respectively 25 Swedish tweets. It is noteworthy that tweets from the U.S. contain more elaborate and rich text, i.e. fuller details in the testimonies than those from Sweden.

4.2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional consequences of misrecognition and epistemic injustices, by looking at testimonies from X. The theories of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) and social recognition (Honneth, 1995) have defined what constitutes as misrecognition and epistemic injustice, thus, by their frameworks, this study has identified episodes of social disdain in #MeToo testimonies. Narrative analysis will be implemented to analyze the testimonies, by scrutinizing the content in its broader context and in its finer textual elements—such as word choice, phrasing, and rhetorical structure—to examine how individuals articulate their experiences and to identify their emotional responses to social disdain. The following heading will go more into detail of the narrative analysis and how this study used an abductive approach.

Narrative analysis is particularly well-suited for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of how individuals structure and make sense of their lived experiences through narratives. Unlike, for instance, thematic analysis, which focuses on identifying and

² Language: Swedish

³ Language: English

categorizing patterns or themes across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006), narrative analysis attends to the form, structure, and context of individual accounts (Kleres, 2011). Since this study investigates emotional consequences of misrecognition and epistemic injustices, narrative analysis enables a more nuanced interpretation of how survivors articulate emotions in their testimonies. Furthermore, narrative analysis considers how stories are shaped by broader cultural and social discourses, making it ideal for examining how emotional regimes in Sweden and the U.S. influence the way experiences of sexual violence are expressed and received. This method supports a deeper understanding of not just what is said, but how it is said—revealing layers of meaning in word choice, sequencing, and tone that are central to issues of recognition, legitimacy, injustice, and emotional expression.

A disadvantage of narrative analysis is its subjectivity. Since the method relies heavily on interpretation—particularly of language, structure, and context—the findings can be influenced by the author’s own biases, assumptions, and cultural framework. Because narrative analysis involves interpreting personal stories and experiences, researchers may arrive at different interpretations even when analyzing the same material. The process requires the researcher to engage deeply with the text’s meaning, structure, and emotional context, which can vary depending on individual perspectives, cultural knowledge, and even theoretical frameworks. As a result, replicating exactly the same conclusions with the same set of data can become difficult, as different researchers may highlight different aspects of the narratives or interpret them in varying ways. Additionally, this study has relatively limited empirical material, restricting generalizability to a broader population or settings. As such, the conclusions drawn from a small set of personal narratives might not apply to other individuals or groups outside the study’s specific context. However, as this study is qualitative, it does not aim for empirical generalizability but rather an in-depth understanding. Despite the small scope, theoretical generalizations can be made, as the findings point to broader patterns of emotional response and social dynamics related to misrecognition and epistemic injustice.

4.3. Narrative analysis and abduction

Kleres’ (2011) narrative analysis is utilized to examine emotional content in #MeToo testimonies on X. The first step in the analysis was to identify episodes of epistemic injustice

and misrecognition. Then, descriptions of the emotional reactions associated with these were examined. The dominant emotions identified became the focus of the analysis and formed the basis of the coding framework. However, other less dominant emotions were also considered and included in the analysis. Furthermore, this study has adopted an abductive approach, oscillating between theory and empirical data (Andersson, 2022). Previous research illustrated the prevalence of misrecognition and epistemic injustice (Engdahl et al., 2021), therefore the current theories were utilized, which provided a foundational understanding of sexual assault and its associated emotional responses. However, during analysis, additional emotions emerged that were not fully accounted for within these theoretical frameworks, such as relief, courage, empathy and pride. Rather than dismissing the deviations, they were scrutinized, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation of the data.

Moreover, Kleres' approach is used to identify specific emotions expressed in the tweets, offering insights into the predominant emotional tones and their connections to broader societal narratives. Narrative analysis investigates how emotions are conveyed through narrative structures (Kleres, 2011), revealing the precursors to emotional experiences by examining narrative elements, such as events and contexts—in this instance episodes of epistemic injustice and misrecognition among sexual assault testimonies—that shape subjective feelings (Kleres, 2011). The language used to express emotions is also central to this analysis. Emotionally charged words, expressive interjections, and evaluative phrases add depth to the narratives (Kleres, 2011). Techniques such as hyperbole, metaphor, and rhetorical questions enrich emotional narratives according to Kleres (2011). An example of hyperbole from the material is "... no medal or cake for anyone...". Additionally, a rhetorical question is for instance "Finally you are listening. Am I grateful for that? Not at all /...?".

Kleres (2011) emphasizes that the sequence of events in a narrative plays a crucial role in shaping its overall structure. Each part of a text gains meaning through its relationship to the surrounding context, which requires careful attention to the order of events and how meanings build progressively. Additionally, narratives may contain multiple storylines or overarching themes, and the relationship between the narrative timeline and actual events can vary. Some sections may summarize, others may slow down with commentary, and some may adhere closely to the original timeline. The structure of a narrative may also include non-linear elements, such as gaps, interruptions, and reflections on the past or future.

Narratives may exhibit repetition or iterative qualities as well (Kleres, 2011). These structural characteristics are evident in several of the testimonies analyzed in this study. One particularly illustrative example is a Swedish testimony in which the testifier reflects on a post made two years earlier, stating: “Two years ago I posted this [referring to a #MeToo post] on fb [Facebook]. And #metoo has changed things for me. I've almost stopped being ashamed. I've made new insights. I could almost, almost tell you about it. 14 years later /.../”. Here, the narrative departs from a linear recounting of the event and instead moves between temporal layers: the moment of partial disclosure, and the present reflection. The repetition of the word “almost” signals an emotional hesitation and highlights the internal conflict between wanting to disclose and the lingering effects of shame and fear. This non-linear structure, coupled with reflective commentary, exemplifies how meaning is constructed gradually and emotionally through fragmented storytelling. Rather than focusing on the incident itself, the testifier centers the enduring emotional aftermath, illustrating Kleres’ (2011) argument that narrative meaning is often found in the interplay between emotional reflection and temporal shifts.

Building on this, Kleres (2011) argues that narrative analysis rests on the theoretical foundation that human experience is fundamentally narrative in nature. Recognizing the significance of emotions in social life leads to the question of whether emotions themselves possess a narrative quality. If they do, how are emotions and narratives interrelated? Do emotions have a “storied” dimension? Despite the rise in narrative research, the concept of “narrative emotions” has been relatively overlooked in the social sciences, particularly within the sociology of emotions. While scholars occasionally suggest that certain emotions have a narrative quality, a recurring idea emerges; emotions are socially learned and embedded within narratives. Key narrative components—characters, events, circumstances, thoughts, and feelings—work together to shape emotional experiences, forming the structure of emotions (Kleres, 2011). This is reflected in the #MeToo testimonies analyzed in this study, where emotions do not appear in isolation but are constructed through the narrative framing of personal experience. For example, anger and frustration often emerge not as standalone emotional states, but as outcomes of narrative arcs in which the survivors position themselves as repeatedly silenced or disbelieved by institutions, family members, or society at large. These emotions gain their intensity through a buildup of events—failed disclosures, lack of

recognition, and systematic denial of recognition—culminating in a demand for acknowledgment.

The construction of agency within narratives also plays a key role in shaping emotional experiences. In anger narratives, for example, an “agentic other” is often highlighted—in the MeToo testimonies analysed in this study anger was directed at clearly defined “agentic others” such as institutions, perpetrators, or disbelieving family members, while shame or helplessness diminish or erase the self’s agency —involving a silenced self in the testimonies, with survivors portraying themselves as unable to act, speak, or be heard. Agency is both attributed and constructed through narratives, becoming a crucial aspect of emotional experience (Kleres, 2011).

Kleres (2011) further highlights the temporal nature of narratives as a key characteristic, with progression over time being central to narrativity. In this sense, paradigm scenarios can be understood as narratives. A paradigm scenario is a typical or culturally recognized situation that helps individuals learn what a specific emotion is, when it is appropriate to feel it, and how to express it. These scenarios combine a common type of event with an expected emotional response, and they play a key role in shaping how emotions are understood and experienced within a particular society (de Sousa, 1987). However, the principle of sequentiality in narrative analysis underscores the interconnectedness of each narrative element within the continuous flow of the story, emphasizing the all-encompassing nature of temporality. This understanding of emotions’ narrativity might suggest a purely cognitive interpretation, where emotions are composed of narrative elements such as actors, events, and conditions. Yet, as Kleres (2011) notes, narratives also reveal the emotional experience itself, illustrating that emotions are not just cognitive constructs but are inseparable from the narrative. Emotions emerge from specific configurations of narrative elements such as actors, events, and conditions, blending thought and emotion into an inseparable part of human experience.

4.4. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are of importance regarding the reliability and the quality of the research. The study aspired to be characterized by good research practice, as established by

the Swedish scientific council (Vetenskapsrådet). To honor this, the codex of good research practice was followed, which implied ensuring the researcher and the research were held to standards of reliability, honesty, respect and responsibility (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024). The measurements to uphold this were to be transparent and honest about the process and research conducted, such as providing information about the method, material and analysis etc. Furthermore, this research is based on personal testimonies which are to be considered of sensitive nature, therefore, to ensure integrity and respect for testifiers all tweets included in the study were anonymized. Only publicly available tweets were selected to avoid infringing on users' privacy and to uphold their integrity. Although the individuals who authored these posts did not provide explicit consent for their inclusion, the content was publicly shared on a platform accessible to anyone. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that users may not anticipate their content being used for academic purposes and may be unaware of the potential implications. To address these concerns, anonymization occurred and all identifying details have been removed to preserve confidentiality. Additionally, there is a risk of reinforcing stereotypes by consistently portraying men as perpetrators and women as victims, which can be harmful—particularly to marginalized groups whose experiences may be overlooked or invalidated. However, statistical data consistently show that women are significantly overrepresented as victims of sexual crimes, while men make up the majority of those identified as offenders (Ellemers, 2018), besides, the material mainly consisted of women testifying. Additionally, the character limitations of the platform may restrict users' ability to fully articulate their experiences. However, some individuals overcome this constraint by sharing images of written text, thereby enabling more elaborate and nuanced narratives.

It is important to acknowledge that while I strive to approach the material objectively, I acknowledge that my own preconceptions—shaped by my understanding of sexual assault and the cultural norms of the countries studied—may influence my interpretations. As a Swedish woman embedded in Swedish society, my perspective is inevitably shaped by my social and cultural context. However, my primary commitment was to let the data guide the analysis, allowing the participants' expressed emotions and experiences to emerge with minimal imposition of external factors or prejudice. I also recognize that complete objectivity is unattainable in research, as a researcher's positionality necessarily informs their engagement with the material. To mitigate this, I employed narrative analysis as my

methodological framework, prioritizing the participants’ own stories and using direct quotations to substantiate my interpretations. This approach helps to ensure that the findings remain rooted in the data, centering the voices of those studied rather than my own assumptions. Furthermore, to maintain consistency, all tweets were analyzed through the same theoretical lens, fostering a systematic and transparent process.

5. Findings

This section will present the findings. Forthcoming headings represent the primary emotions revealed in the #MeToo testimonies from experiencing social disdain. Below in table 1.0, the primary emotions and how often they are expressed is categorized, by each emotion and country separately. Some emotional responses appeared exclusively in the Swedish testimonies. Altogether, there were 25 Swedish and 30 U.S. testimonies.

Table 1.0. *Dominant emotional reactions in respective countries*

USA - Emotional reactions	Number of emotions	SWEDEN - Emotional reactions	Number of emotions
Anger/Frustration	11	Anger/Frustration	14
Fear	7	Fear	2
Shame	2	Shame	2
Empathy	2	Empathy	2
Disappointment	4	Disappointment	3
Courage	5	Courage	5
		Relief	7
		Sadness	3
		Pride	2
		Disgust	1

However, the findings of emotional experiences from the sexual assault testimonies are complex, overlapping and dynamic. A specific situation can give rise to several different emotional experiences. For instance, “Though I dont have the balls to share my story... 4 years ago I became a survivor. #metoo”. The phrase “I don’t have the balls to share my story” suggests fear of stigma, judgment, or negative reactions from others. This fear is tied to

shame, as the testifier feels unable to openly discuss her experience. The fact that the assault happened “4 years ago” is another sign of the fear and shame, as well as it indicates that these emotions have persisted over time, highlighting the long-term impact of trauma. Despite her fear, the act of sharing, even this brief statement, demonstrates courage. By speaking out, she challenges her fear and takes a step toward reclaiming her voice. The testifier explicitly refers to herself as a “survivor” rather than a “victim”. This choice of language is significant. The term “survivor” emphasizes strength, resilience, and the ability to endure and overcome trauma. By identifying as a survivor, she reframes her narrative, shifting from a passive recipient of harm to an active individual reclaiming her life and identity. This suggests that while the assault is part of her story, it does not define her entirely. Moreover, this example illustrates the dynamic nature of emotions, which will be further explored in the findings.

5.1. Anger & Frustration (USA and Sweden)

Both in Sweden and the U.S., the predominant emotions revealed in the testimonies that contain elements of misrecognition or epistemic injustices is anger and frustration. Fourteen Swedish and eleven U.S. tweets contained anger and frustration. It is notably more Swedish than U.S testimonies that include anger/frustration as they are fewer in total. Firstly, examining the Swedish testimonies, anger was often expressed in response to being silenced, specifically, to not being heard, understood, listened to, or taken seriously. For instance:

Now we say #metoo and finally something is happening. Finally you are listening. Am I grateful for that? Not at all. It was really about time. No medal or cake for anyone. [But] fun that it seems like you finally understand. /.../ And yes. Me too. Of course. Don't stop listening again.⁴

This statement contains multiple layers of anger and frustration. The survivor’s use of “Finally you are listening” signals impatience, suggesting that society has taken too long to address these issues. The rhetorical question, “Am I grateful for that? Not at all”, conveys indignation and anger at the delayed response, emphasizing that recognition should have come much sooner and that gratitude for it is not in order. The testifier continues and says “No medal or cake for anyone.”. This sarcastic remark conveys anger toward those who

⁴Original in Swedish: “Nu säger vi #metoo och äntligen händer något. Äntligen lyssnar ni. Är jag tacksam för det? Inte ett dugg. Det var verkligen på tiden. Ingen medalj eller tårta till nån. Me[n] kul att det verkar som att ni äntligen begriper. /.../ Och ja. Jag med. Såklart. Sluta inte lyssna igen.”

expect praise or recognition for doing the bare minimum (e.g., listening to survivors). It criticizes the lack of meaningful action and highlights the speaker's frustration with performative gestures. "It was really about time" expresses frustration that it took so long for society to address these issues, as well as the repeated use of "finally" in the testimony. The speaker emphasizes that the response is long overdue, which reflects a sense of exasperation with the slow pace of change. In continuance, utilizing the word "fun" is likely sarcastic, highlighting the speaker's frustration that it took a movement like #MeToo for people to grasp the severity of the problem. The tone suggests disbelief and irritation that basic understanding and empathy were absent for so long. Furthermore, the plea "Don't stop listening again" reflects frustration with the cyclical nature of attention to social issues. The speaker is wary that the momentum gained through #MeToo might fade, and people might return to ignoring or dismissing survivors' voices. This conveys a deep-seated frustration with societal complacency. Further, the testifier states "And yes. Me too. Of course.", carrying a tone of defiance and assertiveness. The speaker is reclaiming their voice and asserting their presence in the movement, which can be seen as a response to the anger and frustration they feel about being ignored for so long. According to Honneth (1995) the victims can develop these sentiments when they have been wronged and denied solidarity or rights, leading them to fight for recognition. For instance, by participating in collective action, which they are by partaking in sharing #MeToo testimonies.

In the U.S. testimonies where individuals have been subjected to epistemic injustices and denied recognition, they instead express their frustration and anger pointing to proof and evidence in their case, and how they are not to blame but rather the perpetrator or society. The following testifier articulates frustration with the prevailing mantra of needing evidence to validate experiences of assault. This frustration is compounded by the realization that many victims may not have the proof required to be believed, thus experiencing epistemic injustice and denial of their rights (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995):

Show of hands. How many women have been victim to gropes, molested, a rape attempt, or were raped, who have no forensic 'proof' or witnesses to support your claims? /.../ How many are furious this week with the 'no proof, witnesses or report filed so it never happened' mantra? #Metoo /.../ I was 15. An uncle molested me at beginning of summer. That July a different uncle's employer tried to rape me. No

‘forensic proof or witnesses’ for either attack. Just lingering effects I still deal with in relationships to this day...43 years later. Yup. I’m pissed off.

The phrase “I’m pissed off” evidently expresses anger. The emotion is directed not only at the perpetrators of the abuse but also at the societal attitudes that dismiss claims of sexual violence without forensic proof or witnesses. Furthermore, the writer’s call to action with “show of hands” suggests a desire for solidarity among women who had similar experiences. It also implies a sense of isolation among victims by not being acknowledged or validated before, hence, being denied recognition of solidarity. There is also an underlying sense of betrayal in the recollection of the traumatic experiences, especially the impact it has had on the writers’ relationships even decades later. The lingering effects of trauma highlight the long-term emotional scars left by such experiences.

In the U.S. they must provide extensive evidence to be believed. Although even when they do, they are still frequently questioned or not believed. In Sweden they are directing the discourse at policy makers and society and expressing frustration of not being heard before. For instance, a Swedish individual expresses: “Thousands of testimonies. And more are sure to come. Now people are listening. Why didn't society listen when we told you one by one? #metoo /.../”⁵. Meanwhile, a U.S. testimony revealed sentiments of anger and frustration by being subjected to epistemic injustice which led to denial of her rights:

I will say this Only once! For all those trying to dissect my rape kit, my story, tell me about myself I repeat this was a COVER UP done by [full name] & his [tagged workplace] friends, etc /.../ I have plenty more PROOF of it /.../ I only showed 1 thing so far /.../ My rape kit doc! #metoo #metoomvmt.

Both testifiers have been subjected to epistemic injustice. They have not been listened to or believed to be credible victims, thus inflicting anger. The Swedish testimony conveys frustration over the lack of attention and recognition from society when victims speak out individually. The rhetorical question “Why didn't society listen when we told you one by one?” highlights a sense of exasperation at the repeated failures to address their experiences. Although the Swedish testimony’s reference to “Thousands of testimonies” signifies a sense

⁵Original in Swedish: “Tusentals vittnesmål. Och fler kommer säkerligen. Nu lyssnar folk. Varför lyssnade inte samhället när vi berättade en och en? #metoo /.../”

of empowerment in numbers, it also shows a shift from isolation to collective strength, indicating a growing movement where voices are beginning to be heard and recognized. Although, also demonstrating how widespread sexual assault is. Moreover, both testimonies exhibit anger towards the systemic issues surrounding sexual violence and the cover-up of such incidents. Further, the U.S. testimony's emphatic declaration "I will say this Only once!" suggests a culmination of pent-up emotion and a demand for acknowledgment of their suffering. Further, the individual's insistence on having "plenty more PROOF" indicates a need for recognition and validation of their experience. Hence, the testifier has been subjected to denial of rights. Also, the mention of a "COVER UP" reflects feelings of betrayal and a fight against being silenced. The repeated use of capital letters throughout the testimony serves to accentuate emotional intensity and underscore key points, reflecting the speaker's urgency and need to be heard in the face of institutional or societal dismissal. Overall, the emotions in these citations encompass frustration, anger, struggle for recognition, and deep pain, all of which highlight the impact of epistemic injustice on individuals who have experienced sexual violence (Fricker, 2007).

The Swedish testimonies in contrast to U.S. ones, contain a more collective narration focusing on the movement and the broader societal issues explicitly. The Swedish testimonies are more focused on the collective empowerment #MeToo is generating and discussing what the movement has done for themselves and other women. Even though there are individuals who talk about it more broadly in the U.S., they generally tend to focus more on sharing their personal stories. The U.S. testimonies contain more focus on what wrongdoings they have experienced leading them to be angry, for instance victim-blaming, being silenced and not believed.

5.2. Fear, Shame & Disappointment (USA and Sweden)

Disclosing a testimony often leads to ramifications and emotional reactions, including feelings of shame and stigma etc. (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995). In the testimonies, two contained expressions of shame, seven of fear, and four of disappointment. In Sweden, there were three testimonies expressing disappointment, two of fear, and two of shame. In U.S. testimonies, fear is most commonly linked to the apprehension of disclosing experiences to others, whether to close ones or institutions, such as when reporting the incident. This fear is

closely tied to shame, as the hesitation to share personal stories often comes from internalized guilt, self-blame, or the stigma of being a victim (Honneth, 1995; Lindqvist & Garnetz, 2020; Nutbeam & Mereish, 2022). Fear of judgment, disbelief, or further victimization reflects a deeper emotional struggle with shame, which silences survivors and prevents them from seeking justice or support. In this way, fear and shame are interconnected, with fear often experienced as a result of the shame imposed by societal attitudes and norms, as Bogen et al. (2021) and Nutbeam and Mereish's (2022) findings support. In some testimonies, fear also arises from a power imbalance, where the perpetrator holds more authority or influence. For example, a U.S. testimony describes interactions with police:

police officer who assaulted me got an 'order of protection' claimed I was 'harassing him' wrote I was 'crazy' out to 'expose him'—I wasn't. then him/his buddies arrested me 14x [14 times], 10 evictions, destroyed everything in my life—now I think he wanted to be exposed. #MeToo #CopsToo.

Social isolation is another consequence described by survivors, with some displaying withdrawal, change in their daily routines or interactions, or living in fear or silence. Exemplified in this U.S. testimony is silence evoked by fear of anticipated consequences following disclosure: "Though I don't have the balls to share my story... 4 years ago I became a survivor. #metoo". Another U.S. example demonstrates change in interacting due to repeated harassment: "#MeToo Never assaulted but harassed by several different 'powerful and respected' older men, mostly. It changes all interactions with men." These behaviors align with what Honneth (1995) suggests happens to individuals whose physical integrity has been violated. Hänel (2022) further emphasizes the harmful effects of a lack of recognition or validation on survivors' healing processes. Thus, fear and shame act as barriers to recovery, leading to changes in behavior and how survivors or victims interact with others, ultimately affecting their self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect (Honneth, 1995). For instance, the following statement highlights the experience of internalizing blame and a ruined self-confidence: "If you're sexually assaulted or harassed by someone you love and trust and you think that you're the one at fault for it /.../ Yeah, #metoo". Referring to the perpetrator as a "loved one" implies that the recognition of love has been violated, undermining the survivor's dignity and respect as an individual. As already mentioned, this violation can lead survivors to internalize blame, causing feelings of shame (Honneth, 1995). This can stem from societal messages that individuals are responsible for the actions of others, such as Nutbeam and Mereish (2022) as well as Bogen et al. (2021) found in reactions to testimonies.

Lindqvist and Ganetz (2020) also noted that victims are frequently positioned as responsible for stopping the abuse, which may contribute to this survivor's sense of guilt. The violation of trust and the feeling of being blamed seems to erode the survivor's self-confidence, as her autonomy has been disrespected. This alters how she views herself, leading her to internalize the blame for her own abuse, which she explicitly states in the testimony.

There are indications that appoints to sentiments of shame and fear which affects the likelihood of coming forward (Engdahl et al., 2021; Hänel, 2022), or rather explain why survivors did not share their story earlier, which is due to the fear of experiencing epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995). The following individual is removing himself from a position of being vulnerable, as he believes he will be met with distrust or disbelief by the police, and is concealing the experience and identity due to fear of epistemic injustice and not receiving social recognition because of his sexual orientation:

I didn't call the police b/c we were living in a time when I didn't feel my sexual identity would be taken seriously by the police. I thought I would be mocked and ridiculed for being a gay teenager. I thought it was my fault. I didn't feel they would believe me.

This case aligns with the findings of Engdahl et al. (2021), who identified social exclusion as a key consequence of social disdain. However, in this instance, the individual described in the testimony chooses to exclude himself as a proactive measure to avoid potential unjust treatment, prejudice, or the denial of his rights. As a part of a marginalized group, he believes he is compelled to be silent due to the social climate; generating shame from being stigmatized (Fricker, 2007). Additionally, the testimony is provided by a man, which is relatively uncommon. This demonstrates that the #MeToo movement, through its emphasis on collective empowerment, is effectively enabling marginalized individuals to find and assert their voices.

Feelings of disappointment frequently emerge in testimonies when trust is breached, particularly in environments or relationships where individuals expect to feel safe and supported. This breach of trust may relate either to the assault itself or to the experience of disclosing it. This sense of betrayal is especially intense when someone confides in a close individual, such as a friend, family member, or authority figure, only to be met with disbelief,

indifference, or dismissal (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995). Such responses can deepen the emotional harm experienced, as the individual may feel invalidated or unsupported in a vulnerable moment (Hänel, 2022). This dynamic is consistent with the findings of Bogen et al. (2021) and Nutbeam and Mereish (2022), whose research highlights how negative societal attitudes toward victims can exacerbate their distress. These studies emphasize that skepticism or outright disbelief can further marginalize survivors, intensifying their emotional suffering. Conversely, Hänel (2022) stresses the importance of support and validation in the healing process. When survivors are met with distrust or denial, it not only compromises their sense of safety but also negatively impacts their overall well-being. Therefore, the failure to believe or support victims can be seen as a form of secondary victimization, further deepening the psychological and emotional wounds caused by the original violation. Moreover, in this context, the rupture of trust in the testimonies illustrates denial of recognition, particularly of love. This lack of recognition causes survivors to question their competence and role as victims of abuse (Honneth, 1995). For example, one individual recounts, “Sexually abused by my stepfather from age 6 to age 18. When I told my mother, she said, ‘What do you want me to do? I can't leave him.’”. The brevity of this testimony suggests that the individual’s primary intention was to convey the nature of her situation and the dismissive response she received. The use of “mother” and “stepfather”—close individuals who were supposed to offer safety—emphasizes the betrayal of trust and suggests disappointment. The mother’s response, “What do you want me to do?” reflects a critical lack of support, displaying a dismissive attitude that can increase feelings of isolation and helplessness. This response suggests a failure to understand the severity of the situation and the need for intervention. The mother’s prioritization of her relationship with the stepfather over the safety and well-being of her child amplifies the disappointment the survivor feels. Experiences as such lead to shame and a deterioration of self-confidence (Honneth, 1995), particularly when the violation of physical integrity is committed by someone in a position of trust, like a parental figure. The indifference from the mother further undermines the survivor’s self-confidence and sense of worth. Thus, as the testifier’s suffering is ignored or dismissed—the experience damages the individual’s ability to develop a positive self-relation (Honneth, 1995). In this case, the survivor’s disappointment stems from the failure of those closest to her to provide the recognition and support necessary for emotional healing.

In Sweden, disappointment often stems from the realization that survivors' voices were ignored until now. One Swedish testimony discussed earlier in section 4.1 on Anger & Frustration, expresses anger/frustration conjointly with disappointment: "Thousands of testimonies. And more are sure to come. Now people are listening. Why didn't society listen when we told you one by one? #metoo /.../"⁶. As mentioned previously, this testifier displays frustration at the delayed response from society. Furthermore, the disappointment is linked to the realization that individual testimonies were ignored until they reached a critical mass. Moreover, shame in Swedish testimonies portrays reluctance to share their story and how it has affected them, which the following testifier exemplifies: "Two years ago I posted this on fb [facebook]. And #metoo has changed things for me. I've almost stopped being ashamed. I've made new insights. I could almost, almost tell you about it. 14 years later /.../"⁷. This testifier discloses that she is not yet able to speak about her assault and by being unable to speak of it denies the testifier moral validation, which is internalized as shame. Further statement verifying the shame is "I've almost stopped being ashamed", which indicates that shame was a dominant, silencing force. The testifier's progress "almost stopped being ashamed" highlights how social movements can contribute to restore recognition as Honneth (1995) anticipated, but the emotional scars of prior denial remain. However, the shame also contributed to the survivor's hesitation to speak out, likely due to fears of being disbelieved, dismissed, or blamed—factors that stem from societal prejudice and contribute to a credibility deficit (Fricker, 2007).

Fear is further reflected in another Swedish testimony, which reveals a complex emotional response to revisiting pre-MeToo experiences:

Reading @matildagustav s Klubben [*The Club*, English translation] and being thrown back to 2017 and everything that happened before #MeToo. Strange how it affects and how acceptance has made me create new patterns without confrontation and risk. Strong, is the least I can say!⁸.

⁶Original in Swedish: "Tusentals vittnesmål. Och fler kommer säkerligen. Nu lyssnar folk. Varför lyssnade inte samhället när vi berättade en och en? #metoo /.../"

⁷Original in Swedish: "För två år sen postade jag det här på fb [facebook]. Och #metoo har ändrat saker för mig. Jag har nästan slutat skämmas. Jag har gjort nya insikter. Jag skulle nästan, nästan kunna berätta om det. 14 år senare. /.../"

⁸Original in Swedish: "Läser @matildagustav s Klubben och slängs tillbaka till 2017 och allt som hände innan #MeToo. Märkligt hur det påverkar och hur acceptans har fått mig att skapa nya mönster utan konfrontation och risk. Stark, är det minsta jag kan säga!"

The phrase “Being thrown back to 2017” suggests an involuntary reliving of past trauma, indicating unresolved psychological weight. Moreover, “Acceptance has made me create new patterns” reflects a pragmatic, almost resigned adaptation and survival. Further highlighted by the continuance “...without confrontation and risk.”, which signals a protective stance. Thus, choosing to adapt “quietly” rather than challenge those who harmed or failed her—instead adjusting her life and behavior. This indicates her self-relation is distorted (Honneth, 1995)—changing her life patterns, conforming and re-adapting, although she is not at fault. The misrecognition engendered internalized invisibility, i.e. before #MeToo, the testifiers’ experiences were likely minimized or normalized, thus denying her moral standing (Honneth, 1995). The triggering effect of the book shows the trauma never fully resolved. Finally, calling this “strong” implies pride in endurance, but also frustration at the lack of transformative justice.

5.3. Courage & Empathy (USA and Sweden)

Five testimonies from the U.S. conveyed courage and two of them additionally revealed empathy. Courage is exhibited in the sense that individuals sharing their testimonies experience pain from their sexual assault but still choose to be strong. Such as sharing their experience or deciding to write about it and be vulnerable rather than internalizing the pain. Additionally, pushing for that the burden is not only theirs and that actions need to be taken by institutions and highlighting the need for (policy) changes. A U.S. example that reveals both courage and empathy is this individual that testifies: “5 yrs ago I was molested by a family friend, 1 month ago I finally told my mom. Sexual assault is never a victims fault. Stay strong. #MeToo”. The individual was denied the right to physical integrity by someone close to the family, distorting her capability to trust, which is implied by the extensive period of time it took to share her trauma with her mother. The holding back of sharing also implies a sense of fear or shame. With the ample time it took to share in combination of writing “sexual assault is never a victims fault”, it is insinuated that she has had sentiments of being responsible. Although, she has come to realize she is not responsible and encourages others to embrace that it is not the victim’s fault. This final part of the sentence, “Sexual assault is never a victim’s fault. Stay strong”, conveys a tone of understanding and empathy. By stating that the victim is never at fault, the writer challenges societal blame often placed on survivors—consistent with the negative responses to testimonies revealed by the findings of Schnider and Carpenter (2020)—offering reassurance and validation. The phrase “Stay

strong” further reflects the writer’s empathy, drawn from her own experiences, and serves as an encouragement to others facing similar struggles. This combination of validation and encouragement highlights a sense of solidarity and support for survivors, emphasizing resilience in the face of adversity.

In Swedish testimonies there is a slight demonstration of empathy and courage, the former was found in two testimonies and the latter in five testimonies. A Swedish testifier demonstrated empathy by emotionally engaging with the stories of others, feeling sorrow for their experiences, and even crying in response to their accounts: “Today marks two years since #metoo started. I sat awake scrolling through Facebook and cried. Like all the women I know had been victimized. One by one they talked about horrific stories or about everyday life with sexual violence. /.../”⁹. It is also indicated that she has been victimized, “After that day we will never be silent again”¹⁰, by using “we”. Additionally, it is insinuated she has been silenced as proclaiming to never be silent anymore, thus having experienced denial of recognition and rights (Honneth, 1995). Moreover, this empathetic reaction reflects a deep emotional connection to the pain and struggles shared by others, highlighting the testifier’s ability to recognize and validate their experiences. Such empathy underscores the importance of emotional solidarity in understanding and supporting those who have endured similar hardships. By publicly acknowledging these experiences, the testifier validates the suffering of survivors, affirming that their experiences are real, significant, and deserving of attention. This recognition helps counteract the misrecognition or denial that many survivors face in their everyday lives (Honneth, 1995), where their stories are often dismissed or silenced. The writer’s empathy reflects her emotional engagement with this process of recognition, as she connects with the pain and resilience of others. This shared recognition fosters a sense of solidarity and collective empowerment, which is central to the #MeToo movement’s impact. Additionally, in his context, the act of sharing and witnessing these stories through the #MeToo movement represents a form of social recognition for survivors of sexual violence (Honneth, 1995).

⁹Original in Swedish: “Idag var det två år sedan #metoo började. Jag satt vaken och scrollade på Facebook, och grät. Typ alla kvinnor jag känner hade blivit utsatta. En efter en berättade om fruktansvärda historier eller om vardagslivet med sexuellt våld. /.../”

¹⁰Original in Swedish: “Efter den dagen ska vi aldrig vara tysta igen”

Swedish testifiers also indicate emotions of courage, such as the following who recounts their experience: “Many years ago, in my youth, something happened that I have never been able to talk about, but I sat down and wrote down all the terrible things. /.../”¹¹. This encompasses emotional expressions of courage, shame and fear. The phrase “never been able to talk about” suggests long-held shame or fear—emotions often tied to stigma. Which may be fear of experiencing epistemic injustice or being denied recognition (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995), a point further emphasized by the implied length of time it took before she felt able to speak about the experience. Thus, implying some form of risk in speaking out, prior anxiety or suppression. Meanwhile, the act of writing and sharing breaks this silence, framing testimonial disclosure as an act of courage.

5.4. Pride, Sadness & Disgust (Sweden)

Emotions of pride, sadness and disgust were identified although they are not particularly common: two testimonies were recognized as pride conjointly with sadness respectively disgust, three as sadness and one as disgust. These emotions were exclusive to Swedish testimonies. Testifiers are primarily upset and sad about the magnitude of sexual assaults in contemporary Sweden and that it has not been dealt with, or how themselves are sad about their story and for others who had similar experiences, illustrated in the following: “Seeing my story among my fellow sisters at #without safetynet feels mighty, but also damn sad. #metoo”¹². The hashtag #without safetynet refers to a specific occupation and draws attention to the unacceptable behaviors that have persisted without consequences, highlighting a culture of silence and fear around speaking out. This issue has been explored in research by Johansson et al. (2018), which showed that workplace sexism and harassment are often normalized, reducing women to sexual objects while male behavior remains unquestioned. This creates unsafe environments where women feel they cannot speak out (Johansson et al. 2018). However, the testimonies reveal that women are now challenging this culture through the #MeToo movement, using social media to demand accountability (McDonald, 2020). This shift represents a move from passive endurance to active confrontation, seeking both safety and systemic change. Furthermore, pride is present, which is associated with the act of sharing the experience, thus now feeling a sense of accomplishment in coming forward, both

¹¹Original in Swedish: “För många år sedan, i min ungdom, hände det något jag aldrig har kunnat prata om, men jag satte mig ner och skrev av mig allt det hemska. /.../”

¹²Original in Swedish: “Att se min berättelse bland mina medsystrars på # utanskyddsnät känns mäktigt, men också förbannat sorgligt. #metoo”

as a means of personal empowerment and in support of others who have faced similar challenges. Her use of the word “mighty” also signals pride, particularly in the context of contributing to something she sees as powerful and capable of driving change. The emotions expressed in these situations also indicate a process of healing. While individuals feel upset and saddened by the epistemic injustices they have endured—being denied their rights and being silenced—they also find that coming forward within a supportive movement allows them to heal (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995; Lamade et al., 2024). By sharing their experiences in a community that believes in and supports them, they can repair their relationship with themselves and strengthen their connections with others (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995).

The following Swedish testimony reflects a complex emotional experience, with several emotions conveyed, including disgust, discomfort, and a sense of empowerment:

Saying it again, keep an eye on #without safetynet. Kind of the best thing that happened to me this year. And the hardest. I was about to throw up right from an acquaintance's story tonight. And all the difficult own memories it brought back. #metoo¹³.

The individual mentions that it was “kind of the best thing that happened to me this year”, indicating a positive aspect, perhaps related to the feeling of connection, solidarity, or healing through sharing experiences within a movement (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995). However, the individual also acknowledges that it was “the hardest”, suggesting that confronting these difficult memories is emotionally challenging. The mention of “about to throw up” in response to an acquaintance’s story suggests intense disgust and physical revulsion. This reaction indicates the emotional toll of recalling traumatic memories, both from hearing someone else’s story and reliving their own difficult experiences. The disgust likely stems from the recollection of past trauma, as well as the unsettling impact of hearing similar stories of victimization from others. Additionally, the phrase “all the difficult own memories it brought back” reveals sadness and perhaps grief, as the individual is reminded of their own past experiences of sexual assault or harassment. Overall, the testimony conveys a mixture of emotions, with disgust being a prominent feeling as the individual processes the painful

¹³Original in Swedish: “Säger det igen, håll ögonen på #utanskyddsnät. Typ bästa som hänt mig i år. Och jobbigaste. Höll på att spy rakt ut av en bekants berättelse i kväll. Och alla jobbiga egna minnen den väckte. #metoo”

memories and emotional impact of both their own trauma and the shared stories within the #MeToo movement.

5.5. Relief (Sweden)

There were seven Swedish testimonies containing relief, an emotion that was not present in the U.S. testimonies. Relief encompasses situations where testifying was described as difficult yet ultimately leading to a sense of comfort once their stories were shared. This relief often preceded a period of silence, where survivors were unable to speak out, suggesting the presence of fear, shame, or personal beliefs that discouraged disclosure. Although the exact reasons were not always explicitly stated, the act of writing out their experiences appeared to bring a noticeable sense of relief. For instance, sharing how they can finally breathe or how the problem has finally been noticed and addressed: “/.../ At first I hesitated about sharing anything during #metoo[.] The Petitions [and] testimonies kept me awake, but it has certainly become easier to breathe. Thank you to everyone who contributed! #resist”¹⁴. The author of the testimony mentions that she was initially hesitating to share her story, indicating feelings of uncertainty and apprehension, which often stem from fear of judgement, shame or the vulnerability that comes with revealing personal experiences (Honneth, 1995; Kennedy & Prock, 2018). The hashtag “resist” is also implying resistance against the culture of silence surrounding sexual assault and the unjust conditions. Furthermore, as previously noted, the individuals in the testimonies encountered various obstacles—often in the form of fear, shame, or emotional distress—that contributed to their hesitation or inability to disclose their experiences at an earlier stage, which are indications of fear of experiencing epistemic injustice or being denied social recognition (Fricker, 2007; Honneth, 1995).

6. Conclusions

The findings highlight distinct emotional expressions across socio-cultural and geographical contexts. To answer the research questions, firstly, the identified emotions within testimonies of sexual assault containing elements of misrecognition and epistemic injustice were anger/frustration, fear, shame, empathy, disappointment, courage, relief, sadness, pride and disgust. Revealing untheorized nuances of emotional expressions after social disdain, namely

¹⁴Original in Swedish: “/.../ Tvekade först om jag skulle dela med mig något under #metoo Uppropen o vittnesmålen höll mig sömnlös, men visst har det blivit lättare att andas. Tack alla som bidragit! #resist”

pride, empathy, relief and courage. This study thus contributes to the theoretical development of social recognition and epistemic injustice by offering new insights into their emotional dimensions. Secondly, the comparative analysis of #MeToo testimonies from Sweden and the U.S. reveals both shared and divergent emotional expressions linked to experiences of misrecognition and epistemic injustice. Swedish narratives show a broader emotional range—including pride, relief, sadness and disgust—suggesting a more supportive cultural climate for expressing complex feelings. While emotions, for instance anger, frustration, and shame, appear in both contexts, their causes and narrative framing differ. In Swedish testimonies, the emotional responses often stem from not being heard—a form of relational misrecognition—whereas U.S. testimonies emphasize not being believed, reflecting a deeper epistemic injustice. These differences highlight how emotional regimes shape emotional storytelling and the ways survivors navigate recognition and credibility. Thus, this study also advances the sociology of emotions by deepening our understanding of how emotions are shaped by national and cultural contexts, through the lens of emotional regimes. Moreover, the similarities indicate a shared emotional core, with survivors expressing a desire to be heard, validated and believed. Furthermore, within both countries, they express failures of institutional systems not protecting them.

7. Discussion

The findings reveal a divergence in emotional expression between Swedish and U.S. #MeToo testimonies, reflecting distinct sociocultural contexts. Swedish testimonies demonstrate greater emotional freedom, with relief being the second most prevalent emotion after anger/frustration (see table 1.0). Hence, suggesting survivors feel more comfortable openly sharing experiences while emphasizing collective advocacy and systemic change. In contrast, U.S. testimonies are markedly characterized by fear as the second most dominant emotion, indicating survivors' anxieties about secondary victimization, i.e. potential repercussions when speaking out, often accompanied by efforts to substantiate their claims through evidence like rape kits or documentation. Moreover, the emotions of anger and frustration appear in both Swedish and U.S. testimonies, but their underlying causes differ. In the Swedish context, these emotions are often tied to not being heard, pointing to a lack of social recognition (Honneth, 1995). In contrast, testimonies from the U.S. more frequently express anger and frustration stemming from not being believed, which reflects experiences of

epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). Similarly, while disappointment is present in both contexts, its nature varies: Swedish testimonies often frame disappointment around the fact that they were not listened to earlier, whereas U.S. testimonies link it more to not being believed, betrayal by someone close, or institutional failure. Interestingly, certain emotions such as pride, sadness, and disgust appear only in the Swedish material. This may further suggest that Swedish survivors feel freer to express a broader emotional range. Thus, this contrast suggests Swedish survivors operate within a more supportive environment for disclosure, while U.S. survivors navigate greater institutional distrust and personal risk when coming forward, highlighting how cultural and structural factors shape narratives of trauma and resistance within the same global movement. This may reflect the fact that Sweden is more gender-equal and has progressed further in this regard. For women in Sweden, this societal support may make it easier to express themselves more freely. Additionally, as Kleres (2011) points out, context is important for understanding emotions—how they are expressed and what is expressed. In this case, we can see differences between Sweden and the U.S. in the reflections of their vulnerability and the emotions that are expressed.

The #MeToo testimonies also reveal distinct emotional and institutional responses to sexual harassment and assault in the U.S. and Sweden. In the U.S., survivors express shame, fear, and frustration when sharing their experiences, yet they demonstrate bravery by speaking out despite expecting backlash. Their testimonies reflect a struggle for recognition, where they must often prove their victimhood—both socially and legally—due to institutional skepticism. This suggests a broader epistemic injustice, where survivors face credibility deficits and must fight to be believed (Fricker, 2007). Both countries exhibit courage, but this emotion takes on different meanings. In Sweden, courage is often accompanied by a sense of relief, and even sadness over the fact that the situation was, and continues to be, unjust. In the U.S. material, however, courage is more isolated and less tied to emotional resolution—perhaps reflecting the greater struggle for recognition and the ongoing challenge of being believed. These differences may indicate broader cultural or systemic contrasts in how survivors are heard, believed, and socially acknowledged in each country. The lack of relief in the U.S. further signifies the ongoing struggle for recognition. Relief typically represents the end of an unpleasant experience (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, n.d), but for U.S. survivors, the process of gaining recognition and validation continues, highlighting the persistent challenges they face. In contrast, Swedish testimonies

indicate a different emotional regime (Reddy, 2001). Because Sweden has long been seen as a leader in gender equality, survivors appear more confident in being believed from the outset. Their frustration stems not from proving their victimhood but from the delay in societal acknowledgment of their experiences. Unlike in the U.S., Swedish testimonies rarely frame their narratives around legal or institutional validation—instead, they express a sense of justified anger that change took so long. This difference may stem from Sweden’s stronger structural support for gender equality, reducing the burden on survivors to legitimize their claims. In the U.S., however, survivors must navigate a system that often demands evidence and justification, reinforcing a culture of epistemic distrust. Thus, while #MeToo in Sweden reflects frustration with past inaction, in the U.S., it remains a battle for basic credibility.

These differences highlight how emotions are not only personal reactions but are produced and mediated through social structures, cultural norms, and institutional frameworks. As mentioned, Kleres (2011) emphasizes that the narration of emotions is deeply contextual and shaped by the way events are sequenced, reflected upon, and framed. The divergent emotional expressions observed in this study underscore the importance of recognizing narrative and emotional variability within global movements like #MeToo, and caution against assuming a universal survivor experience. Instead, the findings call attention to the situated nature of emotional storytelling, where the politics of recognition and credibility intersect personal histories and collective struggle. These findings underscore that emotions are not only individual reactions but also socially and culturally constructed, shaped by the context in which narratives are told and received.

Despite these differences, similarities also emerge across the Swedish and U.S. testimonies, pointing to the shared emotional core of the #MeToo movement. Regardless of cultural or geographical context, survivors express a desire to be heard, validated, and believed. Many testimonies convey a strong sense of injustice—not only regarding the assault itself, but also in how their experiences were subsequently received or ignored by others. Whether through frustration, disappointment, or fear, survivors in both countries are fundamentally responding to the failure of social and institutional systems to protect them, believe them, or offer meaningful redress. This common purpose reflects the broader ethos of the #MeToo movement, where personal experiences are politicized and transformed into collective action. The testimonies—despite their contextual differences—reveal a shared emotional and

narrative struggle: to reclaim voice, resist injustice, and assert the right to be seen, heard, and believed.

The findings of the emotional expressions partially align with theories of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) and social recognition (Honneth, 1995), yet reveal important untheorized nuances, i.e. positive sentiments despite having endured social disdain, such as empathy, pride, relief and courage. This suggests that while negative emotions like anger, fear, and shame often dominate narratives shaped by misrecognition and epistemic injustice, survivors also express positive emotions that reflect the reclaiming of agency and solidarity. Such expressions may be understood within the unique context of the #MeToo movement, which is not only a space for disclosure but also a collective protest against injustice, offering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. The movement may therefore enable emotional expressions that are both personal and political—blending pain with empowerment. This context likely contributes to the emergence of seemingly paradoxical emotions such as pride in speaking out, or relief in being heard, even when full recognition or justice has not been achieved. This raises further questions about the specificity of these emotional expressions to the #MeToo context. It would be valuable for future research to explore whether these emotional patterns are unique to collective, activist-driven contexts, or if they also appear in individual or institutional settings where survivors recount similar experiences without the backing of a broader movement.

This study has provided important insights into how emotions are expressed in narratives of sexual assault in relation to epistemic injustice and social misrecognition, as well as how these emotional expressions differ between Sweden and the U.S. within the framework of the #MeToo movement. One of the study's strengths lies in its integration of theoretical perspectives on recognition and epistemic injustice with a concrete emotional analysis of real-life testimonies. This has enabled a more nuanced understanding of how emotions such as anger, shame, and fear, but also pride, empathy, and relief, function as both personal and political expressions. The comparative approach was significant, since it revealed how cultural and institutional contexts shape which emotions are given space, how they are articulated, and how they are interpreted. By comparing Swedish and U.S. testimonies, it became clear how national differences in social support, gender policy, and credibility shape the structure and emotional content of these narratives. It also became evident that #MeToo is

not only a platform for disclosure but also for a collective protest that can enable empowering emotions, even in the face of misrecognition and injustice. This knowledge is essential and can function as a tool when engaging with survivors, as it plays a crucial role in shaping appropriate responses in the aftermath of assault. At the same time, this study has its limitations. For instance, I think that an analysis of intersectional factors such as ethnicity, class, or age, which likely also influence emotional expression and experiences of (mis)recognition and (in)justice, would have been beneficial. I also think it would have been beneficial to include additional geographical contexts to explore how these patterns manifest in other parts of the world, especially in countries where #MeToo has not had as strong a presence as in the U.S. and Sweden. Further research could also explore how institutional and cultural frameworks influence not only what emotions are expressed, but also how survivors navigate public disclosure and seek recognition across different social settings.

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