Constructing Sexual Victimization: A Thematic Analysis of Reader Responses to A Literary Female-on-Male Rape Story on *Goodreads*

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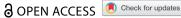Danai Tselenti [a], Daniel Cardoso [b,c], and Joana Carvalho [a,d]

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to provide a detailed understanding of unprompted audience responses to a literary story of female-on-male rape on *Goodreads*. Thematic analysis of 429 reviews revealed 5 key themes and 16 sub-themes, which evolved around appraising the social function of the book, evaluating its literary features, assessing the depiction of female-on-male rape especially in terms of its perceived realism, as well as around a variety of explicitly emotional and cognitive responses. The esthetic features of the story proved to be of particular importance for shaping reader engagement. Reflective elaborations on the female rapist were found to constitute a marginal response pattern. Findings identified the existence of an overarching cognitive schema that construes sexual victimization as feminized and is linked to a tripartite pattern of comprehending female on- male rape (female-focused, gender-inclusive, gender-neutral). The study highlights the persistence of gendered rape myths structured around an "ideal victim" – "ideal offender" paradigm, which, however, co-exist with alternative responses oriented toward de-gendering sexual victimization. These findings suggest the importance of addressing audience responses in future investigations of female sexual violence (hands-on and hands-off behaviors) and pursuing an interventional agenda of more inclusive conceptualizations of victimization.

Introduction

Male sexual victimization and particularly female-on male perpetrated sexual assault and rape remain far removed from the purview of collective attention. Nevertheless, as a body of research (Graham, 2006; Javaid, 2015; Stemple & Meyer, 2014; Walklate, 2004; Weiss, 2010) evidences, men experience attempted forced sex, actual forced sex and other sex-related incidents by male as well as by female perpetrators more frequently than is commonly believed. In particular, although the preponderance of rape victims are women, data on male sexual violence indicates that 46% of male victims has reported a female perpetrator (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Studies on self-reported acts of sexual aggression demonstrate that there are considerable rates of women who report some form of sexual aggression against men (e.g., Carvalho & Nobre, 2015).

One possible reason for the limited attention to the issue of female-on-male sexual aggression can be the "no penis, no problem" assumption (Kirsta, 1994; Levin, 2005), which underpins gender stereotypes about sexual behavior and renders women as less physically able to commit harmful acts (Struckman-Johnson, 1988). More specifically, the view that women are incapable of committing sexual violence and that men cannot be sexually victimized is prevalent in the ways sexual assault and rape are legally defined (Weare, 2018). In this regard, the legal definition of rape has long excluded the possibility of male sexual victimization. It is still problematic in many countries when it comes to forced penetration cases, to the extent that the act of rape is contingent upon the act of victim penetration. For instance, the definition of rape in England and Wales is still inscribed within the frame of penetration by a penis or another object (Lundrigan & Mueller-Johnson, 2013).

A number of studies have indicated that women's sexual aggression against men is taken less seriously than men's aggression against women (Carvalho & Brazão, 2020; Oswald & Russell, 2006; Smith et al., 1988). Additionally, several studies demonstrated that men may not categorize unwanted sexual experiences as sexual coercion but rather as instances of seduction (Byers & O'Sullivan, 1998; O'Sullivan et al., 1998). There is an ongoing myth that men cannot be physically forced to penetrate women to the extent that they are unable to function sexually unless they are aroused (Rumney & Morgan-Taylor, 1997, p. 333). Moreover, obtaining an erection denotes enjoyment or even consent within the confines of this myth (Fisher & Pina, 2013, p. 57). However, in recent years, there has been a growing academic interest in identifying the most frequent strategies employed by female sexual aggressors in forced-to-penetrate cases.

By focusing on the reported experiences of male victims or on self-reports by female perpetrators, forced-to-penetrate strategies have been found to range from verbal pressure or manipulation tactics (i.e., through the use of threats or

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blackmail by exploiting power/authority (e.g., age or hierarchical differences), by producing guilt feelings about refusing sex or not finding the perpetrator desirable), persuasive tactics (i.e., seductive tactics that include physical touch, flirting, compliments, etc. (Schatzel-Murphy et al., 2009) and to even coercive tactics (i.e., through the use of alcohol or intoxication or by taking advantage of a person's intoxication and less frequently through the use of physical force; Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003).

Despite the fact that the majority of research and theory on sexual violence focuses on female sexual victimization, a growing number of existing studies have approached adult male sexual victimization as a legitimate social problem and have demonstrated that it is equally perceived and conceptualized in relation to gender stereotypes and rape myths (e.g., Chapleau et al., 2008; Javaid, 2015, 2018). A wide range of rape myths regarding male sexual victimization have been identified, most of which revolve around social norms of hegemonic masculinity and include: a) the impossibility of male rape, b) the belief that male rape is the victim's fault since men can defend themselves c) the interconnection of male rape with homosexuality, d) the belief that male rape is less harmful and severe compared to the impact of female rape on victims (McMullen, 1990Davies et al., 2012).

The assumption that men cannot be raped or the conceptualization of male rape in respect to homosexuality is rooted in the social construction of heterosexual male sexuality as inherently active and aggressive urging men to be constantly sexually available and to take advantage of sexual opportunities (Clements-Schreiber & Rempel, 1995). Moreover, the ideas that male rape is either the victim's fault or less harmful are rooted in the perception that rape is tied to physical force which relates to the degree of physical and psychological traumatization.

As a large body of studies evidences, sexual minority men experience higher rates of sexual violence, particularly gay and bisexual men, who appear to be at higher risk compared to heterosexual men (e.g., Edwards et al., 2015; Hickson et al., 1994). Furthermore, some sexual minority men may not acknowledge that they are experiencing sexual violence from male partners because they draw on social scripts that primarily depict women as victims of male perpetrated sexual violence (Hequembourg et al., 2015).

Thus, there is strong evidence that the endorsement of myths surrounding male sexual violence contributes to the cultural silencing of male victims and thus to serious underreporting rates (Deming et al., 2013; Javaid, 2018).

Responses to Media and Literary Depictions of Rape

Historically, rape has been constructed as a women's issue not only within the realm of social and legal perceptions but also on the level of a vast variety of media representations (Higgins & Silver, 1991). Particularly, in the domain of literature, literary rape narratives that portray women as victims of sexual assault or rape have become overtly central in the last decades, constituting thereby the rape novel as a distinct literary genre, closely related to a double challenge: the reproduction of rape culture and the simultaneous creation of societal awareness

(Field, 2020). Thus, the literary representation of male-on-female rape seems to present a "feminist paradox" that oscillates between a need to make female sexual victimization more visible and a danger regarding the propagation of rape discourses that position readers as participants in the continuation of rape culture and the fetishization of acts of sexual violence (Projansky, 2001, p. 19).

Mirroring the cultural silence surrounding male rape, literary narratives recounting this experience are comparatively fewer and less frequent. Nevertheless, the scarcity of literary representations of male rape victims poses another type of challenge due to the incompatibility of sexual victimization with dominant notions of masculinity (Cohen, 2014, p. 14). As Higgins and Silver noted, "rape and rapeability are central to the very construction of gender identity and [...] our subjectivity and sense of ourselves as sexual beings are inextricably enmeshed in representations" (Higgins & Silver, 1991, p. 3).

Although an increasing body of academic research (Chapleau et al., 2008; Davies et al., 2012; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992) investigates social responses toward male rape by focusing on male rape myth endorsement through the use of hypothetical short-form narratives (rape vignettes), to date there is a limited line of research that focuses on naturally occurring audience responses toward female-on-male rape media representations. Levy and Adam's (2018) research is one of the few existing studies that focused on audience responses to a female-on-male rape representation with regard to online comments posted in response to *Guardian*'s journalistic coverage of Shia LaBeouf's sexual victimization case. The study revealed a range of opinions regarding female-on-male rape grounded in a three-fold valanced online discussion around positive, mixed, and negative comments toward the victim's rape claims. Furthermore, Cohen's (2020) study focused on audience responses to female-on-male rape scenes displayed on the television episodes of the *American Horror Story* series. By employing Foucauldian discourse analysis, the author investigated audience responses (mostly from self-identified feminist commenters) combined with a close text analysis and identified audience discourse patterns that appraised female-on-male rape narratives as pro-feminist reversals of gendered rape norms, and thus as forms of resistance to patriarchal structures. According to Foucault's paradigm, power relations are made up of a web of discourses and discursive practices which are not externally imposed but rather disseminated and reproduced throughout society. Discursive power formations function in perplexing ways, in that they regularly reproduce themselves even through their supposed repudiation. Under this light, Cohen's textual analysis demonstrated how the construction of female-on-male rape as pro-feminist is ingrained in discursive regularities that overwrite the female into the embodied masculine experience, resulting thereby in a superficial "role-reversal" that perpetuates patriarchal gender norms and rape myths.

Only a few studies focus on reader responses to representations of sexual violence. Koopman et al.'s (2012) most influential study used literary excerpts from male-on-female rape stories of varying stylistic forms (e.g., metaphors, contrasts, and repetitions versus non-esthetic modes) and different

degrees of detail regarding rape depiction (i.e., allusive versus explicit) to assess the effect of literary style on reader response. Results indicated that readers responded to the more literary (esthetic) and explicit accounts of rape with more empathy and tended to intellectualize and reflect more in order to cope with negative feelings.

Nevertheless, there remains a major literature gap concerning the investigation of reader responses to long-form literary narratives of female-on-male rape.

Fiction's Unique Affordances

One aspect of our culture that can significantly shape social responses toward such issues as female-on-male sexual aggression is literary fiction. The comprehensive investigation of reader responses to literary depictions of female-on-male rape can offer valuable insights into the different ways that rape myths and gender stereotypes are being reproduced or challenged.

As events are depicted through the use of written language, literary fiction has certain unique qualities that stem from its symbolic representational nature. As Oatley (1999, 2002) has proposed, fictional stories are simulations, much like computer programs, designed to run on human minds. In this sense, subjects reading in a "fiction mode" construct mental models of the narrative world by running the characters' actions and goals on their own imaginative planning processors. Although responses to visual images are evolutionarily hard-wired in our brain as a quicker process than responses to verbal stimuli alone (Nikolajeva, 2014, p. 95), the primary route through which the simulative experience during reading takes place lies within the individual's imagination. As a result, the imagined settings and characters suggested by fiction are likely to involve the same brain areas as those required when performing corresponding actions and perceptions. According to a line of research, the simulative experiences afforded by fictional narratives are possibly grounded in the existence of mirror neurons, which are activated both when an action is observed and when the observer performs the same action (Gallese & Goldman, 1998; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004).

It has also been extensively argued (Hakemulder, 2000; Oatley, 1999, 2002) that fiction affords a more controlled engagement with intents, feelings, and thoughts within the context of a safer environment, without the need to respond to actual challenges (Cupchik, 2002). Given that fictional engagement can be time-limited, readers can choose the degree of their involvement by allowing different varieties of esthetic distance and even manipulate the pace of their reading. In this sense, literary representations create a space in which mental experiments can be conducted and thus play an important role in shaping "the cognitive systems that make rape thinkable" (Higgins & Silver, 1991, p. 3).

Method

The primary goal of this research was to develop a detailed understanding of the range of reader responses to a literary narrative of female-on-male rape (*Any Man* by Amber Tamblyn) on the online book reviewing platform *Goodreads*.

Moreover, the study aimed as a secondary goal to focus on the cognitive dimensions of readers' responses and illuminate in which ways they reinforce or challenge hegemonic rape myths and gender identities.

In this sense, the analysis focused on the qualitative question: "What kinds of thoughts are triggered by a female-on-male rape story and how do readers reflect on the female-on-male rape script.?." Following Koopman and Hakemulder, "we use the term 'reflection' or 'self-reflection' to designate thoughts and insights on oneself, often in relation to others, and/or society (in the present context of course evoked by reading). While we are thus speaking of a mostly cognitive process of generating (new) thoughts, since the self is implicated, affect-loaded memories are likely to be involved" (2015, p. 2).

The story under review is a fictional literary narrative, in a way that covers all of the three basic discursive forms, namely narrativity (is structured around a sequence of events and goal-oriented characters), fictionality (is based on simulative processes of imagining what could have been or could happen) and literariness (contains esthetic, foregrounded, and unconventional stylistic features; Koopman, 2018).

In this study, we approached online book reviewing practices as naturalistic sources of raw data, which enabled studying social perceptions and particularly "reading culture 'in the wild'" (Nakamura, 2013, p. 241), so as to capture the responses of a large number of lay readers in a context outside of professional criticism. As Stinson and Discroll argued, "Online book reviews offer a rich resource to study vernacular reception because they are both a key domain of reception in contemporary book culture and situated within overlapping networks of discourse" (Stinson & Discroll, 2020, p. 4). By sharing their reading experiences online, reviewers provide written "digital traces" with the expectation that they will be read by other readers in order to help them in choosing and evaluating books.

Book reviews occupy in this sense an online space that provides access to a variety of personal reading experiences and forms a distinct genre of reading responses. Given that book reviews are written accounts with an audience orientation, they connect to audience response in a dual way, in that they simultaneously constitute user-generated content of/for audience response. Moreover, the study of online book reviews presents another significant advantage, as the intervention of the researcher in data collection is radically minimized and user-generated reviews can be seen as more likely to reflect the concerns of readers themselves (Swann & Allington, 2009, p. 249).

Goodreads Platform

Launched in January 2007 and since 2013 Amazon-owned, *Goodreads* is the world's largest book reviewing platform. As of July 2019, *Goodreads* features over 90 million members.[1] *Goodreads* was chosen as the most appropriate online platform as it affords features of an online reading community (e.g., the creation of virtual bookshelves and user-generated tags, the participation at discussion groups around specific book-

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[1]https://www.statista.com/statistics/252986/number-of-registered-members-on-goodreadscom/.

related issues, the rating books within a 5-star rating scale, as well as liking and commenting upon reviews).

Considering the above, the investigation of user-generated Goodreads reviews of a female-on-male literary narrative offers privileged access to the range of cognitive and reflective processes that govern readers' textual experiences, especially in regard to the negotiation of gendered rape myths. The current study aimed at expanding the current limited line of research on audience responses toward male victims of female-perpetrated rape by collecting data from new sources and producing novel theory, which is grounded in a variety of dimensions previously neglected.

Study Participants

Readers' Reviews

Data were collected and archived between May and June 2021. Even though the total number of displayed reviews at the time of data collection was higher (namely 802), the Goodreads algorithm which generally ranks reviews by the number of likes and comments they generate, provided access to a lower number, which amounted to approximately 500 reviews. Thus, we collected all accessible reviews as we wanted to obtain and analyze the greatest available amount of data. After removing reviews containing no text or star rating and duplicated reviews, we obtained a total of 429 valid reviews containing plain evaluative text. As the ways in which individual profile users present themselves on Goodreads are often incomplete (with regard to, e.g., nationality, reading preferences, age), we decided to segregate the sample according to the variables of gender and star rating. The sample consisted of 351 female reviewers (with an average value of 3.7 stars), 47 male reviewers (with an average value of 3.85 stars), 30 unidentified reviewers and 1 reviewer identified as non-binary. It included 17 1-star reviews, 38 2-star reviews, 92 3-star reviews, 172 4-star reviews, and 110 5-star reviews (with an average value of 3.7 stars) (see Table 1).

The relatively lower number of male reviewers is in line with the generally lower tendency among men to read fiction (Tepper, 2000).

Story Under Review: "Any Man"

Amber Tamblyn's first novel, "Any Man" was released in June 2018. It is written in an original experimental format (through the blending of narrative storytelling with poetry prose, fictional excerpts from e-mails, online chats, and social media content). The story is told from the perspective of six men of varying sociodemographic profiles who are trying to heal after being raped by a female serial rapist. The aggressor,

going by the name Maude, is on the loose and preys on men at bars, street corners, online or even in their homes, by leaving no clues behind except from a six-foot-long piece of white hair that remains unidentified.

The novel gives a first-person account of the male rape scenes in an aestheticized but at the same time explicit manner by containing detailed descriptions of the violent sexual acts, which were perpetrated through the use of force, intoxication, and manipulation and include extremely violent scenarios.

The novel narrates the multifarious responses and the effects of sexual trauma on the male survivors (which range from struggling with feelings of shame and humiliation, not being readily able to recount their experience, to developing self-harming or suicidal tendencies and even becoming perpetrators of trauma themselves).

Tamblyn delves into the various ways the victims are alienated from family and friends, as well as the disbelief they face by the police in the aftermath of their assault. Moreover, the story unravels prevailing rape myths and discourses of rape culture through narrating the ways that the media cover the experiences of the male victims by questioning whether they were actually raped, rendering them blameworthy and commoditizing their suffering.

The fictional character of Maude is developed as a shadowy figure, who subverts society's dominant notions of femininity. Rather than offering a familiar generic resolution, Tamblyn avoids turning the female rapist into an anti-hero and advancing a rape-revenge storyline, as Maude lacks any kind of motivation for her horrific acts and thus any redeeming features.

The novel was published within the same socio-cultural moment in which the #Metoo movement started to rise in the U.S.A., by making the experience of rape publicly visible and by increasingly legitimating support for survivors of sexual violence. By casting men as "rapeable" and positioning women as subjects of violence, Tamblyn disrupts societal assumptions about the invulnerability of men.

In this regard, Tamblyn's novel does not simply attempt to reverse gender roles but aims at de-gendering and expanding the conversation around sexual assault. As Tamblyn stressed, "this is not about reversing gender roles." It is about having "more difficult conversations about what sexual assault looks like. I mean, one of the greatest gripes about the #MeToo movement was that it was not inclusive" (Mahdawi, 2018).

Under this light, the text chosen has two significant advantages compared to other literary depictions of rape as it not only constitutes one of the few literary depictions of female-perpetrated male rape in existence but it also structurally and

Table 1. Distribution of star ratings by gender.

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars
Female	(13)/3.03%	(33)/7.7%	(76)/17.7%	(143)/33.3%	(86)/20.04%
Male	(2)/0.5%	(3)/0.7%	(10)/2.33%	(17)/3.96%	(15)/3.5%
Unidentified	(2)/0.5%	(2)/0.5%	(6)/1.39%	(12)/2.79%	(8)/1.86%
Non-Binary	0	0	0	0	(1)/0.2%

semantically foregrounds issues of rape culture, victim blaming, and rape myths.

Analysis

The study received approval by the Ethical Committee of the University of Porto (Comissão de Ética (CE) da Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto).

Following the basic principles that underpin the conduct of ethical internet research (Eynon et al., 2008), we removed all identifiers and we decided to slightly paraphrase quotations, so as to mitigate the risk of disclosing an individual's identity. In order to facilitate the systematic organization and coding of the dataset, the QSR NVivo 12 software program was used (Bazeley & Jackson, 2007). It allowed the comparison and visualization of codes/ sub-themes/ themes for the identification of potentially meaningful relationships within the data.

The focus for this study was the main textual body of reviews posted on the novel *Any Man*. In this sense, the coding and analysis did not include readers' comments, notes, text citations, or other highlights, which are part of the affordances provided by Goodreads. This allowed us to more evenly code and compare codings, since all of the text coded belongs to the same "unit of record" – a review, rather than a response to a review, or a review of a review, a text citation chosen as a highlight and so on, which taken together could be approached as "units of context." As Scherer-Bassani (2011) noted, units of context "relate to the way that different units of record are grouped together under a single discussion topic on the forum" (935). As the size of the reviews ranged from only 1 word to even 2804 words, we chose to use the paragraph as the coding unit.

Reflexive Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2014, 2019, 2020), was chosen as the most appropriate method of analysis to give an overall sense of what was happening in our data set. What distinguishes (reflexive) thematic analysis from other qualitative approaches is its flexibility, as it emphasizes an organic approach to coding and theme development and the active interpretative role of the researchers in these processes. We followed the six-step approach of Braun and Clarke (2020), which involves: 1) prolonged data familiarization; 2) engaging in initial data coding; 3) generating initial themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) refining and defining final themes; and 6) writing the final report.

We followed a predominantly inductive approach, which entailed engaging in a reflexive open-coded process and prioritizing data-based meanings. However, a certain degree of deductive analysis was also employed in order to ensure that the production of codes, sub-themes and themes was pertinent to the research questions. In this regard, the research questions for this study were addressed within a constructivist framework, where language is approached as producing and reproducing both meaning and experience (e.g., Burr, 1995) and not as a simply reflecting them. As Byrne noted, "By adopting a constructionist epistemology, the researcher acknowledges the importance of recurrence, but appreciates meaning and meaningfulness as the central criteria in the coding process" (2022, p. 1395).

Reviews were coded through an open iterative process in multiple rounds. A set of 68 initial codes was developed to capture the information reported across the whole data set. During the successive coding rounds, each review was given one or multiple codes in the qualitative coding software, ensuring at the same time that codes were not interchangeable or redundant. We created a coding scheme by organizing interrelated codes into different sub-themes and finally arranging groups of sub-themes into themes. The sub-themes and codes were interconnected but not mutually exclusive. In this sense, the main textual body of a single review could include concurrently codes from multiple sub-themes and codes, even if at times they were contradictory.

Thus, the main themes, subthemes, and codes presented in this study were developed after repeated meetings of the coding team, by thoroughly discussing, reviewing and revising the initial codes, and by paying careful attention to any discrepancies and inconsistencies, so as to ensure a shared understanding of the final set of themes. Following Braun and Clarke's guidelines for reflexive thematic analysis, we did not attempt to reach inter-coder reliability based on an "objective" and quantifiable account of coding agreement, mostly adopted in a large share of positivist-oriented studies by using Cohen's Kappa values. Rather, as Braun and Clarke specified, reflexive thematic analysis is about "the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594).

Thematic Analysis Findings

Our analysis of the Goodreads reviews on the novel Any Man revealed 5 key themes and 16 sub-themes (see Table 2). Below we provide representative verbatim quotations to illustrate each theme.

Book Appraisal Theme

The theme **Book Appraisal** encompasses responses which appraise the value of the book as a whole and evaluate its social function. Within its first sub-theme *Concept Appraisal*, reviewers evaluate the book concept on a general level. A notable number of reviewers point to the differentness and uniqueness of the novel concept by appraising it as "different" and emphasizing its originality (*Any man is not like any book I've ever read*, female 4 stars reviewer). Another big share of reviews appraises the concept as "significant," by highlighting its necessity and the importance of reading a book that deals with issues of rape culture and sexual victimization (*This is such an important book and I believe everyone needs to read it*, female 3 stars reviewer). A majority of reviewers characterizes the book as a "tough read" as it contains discomforting depictions of violent behaviors and psychological suffering that are difficult to handle (*It's written so poetically and elegantly, yet the content is raw, difficult, hard to handle*, female 5 stars reviewer).

Many reviews also appraise the book as "interesting," to the extent that the unconventional concept of a female aggressor raping men triggers their curiosity (*This is an interesting book.*

Table 2. Coding scheme overview.

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
1. Book Appraisal	1.1. Concept Appraisal	Different-Unique
		Interesting
		Satirical
		Significant
		Tough
		Weird-Complicated
	1.2. Social function of the book	Aligns with the #Metoo movement
		De-genders sexual violence
		Awareness raising potential of the book
		Exposes – criticizes social issues
		Exposes an unacknowledged social reality
		Exposes gendered stereotypes-rape myths
		Unsuccessful social commentary
2. Literary Evaluation	2.1. Genre	Concept and genre execution
		Poetic qualities
	2.2. Style-Format	Unfamiliarity
		Uniqueness of the book format
3. Depiction of female on male sexual violence	3.1. Focusing on female victimization	
	3.2. Rape scenes	Detail Level Evaluation
	3.3. Realism	Breach of realism
		Depiction of rape culture
		Depiction of trauma from real victims
		Perceived realism of female rapist
4. Emotional Responses	4.1. Empathic distress	Discomfort/Distress, Sadness, Fear, Empathy, Disgust, Anger, Shock
	4.2. Narrative absorption	Difficult
		Partial
		Complete
	4.3. Personal memories	
	4.4. Emotional states of positive and mixed valence	Impactful feelings, Being deeply moved, Enjoyment, Surprise, Hope, Curiosity
	4.5. Trigger warnings	
5. Cognitive Responses	5.1. After-reading processing	
	5.2. Comprehending the book	Gaining a new understanding toward rape issues
		Grappling with the meaning
	5.3. Lingering effect	
	5.4. Thought provoking	

It has a great concept and very good execution, female 4 stars reviewer), and a few reviewers appraised the book as "weird," pointing to unfamiliarity of the concept (*This is a bizarre book told from multiple different perspectives of men who get "date-raped" by a supposed female character*, female 3 stars reviewer). A minority of responses identified the book concept as a "satirical" reversion of rape scripts, that turns the tables of the common depictions of rape (*Tamblyn's satirical take on rape culture and how we treat those who've been raped is gripping without being too on the nose or in your face*, female 5 stars reviewer).

Within the second sub-theme, *Social Function of the Book*, we can identify responses which focus on the reasons the book matters and is worth reading. A big share of reviewers perceived the book as "exposing an unacknowledged and under-discussed social reality," namely male rape and in particular female-perpetrated male sexual victimization (*I appreciate the topic it covers, sexual assault committed toward men. I feel like we really don't get good and serious representation about it*, female 3 stars reviewer). Most reviewers within this code emphasized that the issue of male rape is still to date unaddressed and silenced, especially regarding its media coverage. Interestingly, most reviewers referred to the reality of male rape generally, without focusing on female-perpetrated male rape/sexual assault. Many reviews perceived the book as a "social critique" that foregrounds and criticizes a range of important issues that deal with the perpetuation of rape

culture, the effects of victim blaming on rape survivors and subsequent gender inequalities (*"Any Man" is about how society (our society) responds to violent sexual assault, romanticizes it, jokes about it, debates about it, without any true compassion for the survivors*, female 4 stars reviewer).

A notable share of responses focused on the "exposure of gendered stereotypes" (*What genius commentary on how the narrative of sexual assault changes when the victims are men*, female 5 stars reviewer) but also saw it as "as de-gendering sexual victimization" as it highlighted the fact that gendered articulations of sexual violence can extend beyond female victims and encompass all human beings (*It provided me with a change of mind about lots of concepts such as thinking of "people" instead of "women*," female 4 stars reviewer). Some responses call attention to the educational potential of the book *to raise general awareness* about contemporary rape culture issues (*I feel like it should be required reading for everyone in America and probably the whole world*, female 5 stars reviewer).

Other responses aligned with the basic premise of the book with the "#Metoo movement" by identifying the concept as a timely subject that is inscribed within and reflects the concerns of the current cultural moment (*This is a novel of the times, a weaponized offspring of the #MeToo movement and all the associated news we've all been exposed to over the past few years*, male 4 stars reviewer). A minority of responses perceived the book as an "unsuccessful social commentary" that fails to address adequately issues of rape (*I didn't find the powerful*

exploration of rape narrative that others found here, male 2 stars reviewer).

Literary Evaluation Theme

The **Literary Evaluation** theme aggregates responses that focus on the literary qualities of the novel, namely its formal, stylistic, and generic features. Within the first sub-theme *Style-format*, we can identify responses that evaluate the writing style and the format of the book. A vast majority of reviewers overwhelmingly emphasized the "unfamiliarity of the book format," by pointing (in a positive, mixed, or negative manner) to its unconventional and striking features (*The novel alternates between prose, poetry, journal entries, online messaging, and tweets. These differing formats help the reader immerse themselves in the story*, female 5 stars reviewer). Closely related to this evaluative perception, another portion referred to the "uniqueness of the format" by highlighting its originality through the use of an unusual mixture of textual forms (*Original format with prose, poetry, dialog, twitter, and text*, male 4 stars reviewer).

Within the second sub-theme *Genre*, we can find varying evaluations (positive, mixed, and negative) on the effectiveness of the *concept and genre* execution through an examination of the author's literary choices (*Wow. I feel like this book did exactly what it set out to do and was just so well done*, female 4 stars reviewer). Other responses stresse the *poetic qualities* of the novel, as it is perceived that the author relies on her background as a poet and incorporates poetic language into the text (*Tamblyn is a poet, and she lets the prose slip into poetry at will as the narrators discuss their experiences*, male 4 stars reviewer).

Depiction of Male Rape

The theme **Depiction of male rape** includes responses that assess the realism of the story and the characters, the violence of the depicted rape scenes and it also encompasses responses that interpret male rape through a focus on female sexual victimization. Interestingly, within the first sub-theme *Rape scenes*, we find few responses that call attention to the depiction of rape scenes by assessing them as either "detailed" (*The rapes that occur in this book are detailed, graphic, and they made me feel terrified*, female 4 stars reviewer), "non-detailed" ("*never overly graphic in the description of the assaults*," female 4 stars reviewer) or "excessively violent."

It is worth noting that the second sub-theme, *Focusing on female sexual victimization*, encompasses a considerable part of reviewers who focus on women when interpreting the book, by perceiving the female-on-male script as a vehicle for exposing the reality of female sexual victimization (*That is what I think the final chapter(s) want you to think about: that for women walking down the street, drinking at bars, going to parties, getting into ubers, that our attacker could literally be ANY MAN that we ever interact with. [.] This story illustrates that point even though it completely flips the lens through which we're looking in order to make that point*, female 4 stars reviewer).

Within the third sub-theme *Realism*, we can identify reviewers who assess that the book manages to offer a realistic depiction of contemporary rape culture by exposing the ways social media operate in perpetuating victim blaming.

Connected to that view, many responses evaluate the depiction of the psychological traumas and suffering as "realistic," to the extent that the book provides a deep understanding on the varying effects and the aftermath of rape (*It tells a realistic perception of sexual assault survivors and what they physically and emotionally go through*, female 5 stars reviewer).

Other responses focus on "breaches of realism," since they assess some parts of the story as unsuccessful depictions of the particularities of rape culture (*There were a few parts which seemed utterly bizarre. The weirdest scene happened when the media reached out to Maude, via OkCupid, to get a statement [. . .] it seems so unrealistic that I couldn't believe it*, male 5 stars reviewer).

Some responses focus on the "depiction of the female rapist." Here we can identify responses that perceive the rapist as an unrealistic and stereotypical figure (*It turns the rapist into an almost cosmic figure. A ghost. To juxtapose the over-the-top nature of this rapist with realistic stories of trauma and survival . . . well, it doesn't quite work*, female 2 stars reviewer), while other responses express the view that the predators' lack of motivation that is revealed in the end of the story is a well-thought and successful choice (*I really respect Tamblyn's decision for Maude's intention- it's not as simple as you may think. The fact that she didn't choose the easy way out, or provide a simplistic one-dimensional answer to make things easier to swallow makes this debut even more harsh & raw*, female 4 stars reviewer).

Emotional Response Theme

The **Emotional Response** theme encompasses responses that focused on reader engagement as well as a range of different narrative feelings elicited during the reading experience. The first sub-theme, *Narrative absorption*, incorporates responses that focus on the different degrees of reported reader engagement. Many reviewers report being "completely absorbed" during reading (*I couldn't put this book down-it's so different from anything I've ever read*, female 4 stars reviewer), while others express the "difficulty" they faced for being engaged either due to the distracting writing style or due to the discomforting material (*Unfortunately, the writing style and I didn't gel, and I ended up skimming a lot*, female 2 stars reviewer). Some readers report a "partial engagement," which oscillated from total engrossment in some parts of the novel to a detached reading in other parts (*I struggled through the first few pages, but once Tamblyn introduces Maude's second victim I couldn't put the book down*, female 4 stars reviewer).

The second sub-theme, *Empathic Distress*, encompasses a range of negative emotions elicited through reading the book which are mostly articulated through the use of adjectives, the most common being those associated with "Discomfort/Distress" ("*super disturbing*"), "Sadness" ("*heartbreaking*"), "Fear" ("*horrifying*"), "Anger" ("*made me so angry*"), "Disgust" ("*stomach churning*"), "Empathy" ("*the pain was real while reading this. I can sadly relate way too much*"), "Shock" ("*shocking*"). Additionally, this sub-theme includes "Trigger warnings" (reviewers who warn other

readers about troubling reading material) *(**TW: Please do not read this book or this review if the subjects of rape, violence and self-harm are detrimental to your wellbeing**, nonbinary 5 stars reviewer)*.

Within the sub-theme *Positively and Mixed Valenced Emotional States*, we can identify a range of feelings of positive or mixed valence, such as "Impactful feelings" ("*powerful*"), "Being deeply moved" ("*packed a terrific punch*"), "Enjoyment" ("*fascinating*"), "Interest" ("*interesting*"), "Surprise" ("*took me by surprise*"), "Curiosity" ("*I did find myself wanting to keep reading*"), "Hope" ("*hopeful*"). The codes "Impactful feelings" and "Being deeply moved" denote mixed emotional states, while the rest of the codes are associated with positive feelings. Within this sub-theme, we can also identify some responses that focus on the "personal memories" elicited through the reading process, mostly reported by victims of sexual assault or rape (*It was extremely raw and emotional and I found myself looking back at different experiences in my life which was hard at first but I got through it*, female 4 stars reviewer).

Cognitive Responses Theme

The **Cognitive Responses** theme included responses that focused on the reflective potential of the book, as well as varying reading stances in respect to the cognitive reappraisal and interpretation of the novel. The first sub-theme, *Thought Provoking*, appraises the book as able to elicit reflection and is shared by a vast majority of reviewers.

Within the second sub-theme *Comprehending the book*, we can identify two different content comprehension approaches. A proportion of reviewers reflected on the book content by stressing the "new understanding they have gained" toward rape issues through reading (*Male sexual assault survivors. 4 words I would usually dismiss. This book changed that for me*, female 4 stars reviewer). Another portion of responses "grapples with meaning comprehension" by expressing uncertainty for whether they have properly understood the book's message (*I don't entirely understand the message behind the gender swapping besides the very base level that rape is awful*, female 3 stars reviewer). The third sub-theme is *Processing after reading* and focuses on responses which revolve around the need of readers for deeper reflection. These reviews point to the significance of the content and the questions it elicits which call for cognitive digestion and assimilation after the reading process (*I'm going to have to think about this one for a while*, female 4 stars reviewer). This is, in turn, linked to the fourth sub-theme, *Lingering effect*, which includes responses emphasizing the long-term effect of the book as memorable and impactful (*It will stay with me for a long while*, female 3 stars reviewer).

In addition to the traditional Theme/Sub-theme/Code structure, we have identified three different evaluative valences (positive, mixed, and negative) articulated in responses coded at different themes. This allowed the team to more clearly identify when certain elements of the coding were being used in a positive, negative, or mixed sense, without needlessly expanding the coding scheme. Specifically, valenced responses were identified as relevant in the following codes of the Literary Evaluation Theme: *Concept and Genre Execution* and *Unfamiliarity*.

We used NVivo to better understand if there were any meaningful patterns of responses between different sub-groups (by gender or star rating) of our sample. Variations in the comparative frequencies of codes across genders were firstly reviewed, indicating a proportionally more pronounced presence of all codes among female reviewers (as more women than men write reviews (Bourrier & Thelwall, 2020)). We focused on codes that aggregated similar response frequencies among female and male reviewers, due to taking into consideration the disproportionate lower number of male reviewers. In this respect, the codes that displayed similar proportions of responses across women and men and thus higher response frequencies among male reviewers were drawn from all themes and were the following: "de-genders sexual violence," "awareness raising potential of the book," "poetic qualities," "empathy," "sadness," "personal memories," "grappling with the meaning." This finding may provide some tentative indication regarding the different impact of gender on the ways that readers reflect on a female-on-male rape story. However, a more robust comparative sample of men would be necessary in order to establish relationships between themes and gender in a valid way.

Of note – but expected – is the fact that more positive reviews tend to be particularly nuanced and diversified in terms of how many codes can be applied to them, as compared to more negative reviews, a conclusion reinforced by looking at the length of the reviews themselves. This means that people who had a lower opinion of the book were also less invested in exploring more in-depth the reasons behind their lower opinion. In fact, codings pertaining to a more reflexive stance (e.g., "after-reading processing," "empathic distress") were less common in negative reviews.

Discussion

This study contributes to the literature on male rape and female sexual aggression by: a) developing a detailed understanding of the reader response patterns elicited by a female on male literary narrative (*Any Man*) on the book-reviewing platform Goodreads; b) focusing on the cognitive dimensions of readers' responses in order to highlight the ways they reinforce or challenge gendered rape myths and gender identities.

Overall, our study identified a range of different patterns of response to the literary narrative *Any Man* and specifically indicated a variable set of cognitive responses with explicit/implicit indexes of reflection on female-on-male rape.

Our study contributes to the efforts made in prior literature regarding the investigation of the impact of a story's artifice on audience reactions. In particular, our findings highlight the significance of esthetic features on reader responses to literary texts. In this sense, the findings of this study are in line with a body of work that demonstrates how representations of sexual violence, particularly strong and complex depictions, are able to generate opposing audience responses, which can range from full absorption and engagement to high degrees of esthetic distance and complete detachment (e.g., Koopman et al., 2012).

According to a number of scholars (e.g., Miall & Kuiken, 1994), what makes a text "literary" is the extent of

foregrounding, namely the alienating narrative styles or unfamiliar stylistic devices, that have a defamiliarization effect and can render readers unsettled or prompt them to start attending to the text differently.

Specifically, less favorable reviews (1- and 2-star reviews) in our sample indicate that esthetic foregrounding features may produce confusion for some readers and lead them to feel distanced from the text to such an extent that they might become detached or turn away from it completely. This is in line with a literature stream which supports that striking stylistic features could make readers focus more on the form than on the content (Kneepkens & Zwaan, 1994), resulting in confusion (Walczyk et al., 2007) and the creation of an esthetic distance between the reader and the narrative world (cf., Cupchik, 2002).

Foregrounding and Reflection

Aesthetic Foregrounding and Explicit Cognitive Responses

Reviewers' positive or mixed appreciation of the literary format displayed an overall mild association with explicit cognitive responses, a finding that reflects the contradictory literature on the relationship between foregrounding and reflection, where some studies identify no effect of foregrounding on reflection (Halász, 1991; Kuijpers, 2014), while others suggest the possibility of a reinforcing impact of foregrounding on reflection (Miall & Kuiken, 1994; Van Peer et al., 2007). The most pronounced association between perceived foregrounding and articulations of reflection was exhibited in responses which suggested that the book was able to elicit thinking, without, however, specifying directly their content.

Reviewers who rated the work higher (4- and 5-stars reviews) were also the ones for whom the book had a deeper and more self-reflexive impact. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to establish any sort of formal causation, we argue that this points toward a connection between the aesthetic or artistic appreciation of a work and its (self-)reflective impact on readers. This finding supports Miall's and Kuiken's (2002) elaboration of "self-modifying feelings," conceptualized as an intrinsic phenomenon to literary reading that entails instances of (self-)reflection and subsequent subtle changes in one's self-concept and perspective.

Aesthetic Foregrounding and Indexes of Deeper Reflection

In both the *Realism* and the *Social Function of the Book* sub-themes, we found examples of deeper reflection. Even though the review excerpts coded within the codes belonging to these sub-themes might not present explicit mentions of cognitive engagement, they are nonetheless instances of indirect reflection and interpretation on the topic of, respectively, women's sexual violence against men, and the role that fiction plays in mediating such experiences to a wider audience.

We identified a close association between responses of positive valence toward the unfamiliar format of the novel and the perceived realism regarding the representation of contemporary rape culture and survivor trauma, but also with a bigger focus on female victimization. This means that positive experiences with the novel's format – even when that format is unexpected or unfamiliar – are connected with more perceived realism around rape culture.

However, rather than centering on the male survivor of rape, these reviews also (but not exclusively) adopt the lens of feminine victimhood to engage with that very same rape culture, thereby partially negating the gender-specific dimension of *Any Man*. According to Koopman (2018), thoughts do not need to be prompted by original text features, but appraising textual features as striking might trigger further reflection and elaboration on one's thoughts. As previously mentioned, foregrounding is able to promote defamiliarization, which subsequently leads to "refamiliarising" interpretive efforts, a process described as "[. . .] an intra and/or extra textual revision or re-evaluation in order to discern, delimit or develop the novel meanings suggested by the foregrounded passages" (Miall & Kuiken, 1994, p. 394).

In line with previous work, our study adds to the literature on reader responses to literary rape narratives, as it extends the discussion on the relationship between foregrounding and reflection, by providing a detailed understanding of the different ways readers interpret and re-familiarize the female-on-male rape script.

Three Patterns of Re-Familiarizing Female-Perpetrated Male Sexual Victimization

A closer inspection of code co-occurrences between the Book Appraisal theme and the Depiction of Male Rape theme has pointed to the existence of different patterns of framing female-on-male rape, which allowed us to identify three different re-familiarization interpretive processes regarding female-on-male rape, often used as frameworks that readers deploy to engage with, and understand, the story.

Reviews often presented themselves in a *female-centered*, a *gender-inclusive* and/or a *gender-neutral* way. This is to say, reviews would mention sexual violence as something that needs to always be understood from the perspective of *women*, as something that can happen to people of *all* genders, and as something that can be talked about without *gender-specific* markers for the people involved.

To exemplify, a group of reviewers connected the criticizing function of the book to female sexual victimization: "This novel proved to be a cutting commentary on society's present approach to female victims of sexual assault" (female 5 stars reviewer). Other reviewers perceived the book as criticizing social issues in a gender-inclusive way: "Using male victims in the novel creates a very powerful point which is that society's rape culture treats male and female victims differently" (female 4-star reviewer). Finally, a considerable share of reviewers appraised the book as highlighting and criticizing major social issues regarding rape culture, victim blaming, survivor trauma and sexual assault or exposing rape myths in a gender-neutral way, without using any specific gender references. A characteristic example is the following: "The author gives a distinct voice and personality to all of the victims in the book" (female, 5 stars reviewer).

Such a diversity of approaches demonstrates the importance of looking at the perceived realism of *Any Man*. Generally, perceived realism refers to the audience's perception regarding the degree to which a narrative representation reflects reality

and it is considered as a crucial component for narrative persuasion and engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Thus, we have identified three different modes of perceiving the realism of *Any Man*, which match the aforementioned three specific ways of folding gender considerations into the realism evaluation of the story.

For the first group of readers (which deploy a *female-centered framing*), female-on-male rape is treated as a metaphor for male-on-female rape. The female-on-male rape script is evaluated on the basis of its effectiveness as a literary defamiliarizing device to expose real-world injustices that concern female victims and not on its own merits. Under this interpretative scheme, *Any Man* is ultimately *not* about men victims of sexual violence done by women, but about women's status as sexual victims of men.

These readers approach the representation of rape culture as real only to the extent that it can be said that it accurately depicts the female experience, which is perceived as constituting the single reality of rape. In this sense, recipients' operationalization of the narrative is radically decoupled from the plot primings of female-on-male rape, something that inhibits the generalization of the story's causal frame (Strange & Leung, 1999). In this sense, it is possible that this group of reviewers does not end up with a different image of rape after reading the story.

The second group of readers takes a more *gender-inclusive framing*, verifiable through the presence of reviews which assess the book as accurately depicting contemporary rape culture and sexual trauma in specifically masculine and feminine forms. For this group, the female-on-male rape script was perceived as atypical but as more or less plausible and thus generalizable, and distinct, but not separated from, sexual violence of men against women.

A sizable body of literature has indicated that a story is more likely to facilitate the generation of causal generalizations, namely judgments of a problem's causes and cures in society, when it resonates with reminders of related experiences in a reader's personal or mediated past (Larsen & Laszlo, 1990; Larsen & Seilman, 1988; Read, 1983; Strange & Leung, 1999; Wharton et al., 1996). In this sense, to the extent that the fictional depiction of male sexual victimization resonates with recollections of real-world instances of female sexual victimization, this group of readers mobilizes those recollections as a way to re-familiarize themselves with the story.

According to the theory of story-specific prototype priming effects, a narrative that foregrounds a specific social role (in this case the male sexual victim) enables recipients to access and draw upon existing group-level beliefs about this role (Strand & Leung, 1999). However, evidence suggests that recipients' operationalization of a narrative's priming frame may rely more on the mobilization of a personal or media-based repertoire of reminders. Empirical evidence also indicates that the generation of causal generalizations from a case can be independent from the perceived typicality of that case (Strand & Leung, 1999). This explains why reviewers in this group are more apt to attribute victim-blaming culture in a gender-inclusive way as a significant cause for sexual trauma for both women and men on the basis of female-on-male rape narrative cases assessed as atypical.

However, it should be noted that hierarchies of sexual victimization (Gracia, 2018) can still be observed within this group. Some of the reviews lean more heavily on female-centered perspectives, even as they remain gender-inclusive, whereas others are more evenly balanced in their gendered references to both men and women. This supports Strange and Leung's argument that narratives that focus on highlighting concrete instances of a social problem may enhance reflection on its situational causes by bypassing stereotypes and biases on the basis of story-congruent remindings (1999, pp. 445–6).

The third group resorts to deploying *gender-neutral* framings, especially when focusing their reviews on the victim's position and experiences. The repeated use of phrases like "turning the tables," "flipping the script" by this group of reviewers, and the complete silencing of women as possible sexual perpetrators in close association with the identified gender neutralization of the victim position suggests that reviewers might not recognize that both men and women can be rape victims as well as perpetrators, but are more likely to implicitly frame sexual victimization on the basis of a female-centered cognitive schema. However, it remains to be tested whether such neutral forms increase or decrease men's visibility and to what extent they might evoke female-centered mental representations to the audiences reading such reviews.

In line with previous work, our findings highlight the significance of gender bias in language use in respect to victimology. As Cohen (2014) vehemently noted, while a gender-neutral framing of sexual violence may at a first reading indicate a move toward inclusivity, on a closer inspection it is revealed to be imbued with gendered assumptions that inscribe victimization as intrinsically female. In this sense, according to Cohen, media, academic, and legal constructions of "the male victim" and "the female offender" in the context of female-on-male sexual violence are structured around the components of passivity, vulnerability, and innocence. These rationales contribute to an all-pervasive discursive regularity that feminizes sexual violence and can "be said to comprise a single archive that runs along several corresponding registers" (2014, p. 6).

Under this light, our findings advance the discussion on the exclusionary politics and problematic frames mobilized by the #MeToo movement and subsequently in #MeToo-inspired debates within the contemporary public sphere. #MeToo has raised significant awareness on issues of gender, power, and sexual violence by publicly confronting victim-blaming discourses and rape-supportive culture. However, consistent with previous work, our findings suggest that the movement has foregrounded specific female-centered frames of victimization by focusing predominantly on women of certain roles and social categories (Gill & Orgad, 2018) or by advancing framing discourses which end up in defining sexual violence in narrow and rigid ways (Abrams, 2018).

These discourses may result in essentializing victims and offenders and obscuring the experiences of male victims as well as of LGBTQ+ victims or people of color. Thus, they risk reinforcing and feeding into the exact stigmas and gendered stereotypes they fight by downplaying an understanding of sexual violence within an intersectional context.

A Pattern of Neglect: The Female Rapist

Since the story privileges the point of view of the male survivors, the novel does not provide adequate access to the character of the female rapist throughout the narrative, until the end, where the female rapist reveals that there were no motives behind her horrific acts. The authorial choice of providing little information on the female rapist aligns with a common literary technique to favor a negative moral response and block empathy toward a character. However, as literary reading entails the imaginative co-creation of meaning from the reader's part, textual gaps, omissions, or background features open up space for readers' creative interpretation of the work (Iser, 1988).

Although explicit mentions to the serial female rapist are abundant throughout the whole dataset, they are overwhelmingly descriptive of the character. Interestingly, implicit mentions of the female character are subsumed in assessments and evaluations of the story's ending, as either a successful or an unsuccessful closure.

This echoes the tendency of marginalizing the female rapist, in line with the literature, which indicates that female sexual offending is culturally incomprehensible due to the predominant social assumption about the peaceful and nurturing nature of women. In this regard, female sexual offenders are either demonized as "doubly deviating" criminal and gender norms (Lloyd, 1995) or their actions are downplayed, trivialized, and consequently go unnamed (Healicon, 2016, p. 71). Additionally, the few responses that approached the female rapist in pathologizing terms support the literature that evidences that representations of female offenders are often anchored in stereotypical categories, such as "mythical monsters," "mad" or "bad" women (Jewkes, 2015; Jones & Wardle, 2008). Moreover, the few responses that assessed the rapist through a prism of "inherent human evil" support the literature, which indicates that the downplaying of female offending is generally accompanied by an individualization tendency that provides over-simplistic or deterministic explanations for the deviant actions as being inherently evil or grounded in psychopathology (Gilbert, 2002; Naylor, 2001).

However, and crucial to the contribution of the present research to the overall literature on female-on-male sexual violence, this study adds new findings to existing frameworks on male sexual victimization and female sexual offending and subsequently to victimology studies (e.g., Christie, 2018; Cohen, 2014). While an explicit or implicit female-centered framing of male sexual victimization dominated our sample and female sexual offending was readily invisibilised, we also identified the existence of other more inclusive framings that drew on novel insights derived from the book and helped readers solidify shifts in consciousness regarding male rape and incite questions about the female offender. These frames point to the acknowledgment that both men and women can be victims and perpetrators of sexual violence and thus to the possibility of more inclusive approaches to victimology that extend beyond the "ideal victim"/ "ideal offender" paradigm (Christie, 2018).

Limitations of the Study

This study was not without its limitations. The sample size and the lack of demographic data for identifying the specific socio-cultural characteristics of reviewers pose some limitations regarding the ability to generalize findings. Although we had some general indications of the basic demographic profile of Goodreads reviewers[2] and there is evidence that most of the reviewers in our dataset had an Anglo-American national background, we are unable to say how representative they were of the American or British public, or even a worldwide audience. This limitation is further enhanced by the disproportionate number of female to male reviewers. However, this is a common challenge with digital traces or social media data (Golder & Macy, 2014).

Although researcher influence was radically reduced, one potential limitation of the study is linked to the bias of social desirability. As practices of reading convey symbolic value and significance, readers are often subjected to what Bourdieu defined as the "legitimacy effect" (Reeser & Spalding, 2002), where they adjust their responses in a manner they deem more socially acceptable and desirable, an effect that might be more pronounced within a public context, where reviewers orient themselves toward an audience focus.

Another limitation concerns the chosen text, which might not have been sufficiently representative of the rape novel genre due to its particular story affordances that might encourage specific types of responses, centered around the critique of rape culture, victim blaming, and rape myths. While female-on-male rape literary narratives are still scarce and the specific structural and semantic foregrounding features of the text under study exhibit some significant advantages compared to other literary rape stories, to further understand the patterns of readers' responses toward female-on-male rape, we must investigate and compare responses on other types of literary rape stories.

Future Research and Practice Implications

Although our research focused on responses to a fictional literary story, there is reasonable ground to suggest that foregrounding in all of its dimensions can produce significant response effects across different types of narrative media (Hakemulder, 2007), which could be both of a general or of a unique nature according to the specific affordances of different narrative forms. In this sense, there is a need to investigate other types of media (television, film, video games, podcast, vignettes etc.) exhibiting different degrees of narrativity, fictionality and literariness (Koopman, 2018), which foreground different female-on-male sexual coercion stories. Given that cultural differences can also influence the ways that audiences respond to female-on-male stories, our findings point to a need

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[2]In terms of gender, approximately 76% of *Goodreads* users are women. In terms of education level, 47% of Goodreads users have a college degree, and 26% a graduate school diploma. In terms of ethnic background, 79% of *Goodreads* users are White, 9% Hispanic, 7% African American, 4% Asian, and 1% other. In terms of age, an estimated 88% of users are under age 54 (Bourrier & Thelwall, 2020).

for conducting more cross-cultural-oriented studies of female-on-male rape responses.

Our findings also highlighted a need for researching sexual violence stories that foreground both physical and psychological (i.e., hands-on and hands-off) coercion tactics, so as to investigate responses to a broader range of male sexual victimization.

As a cumulative body of work is consistently showing, sexual violence is not equally experienced across the spectrum of gender and sexual identity. Sexual minority individuals (i.e., LGBTQ+) experience higher rates of sexual violence in comparison to heterosexual individuals, with bisexual people reporting greater rates than gay/lesbian people (especially bisexual women; e.g., Chen et al., 2020). Additional research indicates that transgender individuals experience greater vulnerability for rape and sexual assault than cisgender LGB individuals (e.g., Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016). Furthermore, college-aged sexual minorities are considerably more likely to experience sexual violence when compared to heterosexual students (e.g., Snyder et al., 2018).

In response to the elevated risks of sexual violence across populations and from a practical perspective, findings from this study support the idea that the incorporation of literary fiction into sexual violence prevention programs/interventions at the high school and college level can help students gain an understanding of the complexities of social issues concerning sexual violence through the reading of fiction.

A large body of work suggests that fiction can be used as a pedagogical tool for students to reflect on difficult and conflicting social issues and develop critical thinking (e.g., Jarvis, 2020). Under this light, engaging students through the use of literature in open discussions that include tailored content addressing the specific needs of male victims and LGBTQ+ sexual minorities, can counter their implicit rape myths and even enable them to recognize themselves as potential victims or offenders.

We argue, thus, that our findings have useful implications for the development of a framework for ethical reading that can promote a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of sexual violence. The framework can target at imaginatively opening the cognitive and affective frames of understandings that surround sexual offending and victimization by not only affirming (in female-focused or gender-neutral ways) that just every woman but every*one* could be a victim and/or an offender.

Conclusions

The present study is the first to investigate readers' responses to a literary narrative of female-on-male rape. It contributes to the scarce body of literature surrounding audience responses to female-on-male rape by synthesizing insights from the fields of feminist sexual criminological studies, cognitive psychology, cognitive literary studies, and audience/reader response studies.

The study has shown how the reception of a female-on-male sexual violence literary narrative that foregrounds a critique of rape culture and gendered rape myths as its preferred reading produces varying patterns of response, which predominantly revolve around feminizing male sexual victimization and downplaying female sexual offending behavior.

Findings suggest that the feminization of sexual victimization can be regarded as an overall operating cognitive schema, which can be seen as comprised of three different response patterns: a female-centered pattern which acknowledges women as the only real and plausible victims of rape, a gender-inclusive and a gender neutral pattern, which in different manners result in implicitly priming and prioritizing female sexual victimization, either by creating a hierarchy of "ideal" victims- "ideal" offenders or by treating sexual victimization in isolation from gender-specific references. Interestingly, our study indicates that gender-neutrality does not necessarily align with gender-inclusive interpretive processes.

Findings also highlight alternative gender-inclusive or de-gendering response patterns that subvert the predominant paradigm of "ideal victim-ideal offender" (Christie, 2018) and point to discursive possibilities of more inclusive conceptualizations of victimization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by Danai Tselenti and Daniel Cardoso. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Danai Tselenti and Daniel Cardoso, and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Ethics Approval

This study has received ethical approval from the HEI-Lab research center at University of Porto.

Data Availability

Due to the sensitive nature of the data, and the fact that it was collected from a naturalist setting, and considering the latest ethical guidelines for naturalistic web research, we have not made the data publicly available as a dataset. However, the data are freely available on the platform from where it was extracted, and the dataset in specific can be requested from the corresponding author with a justification for the need to access the dataset.

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