



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Power Relations, Institutional Dysfunction, and the Silencing of Child Sexual Violence Survivors: A Study of Aurelie Moeremans' Broken Strings

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Abstract

Aurelie Moeremans' memoir *Broken Strings* (2025) reveals emotional manipulation, sexual abuse, and psychological violence experienced by a 15-year-old girl, while also exposing the politics of non-alignment practiced by institutions surrounding the survivor. This study aimed to analyze how power relations and institutional dysfunction isolate survivors from the perspective of structural functionalism. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method using narrative analysis of memoirs as primary data, supported by secondary sources, such as news reports, institutional documents, and social media discourse. The findings show that the memoir exposes failures within institutional functions, including weak protection systems, victim blaming, and delayed public responses, which reinforce the silencing of survivors. Simultaneously, *Broken Strings* function as a form of survivor advocacy that pressures institutions to shift from silence to public accountability. This study contributes to gender and child studies in Indonesia by demonstrating how survivor narratives can challenge structural failures and encourage broader social awareness of child abuse and grooming.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Child Grooming, Memoir, Structural Functionalism, Survivor Advocacy

Abstrak

Memoar *Broken Strings* (2025) karya Aurelie Moeremans mengungkapkan manipulasi emosional, kekerasan seksual, dan kekerasan psikologis yang dialami seorang remaja perempuan berusia 15 tahun, sekaligus memperlihatkan politik ketidakberpihakan yang dilakukan institusi di sekitar korban. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana relasi kuasa dan disfungsi institusional mengisolasi penyintas melalui perspektif struktural fungsionalisme. Penelitian menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif dengan analisis naratif terhadap memoir sebagai data utama, didukung berita, dokumen institusi, dan diskursus media sosial sebagai data sekunder. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa memoar tersebut mengungkapkan kegagalan fungsi institusi, seperti lemahnya sistem perlindungan, praktik menyalahkan korban, dan lambatnya respons publik yang memperkuat pembungkaman korban. Di sisi lain, *Broken Strings* berfungsi sebagai bentuk advokasi penyintas yang mendorong institusi bergeser dari sikap diam menuju akuntabilitas publik. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian gender dan anak di Indonesia dengan menunjukkan bahwa narasi penyintas dapat menjadi sarana untuk menantang kegagalan struktural dan meningkatkan kesadaran sosial mengenai kekerasan terhadap anak serta child grooming.

Kata kunci: Kekerasan Anak, Child Grooming, Memoir, Struktural Fungsionalisme, Advokasi Penyintas

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Introduction

Violence against children and women can be understood not only as a personal experience but also as a social issue related to power dynamics, failure of institutional protection, and silencing of survivors' voices. In academic studies, survivors' memoirs are viewed as a form of survivor narrative capable of revealing how trauma, violence, and social responses interact in their lives. *Broken Strings*, a memoir written by Aurelie Moeremans, is an important text to examine because it presents experiences of violence, emotional manipulation, and delayed protection of minors from the survivor's perspective. This memoir documents personal suffering and reveals how child abuse can occur within networks of gender power dynamics, media bias, and institutions that do not immediately side with the victim. Research on sexual violence indicates that survivors often face social stigma, victim blaming, and a lack of trust in both their social circles and institutions when they attempt to speak out (Ubino & Astuti, 2025).

In fact, the authorities responsible for providing protection were the slowest to come to the aid of Aurelie, who was a minor at the time. Aurelie wrote a memoir titled "*Broken Strings*," based on her experiences of emotional manipulation, coercion, bullying, sexual abuse, and psychological violence perpetrated by a survivor against a 15-year-old girl. The book focuses on Aurelie's boyfriend at the time, Bobby (a pseudonym used in the book), and an adult man (Moeremans, 2025). In 2025, as reported by ANTARA, the Vice Chair of the National Commission on Violence Against Women stated that there were 22,848 cases of sexual violence against women, 15,727 cases of psychological violence, 14,126 cases of physical violence, and 5,942 cases of economic violence (Damarjati, 2026). It was also reported at the launch of the National Commission on Violence Against Women's (Komnas Perempuan) 2025 Annual Report (CATAHU) in the lead-up to International Women's Day that Komnas Perempuan recorded 376,529 cases of gender-based violence against women, a 14.7 percent increase compared to the previous year.

When broken down by sphere, the private sphere had the highest number of cases at 337,961, followed by the public sphere with 17,252, and the state sphere with 2,707. Although many reports have been published, numerous cases remain unreported. This is due to strong social stigma against victims, fear of being blamed, economic dependence or power dynamics with the perpetrator, and limited access to safe reporting services (Tirto ID, 2026). Annual figures on sexual violence in Indonesia demonstrate that there are still many victims and perpetrators in cases that have the most profound impact on women's lives.

From a structural functionalist perspective, society is understood as a social system composed of various institutions with specific functions that

maintain order and protect its members. Families, law enforcement, media, and social norms are supposed to function as part of a social mechanism capable of preventing violence and protecting victims. This perspective is used in this study to examine how these institutions demonstrate dysfunction when confronted with Aurelie's experience. In *Broken Strings*, the victim's account is not immediately believed, reports are not promptly followed, and the perpetrator's narrative is more readily accepted than the survivor's experience. These conditions reveal "institutional betrayal," the failure of institutions to provide a safe and victim-centered response to survivors of sexual violence.

A study of grooming, institutional betrayal, victim blaming, and survivor narratives is essential for interpreting the memoir's *Broken Strings*. Recent research explains that grooming is a form of emotional manipulation and a power dynamic used by perpetrators to create dependency on victims, making them easier to control. Furthermore, survivors of sexual violence often experience victim blaming, which is the tendency of society to question the victim's actions, clothing, or decisions rather than the perpetrator's behavior (Ubino & Astuti, 2025). Other research indicates that victims who attempt to speak out frequently face social silencing, intimidation, stigma, and distrust from those around them, leading them to remain silent or fear reporting abuse (Simeon, 2022). In this context, Aurelie's memoir can be understood as a form of survivor narrative that not only represents the victim's traumatic experience but also serves as a critique of societal and institutional failures to protect survivors of child and sexual violence.

Aurelie's memoir has garnered public attention for showcasing the courage of a sexual violence survivor in speaking out about her traumatic experiences. Through *Broken Strings*, Aurelie shares her personal experiences and illustrates how power dynamics, emotional manipulation, and slow institutional responses can exacerbate a victim's situation. The spread of this memoir through social media has spurred public discussion on the injustices faced by victims, and raised questions about the role of institutions that are supposed to provide protection. Research on survivor narratives indicates that these stories can serve as a form of resistance against social silencing and stigma surrounding victims of sexual violence. However, research using survivors' memoirs as primary data to examine institutional bias and dysfunction in social institutions remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of power relations and institutional failure in the memoir *Broken Strings* through the lens of structural functionalism as a novel research approach.

Literature Review

Power Dynamics in Child Abuse

Power relations in child abuse are understood as unequal relationships between the perpetrator and victim, in which the perpetrator exploits the victim's age, authority, emotional closeness, or social status to control them. Foucault explains that power operates through everyday relationships and shapes the way individuals think and act; thus, victims often feel that they have no room to refuse or resist. This concept is widely used in studies of gender-based sexual violence to explain how emotional manipulation, threats, and psychological dependence keep victims trapped in a cycle of violence. Research on child sexual abuse also shows that perpetrators often establish relationships that appear safe and caring before sexually exploiting the child (Wyles et al., 2025).

Recent studies on child abuse have identified grooming as a key element in power dynamics. Grooming is understood as a gradual, manipulative process designed to gain the victim's trust, foster emotional dependence, and ultimately control the victim, making it difficult for them to report abuse (Harefa & Dewanto, 2026). In research on sexual violence in sports settings, the relationship between coaches and athletes illustrates how perpetrators exploit positions of authority, trust, and personal closeness to exert control over their victims (Gillard et al., 2022). A similar situation also arises in the memoir *Broken Strings*, in which Bobby builds an emotional bond with 15-year-old Aurelie and then uses verbal manipulation and psychological pressure to maintain his dominance over her.

In addition to interpersonal relationships, recent research highlights "institutional betrayal" as the failure of institutions to support survivors of sexual violence. Institutional betrayal occurs when institutions that are supposed to protect survivors fail to provide support, dismiss survivors' reports, or create an environment that makes survivors afraid of seeking help. Clark et al. (2024) showed that poor institutional responses can exacerbate trauma and make survivors reluctant to use support services. Dufour (2024) also explains that institutional betrayal manifests through policies, organizational culture, and social responses that blame the victim and protect the perpetrator. This study is relevant to Aurelie's experience because her memoir illustrates how social media and community pressure often focus more on questioning the victim than on understanding her traumatic experience.

Research on victim blaming shows that survivors of sexual violence are often held partly responsible for the violence they experience due to their behavior. This attitude is influenced by patriarchal culture, rape myths, social media, and stigma against survivors of sexual violence. A literature review by Wijayanti and Suarya (2023) explains that victim blaming makes survivors

afraid of reporting incidents because they fear humiliation and stigma from society. Jacobus et al. (2025) also found that victim blaming remains prevalent among college students and is influenced by gender and patriarchal culture. Ubino and Astuti (2025) add that social media often reinforces narratives that blame victims through public comments and the spread of gender stereotypes. In *Broken Strings*, Aurelie's experience illustrates how victims face not only violence from perpetrators but also social pressure that questions their decisions, behaviors, and responses to the abusive relationships they endure.

Research on survivor narratives has emerged to understand survivors' experiences through their personal stories. Delker et al. (2020) showed that the stories of survivors of sexual violence are often considered harder for the public to accept than those of other traumas because of the social stigma surrounding victims of sexual violence. Simeon (2022) explained that many survivors experience silencing as a result of intimidation, victim blaming, and patriarchal dominance, which makes victims afraid to speak openly. Survivor narratives are not merely forms of testimony but also a way for victims to reclaim their voices and identities after being silenced for so long. The memoir *Broken Strings* can be understood as a survivor narrative because Aurelie writes about her traumatic experiences in a personal way to illustrate the impact of the power dynamics, emotional manipulation, and social pressure experienced by victims of violence since adolescence.

The theory of Structural Functionalism

The theory of structural functionalism, developed by Parsons (1951) and Merton (1968), views society as a social system consisting of interrelated structures—such as the family, state, religious institutions, and media—whose function is to maintain stability and balance through the AGIL model (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, Latency). This theory explains that any deviation, such as child abuse, should be controlled by mechanisms of norms, sanctions, and institutions so that the system continues to function harmoniously (Turama, 2020). In the Indonesian context, structural functionalism is relevant for analyzing how state and religious institutions should protect victims to maintain social stability, as the Aurelie case demonstrates the system's failure to respond to violence against minors.

A commonly used method is the qualitative approach with institutional case studies, as conducted by Turama (2020) to examine failures in child protection in Indonesia. Applying theory to the memoir *Broken Strings* reveals tangible dysfunction within the AGIL framework, where the state failed to adapt due to slow official responses, achieve its protection goals, and integrate safety standards. The focus of this study remains too abstract and fails to sufficiently incorporate survivors' narrative perspectives.

Non-Alignment Policy with Survivors

The term “political non-alignment” as it relates to survivors, is used in this study to describe the stance of state agencies, the media, religious institutions, and society, which neither directly supports the perpetrators nor provides safe support to victims of sexual violence. This stance manifests through inaction, slow responses, skepticism toward victims’ testimonies, and the dissemination of narratives that reinforce social stigma against survivors of sexual violence. The politics of non-alignment differs from victim blaming, which focuses more on directly blaming the victim. It also differs from institutional betrayal because it not only highlights the failures of formal institutions but also involves a social culture that leaves victims isolated and without adequate support (Clark et al., 2024). Such failures can manifest through the social and cultural systems of institutions that allow sexual violence to continue unchecked without providing responsive protection for victims (Dufour, 2024).

Research on victim blaming shows that victims of sexual violence are often viewed as the cause of violence due to their clothing, behavior, or activities in public spaces. Patriarchal culture, media framing, and rape myths reinforce the tendency to blame victims in cases of sexual violence (Wijayanti & Suarya, 2023). Such social perceptions make victims afraid to speak out for fear of receiving negative judgments from those around them. Research by Jacobus et al. (2025) also shows that college students still exhibit a tendency toward victim blaming, influenced by gender perceptions and social culture in their environment. Additionally, social media contributes to the spread of comments that demean victims and exacerbates the psychological trauma of survivors (Ubino & Astuti, 2025).

In addition to experiencing victim blaming, survivors of sexual violence often face a culture of silence and secondary victimization. Survivors who try to speak out still face intimidation, ridicule, threats, and power dynamics, leading many victims to remain silent because they feel that they lack social support (Simeon, 2022). Secondary victimization also frequently occurs during legal proceedings when law enforcement officials lack a victim-centered perspective in handling sexual violence cases (Syahbur et al., 2024). This means that victims face not only trauma resulting from sexual violence but also social and institutional pressures that exacerbate their psychological condition. Weak legal protection against sexual violence against children also indicates that institutional gaps persist in providing safe protection for victims (Harefa & Dewanto, 2026).

Previous studies have primarily addressed victim blaming, psychological trauma, and/or institutional responses through surveys, media experiments, and legal research. Research on survivors’ narratives rarely uses memoirs as primary data to analyze the power dynamics and dysfunction of social institutions. Survivor narratives can play a crucial role in the process

of understanding trauma, giving a voice to survivors, and fostering self-recovery among victims of sexual violence (Gillard et al., 2022). Society also tends to find it more difficult to accept stories of sexual violence than other forms of trauma because of the persistent cultural stigma surrounding survivors (Delker et al., 2020). Research by Wyles et al. (2025) shows that many survivors of sexual violence within institutions choose to delay disclosing their experiences because of the power dynamics and fear of social backlash. This synthesis reveals that there is still very little research that interprets survivors' memoirs as a form of resistance to the politics of non-alignment within institutions and society.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design with narrative analysis. The material object of the study is the memoir *Broken Strings* by Aurelie Moeremans, while the formal objects are power relations, child abuse, and the politics of non-alignment, as experienced by survivors. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on the meaning of experiences, narrative flow, and social and institutional responses that emerge in survivors' narratives. The memoir is treated as primary data because it contains firsthand experiences, a chronology of events, and the victim's reflections on the violence that she endured.

The primary data for this study consist of passages from *Broken Strings* that describe experiences of emotional manipulation, sexual violence, psychological abuse, her relationship with Bobby, family responses, institutional responses, and Aurelie's process of speaking out. Secondary data consisted of news articles, institutional reports, journal articles, and social media posts discussing Aurelie's case and the issue of child sexual abuse. Secondary data were sourced from materials published or circulated during the 2025–2026 period to align with the timing of the memoir's release and the subsequent public response. The inclusion criteria for data were sources that discussed *Broken Strings*, child grooming, sexual violence, institutional responses, victim blaming, or public support for survivors. Sources that only discussed celebrity gossip without any connection to issues of violence, institutions, or victim protection were not used.

Data were collected through a documentary study. The researcher read the memoir repeatedly, highlighted key passages, and grouped excerpts based on the themes of violence, power relations, victims' fears, institutional responses, and public support. Secondary data were collected to help analyze the social and institutional responses to the cases described in the memoir. The units of analysis in this study are narratives, scenes, statements, and responses that demonstrate the perpetrator's power, silencing of victims, institutional inaction, and shifts in public attitudes toward survivors.

The data were analyzed using narrative analysis in several stages. First, the data were sorted based on the trajectory of Aurelie's experiences as a survivor, ranging from violence, silencing, and reporting to the publication of her memoir. Second, the data were coded into themes of power relations, grooming, victim blaming, institutional betrayal, and politics of non-alignment. Third, the findings were analyzed using structural functionalism, particularly to examine dysfunction within the family, state apparatus, religious institutions, media, and society. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, that is, by comparing the memoir's narrative with relevant news reports, documents, journals, and public responses. Research ethics were upheld by refraining from adding allegations beyond the written data, avoiding the exploitation of the survivor's trauma, and consistently positioning Aurelie as a subject with a voice rather than merely an object of the case.

Result

The memoir *Broken Strings* reveals an unequal power dynamic between the adult perpetrator and the 15-year-old victim. Aurelie describes how the perpetrator built an emotional bond, provided a false sense of security, and then gradually began to control the victim's behavior and way of thinking. This form of manipulation is evident when the victim feels compelled to be 'obedient and unproblematic' to maintain the relationship and prevent conflict (Moeremans, 2025). This experience demonstrates that power dynamics in child grooming cases often operate through emotional manipulation, dependency, and psychological domination, not merely through physical violence. Gillard et al. (2022) explain that perpetrators of child sexual abuse often exploit relationships of trust and positions of authority to exert control over their victims. Harefa and Dewanto (2026) also noted that child grooming is carried out gradually and covertly through the emotional manipulation of the victim.

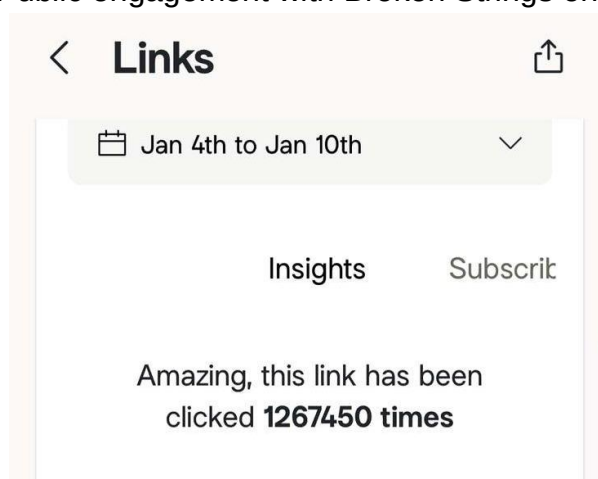
In her memoir, Aurelie shows that experiences of violence were not immediately reported because of fear, shame, and uncertainty about how the surrounding community would respond. Victims felt that speaking out could actually increase social pressure and lead them to be blamed even more. Simeon (2022) explained that survivors of sexual violence often face intimidation, threats, and social pressure when they try to speak out in public. Several sections of the memoir also reveal that victims' experiences are often dismissed as exaggerated, emotional, or incredible enough to be believed. This situation highlights the existence of a "culture of silence" that leads victims to keep their experiences of violence hidden for a long time. Delker et al. (2020) noted that cultural stigma makes narratives of sexual violence harder to accept than other forms of trauma.

The memoir *Broken Strings* also highlighted the slow response of several institutions that were supposed to provide protection to victims.

Aurelie wrote that the reports filed by her family did not receive clear follow-up, and the protection process proceeded very slowly. Some institutions are described as being more focused on preserving their image than on ensuring victims' safety. Clark et al. (2024) explain that institutional betrayal occurs when institutions fail to provide support and protection to survivors who depend on them. Dufour (2024) also notes that institutional betrayal can manifest through systemic neglect, bureaucratic responses, and an organizational culture that does not prioritize victims. This situation highlights the disconnection between the ideal functions of institutions and the practices that occur on the ground.

Aurelie's experience, as described in her memoir, also reveals a form of secondary victimization stemming from both the social environment and the digital sphere. Victims not only experience trauma as a result of the violence they endure but also face negative comments, public skepticism, and a tendency to blame the victim. Wijayanti and Suarya (2023) explain that patriarchal culture, mass media, and rape myths reinforce the practice of victim blaming in society. Jacobus et al. (2025) also found that victim-blaming attitudes remain quite prevalent among college students, primarily due to the influence of gender norms and patriarchal culture. Ubino and Astuti (2025) note that social media often reinforces stigma against survivors through comments that judge their behavior or appearance. This situation demonstrates that survivors of sexual violence often face layered social pressures after attempting to speak.

Figure 1. Public engagement with Broken Strings on Instagram.



Source. Field observation/social media.

After the memoir was shared on social media, a wave of public support emerged, reflecting a shift in society's response to victims' experiences. Personal narratives, previously viewed as private matters, began to be

understood as social issues related to violence against children and women. Aurelie's Instagram channel, Broken Strings Circle, served as a space for sharing experiences, offering emotional support, and discussing child grooming and sexual violence. Wyles et al. (2025) explain that widely published survivor narratives can help create a space for social recognition of victims of institutional sexual violence. Digital interaction data derived from social media were used in this study as non-academic supporting data; therefore, there are limitations in verifying the number of readers and audience reach. Nevertheless, this public response indicates that survivors' narratives can generate social pressure on institutions and create a space for advocacy grounded in victims' experiences.

Discussion

The memoir Broken Strings demonstrates that child sexual abuse is not merely an individual experience but is linked to unequal power dynamics between the perpetrator and the victim. Perpetrators exploit emotional closeness, age, and position of dominance to establish dependence and control over the victim. Gillard et al. (2022) explain that perpetrators of child sexual abuse often use relationships of trust to maintain dominance over the victim. Harefa and Dewanto (2026) also noted that child grooming occurs gradually through emotional manipulation, making it difficult for victims to realize that they are experiencing sexual abuse. Aurelie's experience illustrates how emotional pressure and the expectation to be "obedient and unproblematic" contribute to the victim's powerlessness within that relationship.

The research findings also indicate that victims face significant barriers when attempting to speak about the violence they have experienced. Fear, shame, and concerns about social reactions lead victims to remain silent for extended periods. Simeon (2022) explained that survivors of sexual violence are often silenced through intimidation, threats, and social pressure from their surroundings. Delker et al. (2020) found that society tends to have a harder time accepting accounts of sexual violence than other forms of trauma due to cultural stigma against victims. In the memoir Broken Strings, these barriers arise not only from the social environment but also from victims' low trust in the protection system, which is supposed to provide a sense of safety.

The discussion of institutional dysfunction in this study also supports research on institutional betrayals. Clark et al. (2024) explain that institutions can exacerbate victims' trauma when they fail to provide protection, support, and a safe response to reports of sexual violence. Dufour (2024) notes that institutional betrayal can manifest through systemic neglect, slow bureaucracy, and an institutional culture that prioritizes protecting the institution's image over the victim. In the memoir, the slow response of authorities and the lack of clear protection for the victim reveal a disconnect

between the institution's ideal functions and actual practices. This study demonstrates that institutional failure not only impacts the legal process but also prolongs the fear and social isolation experienced by victims.

This study also found that victim blaming reinforces social pressure on survivors. Wijayanti and Suarya (2023) explain that patriarchal culture, rape myths, and mass media often shape perspectives that blame victims of sexual violence. Jacobus et al. (2025) showed that the tendency toward victim blaming remains quite high among college students due to the influence of gender norms and patriarchal culture. In the memoir **Broken Strings**, the victim is portrayed as having to face public skepticism and comments that question the victim's behavior more than the perpetrator's actions. This situation illustrates that a lack of support for survivors manifests not only through formal institutions but also through society's social response to victims of sexual violence.

In this study, social media serves a different function from that of formal institutions. While formal institutions are slow to respond to victims' reports, digital spaces have become a venue for public solidarity with survivors. Ubino and Astuti (2025) explain that social media can amplify victim-blaming practices, but it can also serve as a space for advocacy and support for survivors of sexual violence. The narratives Aurelie shared through her memoir and social media have drawn public attention to the issues of child grooming and sexual violence against children. This study demonstrates that survivors' narratives can serve as a form of digital advocacy that generates social pressure on institutions to respond more to victims.

Conclusion

The memoir *Broken Strings* demonstrates that the policy of indifference toward survivors of child abuse manifests not only through individual actions but also through the failure of social institutions to provide safe protection for victims. Through a structural functionalist perspective, this study demonstrates how families, the state, religious institutions, and the media fail to optimally fulfill their protective functions, resulting in victims facing barriers to obtaining a sense of safety, support, and recognition of the violence they have experienced. Unequal power dynamics, victim blaming, and slow institutional responses lead victims to remain silent for a long time before speaking out through memoirs and social media. This study also showed that survivors' narratives can serve as a form of digital advocacy that fosters public solidarity and exerts social pressure on institutions deemed to have failed to protect victims. The memoirs examined in this study not only function as a personal space for recounting trauma but also serve as a medium for critiquing social dysfunction and institutional bias against survivors of sexual violence.

This study has several limitations, primarily because the main research source focuses solely on a single memoir, meaning that the experiences

analyzed remain specific to that particular case. Additionally, the use of social media as supporting data presents limitations in terms of data verification, audience reach, and the ever-changing nature of digital interaction. This study has not yet compared Aurelie's experiences with the narratives of other survivors from different social, cultural, and institutional backgrounds. Therefore, future research could develop a comparative analysis of memoirs or digital narratives from other survivors of sexual violence to examine patterns of power relations, institutional responses, and forms of victim advocacy in the public sphere. Further studies could also expand the use of other theoretical perspectives, such as feminism, trauma studies, or media studies, to allow survivors' experiences to be interpreted from a more diverse range of viewpoints.

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Author Contribution Statement

The first author contributed to the conceptualization of the research, data collection, data analysis, development of the theoretical framework, and writing of the initial draft of the manuscript. The second author contributed to the supervision process, academic revisions, development of argumentation, and refinement of the final draft of the manuscript. Both authors reviewed the research findings and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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