

Memoir Reading, Remembering, and Reflecting on Social Media

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Abstract: This article investigates how readers engage with memoir on social media, foregrounding the role of memory in contemporary reading practices. I draw on an original dataset of posts and discussions collected from Goodreads, TikTok, Instagram, Reddit, X, and YouTube about four recent memoirs. Combining inductive and deductive coding with semi-distant and close reading, I analyze how readers articulate memories of their own lives in response to authors' life narratives. Findings show that memoirs prompt readers to engage in transmedia discovery, embodied reflection, and personal recollection, producing responses that highlight recognition, nostalgia, and shared vulnerability. Unlike other studies that focus primarily on fiction, my analysis demonstrates that memoir occupies a distinctive space of identification and activism, where readers' digital articulations of memory resist silencing, erasure, and the policing of life stories. By situating memoir at the centre, I argue that readers' memory work in digital spaces constitutes more than private reflection. It is also a collective and multimodal practice of meaning-making through which readers connect their lives to broader cultural conversations.

Keywords: Memoir and Life Writing, Digital Reading Practices, Social

Introduction

Why do readers turn to memoir to understand the world? How do readers present their memoir reading on social media? What role do social media platforms play in shaping readers' presentation of their memoir reading? These are the questions of an interdisciplinary project called *Reading for Our Lives: Readers, Memoir and Social Media* in which we investigate non-professional reading responses to *I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Jennette McCurdy (2023), *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe (2020), *I Want to Die but I also Want to Eat Tteokbokki: A Memoir* by Baek Sehee (2022), and *Making it So: A Memoir* by Patrick Stewart (2023).¹

Social media platforms are spaces where readers discover books, talk about them, and recommend or don't recommend their reading choices (Foesberg 2012; Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 2019; Thomas 2020). There are studies of reading practices on a single platform, such as Goodreads (Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo 2018), Instagram (Zhan, Tu, and Yu 2018), TikTok (Low, Ehret, and Hagh 2023), Twitter (Gruzd and Rehberg Sedo 2012), Wattpad (Ramdarshan Bold 2016), or YouTube (Tomasena and Scolari 2024), or more wide-ranging studies that connect reading, media ecologies and the literary sphere together (Ren 2024). Our project makes the study of reading *memoir* its specific intention, which is an important advancement to the field of Reading Studies because most of the extant scholarship focuses on readers reading fiction.

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In this paper, I examine how multimodal readers cubed (or MMR³) articulate individual memories of life experiences prompted by reading memoirs, and why we think these memories are important. My long-time research partner, Danielle Fuller, and I came up with the concept of the “multimodal reader cubed.” It refers to readers in a post-digital age who integrate online and offline reading practices—such as finding, selecting, reading, and discussing texts. Multimodal readers³ engage in a range of communicative modes, including gestural, visual, auditory, spatial, and linguistic. They navigate across devices and formats, acting and interacting within a mobile, networked, multimedia environment (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 2023, 5–7). Post-digital indicates an era when on-line and off-line practices are considered equally important to one another and can happen simultaneously (Cramer 2014). I use Dane and Weber’s (2021) conceptualization of post digital readers.

While Alessio Antonini, Sam Brooker, and Lovro Škopljanc (2024) attend to the question of remembering specific stories across time and media, I look to better understand *what* memories surface for readers of memoir and *how* those memories are articulated in online reading reception.

Methods

To answer our research questions, we used scraping software and manual collection for two weeks in February and March 2023 and 2024. Our dataset consists of randomized reader posts and conversations for each memoir using GoodReads for every case study (1063 original posts), plus two different social media platforms per book. The platforms are Reddit (236), Instagram (331), TikTok (201), X (370) and YouTube (5). The data were managed using NVivo and

coded using both inductive and deductive means to create coding categories. Analysis includes both semi-distant and close reading of the text, video and sound.

In responding to the conference call and the emphasis of memory work, I searched the dataset for posts and discussions including the word “memory” (Nvivo captures similar words, such as “remember”, “memories”, and “remembering”). These posts and discussions were analysed, along with the codes “Life Like Mine” and “Nostalgia” across all four case study memoirs.

Like Antonini, Brooker and Škopljanac’s interview study with readers, this paper bridges reader reception studies and memory studies. It is informed by life writing studies. As such, it might be considered a postcritical study (Felski, 2020) of non-professional or recreational readers’ memories of memoir. What follows is a glimpse into our readers’ reading, remembering and reflecting, and my explanation of why we think memoir matters.

Findings and Discussion

3a. Reading

How do books come into our hands? How do we discover them? In this section, I do not want to talk about the act of reading but rather focus on the importance of multimodal or transmedia *discovery* of memoir.

Transmedia memories, as Antonini, Brooker and Škopljanac forward are evident in our readers’ posts about discovering memoir. In the first instance, McCurdy is a famous US actor, filmmaker, singer and podcaster. She was a child actor from 2007-2012 on Nickelodeon TV teen sitcom series *iCarly*. Celebrity memoirists have an established

audience base (Moran 2000; Rak 2013), and many of our readers refer to watching McCurdy growing up and coming to the book that way. Some even come to the genre of memoir in this way. For example, one Goodreads reader wrote,

So, I am not the biggest memoir reader. I've probably read less than five in my entire thirty-two years and over 1,000 books (per Goodreads). This freaking title though....how can you resist? Slight disclaimer - I knew who Jennette McCurdy was going into this, my little sisters used to watch iCarly, but I hadn't particularly followed her career. I probably will now though, because HOLY SHIT this woman writes a damn engaging story. (GR Manual Scrape 02Mar2023 #118)

Many others refer specifically to the title as this reader did, and refer to it as titillating. Some find it troubling. Other readers refer to the hype the book garnered, and others reference a podcast, memes or her music.

Let's turn to our case study #2. In March 2023, the author, book influencer, and activist Sim Kern used their platform and more than 500,000 followers to create *The Trans Rights Readathon*. The week-long reading event was in response to the growing wave of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ legislation in the United States, and encouraged readers to engage with books by trans, genderqueer, or nonbinary authors—or works featuring trans, genderqueer, or nonbinary characters—and to share their reading experiences online. One of the books highlighted during the Readathon was *Gender Queer: A Memoir*. The event amplified the memoir's visibility, leading to increased social media discussions on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. As of this writing, more than 75 thousand readers have rated the book on the social networking site Goodreads (average of 4.27/5 stars); more than

10,600 readers have posted reviews.

This book is not available in Croatia, to the best of my knowledge.

Gender Queer: A Memoir was named the most “challenged book” by the American Library Association for three years in a row: 2022-2024 (Italie 2024). The controversy surrounding the graphic YA memoir was amplified through social media and was the cause to pick up the book for many readers in our data set. See, for example, one reader who posted on Instagram:

If you've followed my page for a minute, you probably know that memoirs are typically not the genre I am most drawn to. However, when every conservative in the county is throwing themselves a proper tantrum and demanding a book be banned, it becomes my mission in life to consume that book as fast as possible. (MK_I_M_Mar23 #26)

Here, we see an indication that the banning of books has the opposite effect of what the protesters intend. In these posts, and there were many, we see hope of readers finding the books they need.

Case study #3 is interesting for many reasons, not the least that it is a result of transmedia processes. Sehee's publication is a mix between self-help and memoir in that she publishes transcripts between herself and her therapist that first appeared on her blog. While the author is not a celebrity, her popularity as a blogger led to the publishing of the book. In this way, Sehee exemplifies what Fuller and Norrick-Rühl (2025) identify as “memoirification.” That is, “the (often sophisticated) performance of the self that, while it contributes to the celebrity's existing ‘brand,’ becomes an extension of the life (or

'bios') narrated in the print memoir." (388) In addition, Sehee's book was a "bestseller in the original Korean (2018) but also in many Asian and European languages ..." (Fuller and Norrick-Rühl 2025, 404).²

Finally, the uptake of Patrick Stewart's *Making it So* is exemplary of transmedia influence in contemporary publishing. Stewart is a famous theatre, film and movie actor. Like McCurdy, he has a ready-made book audience with his fans but arguably many, many more because of his age and years in the business.

As mentioned above, in some cases, the celebrity is the reason that readers come to the genre of memoir. As illustration, consider what one reader posted on Instagram:

You may not know this about me, but I love me some Captain Jean-Luc Picard. In the almost eight years since I've been with my partner, I've seen every episode of Star Trek original series, Next Generation, Deep Space Nine, and all of the movies. So, as one could guess I've grown a bit attached to the one and only Sir Patrick Stewart in the process.

I don't read a lot of mens-oirs (men's memoirs as coined by [@chelseadevantez](#)), but I knew I had to grab this one. (IG Posts with Translations #32)

This Bookstagrammer goes on to read other memoir through the year and posts about them at the end, but what is telling about the post is its articulation of memoir readers' expectations. She writes further that, "I was surprised by how open Patrick was about his childhood (CW for domestic abuse) and growing up in poverty in post WWII

² Baek Se-hee died on October 16, 2025. Reactions from readers can be found on Reddit, and other social media platforms.

England. The self awareness and vulnerability coming from an 80 something year old white British man was at times shocking and so pure.” The characteristics the reader describes illustrate a reader’s expectations. They reflect what life writing theorist Philippe Lejeune calls “the autobiographical pact,” which is an implicit agreement between author and reader, signaled through paratextual cues (Lejeune 1989, 44). Readers of memoir expect authors to approach their own lives with genuine seriousness and sincerity. In the next section, I will present my ideas about the moments when an author’s memories intersect with those of the reader.

3b. *Remembering*

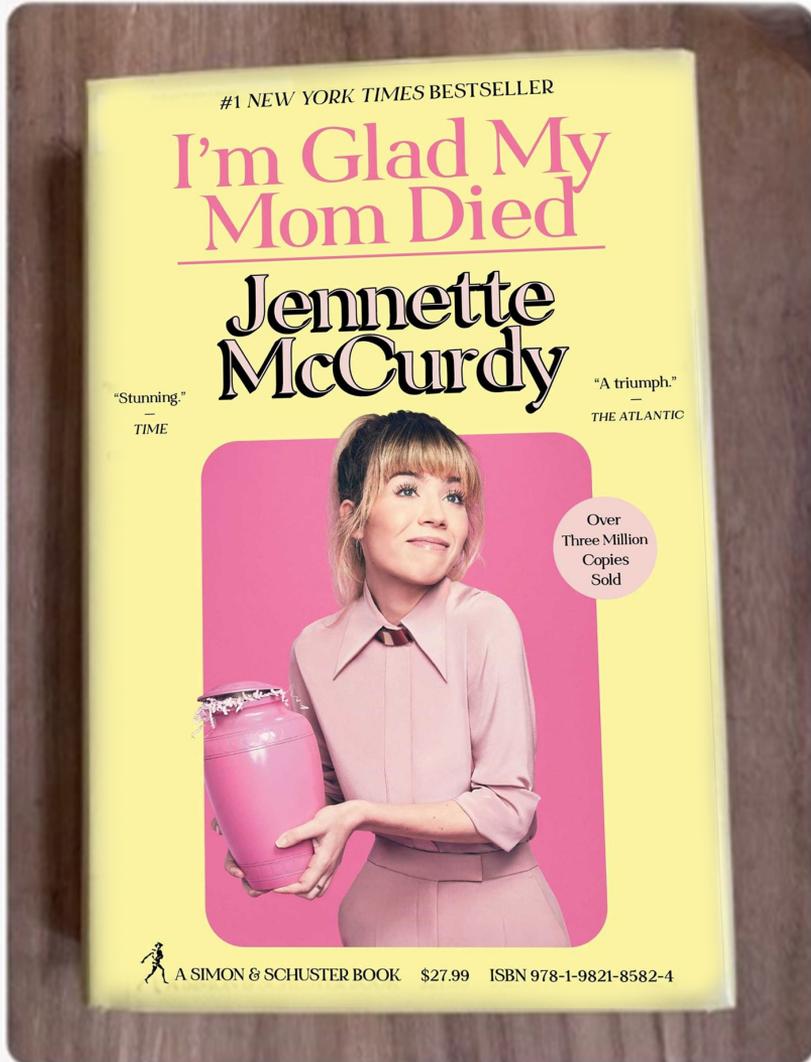
Consider the post in Illustration 1.

Feb 12

I just finished Jennette McCurdy's memoir. Wow.

I found the way she wrote each chapter through her feelings at the time she was recalling was a powerful way to take in her story.

It was also way more relatable than I was expecting. I may need a hug.



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237

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Aso, I didn't know who she was when I picked it up at the library! I just knew people were saying this was a good book. My wife was like "do you know who that is ans what it's about?" And I was like "nah, just looked interesting." I'm a weirdo.

2:48PM • Feb 12,2023 • 28 Views

Illustration 1: Twitter Post (JM_T_N_Feb 23 #156)

How is remembering different from reflecting? How is reflecting different from recall? I am pondering these questions because this reader uses “recall” to talk about JM’s “powerful way to take in her story.” Memoirs are mediated and narrated collections; they are curated collections of memories. Life writing theorists Smith and Watson (2010; 2020) identify inter-related concepts of memory, experience, identity, spatiality, embodiment, and agency to complicate what they call the autobiographical act. Although there are many variations, the actions differentiate memoir from novels. But what happens when the author’s memories or recollections are like those of the reader? A connection is created between reader and author.

I think it is important to think about investigative methods here. I think social media accounts of readers’ responses offer more immediate articulated memories than what might be available in reader interviews. Our findings are different from those of Shelley Trower, for example, who interviewed readers as part of an oral history project and found that “Readers tend more readily to remember experiences of reading novels, in other words, than the content of the novels themselves” (Trower 2020, 271). The readers in our study whose responses were coded into “Life like Mine” or “Nostalgia” remember specific content. Consider, for example, an Instagram reader who wrote: “Reading this book was a lot like when I read “Fun Home” for the first time. A recognition of myself in another’s experience, a feeling that finally, someone had put into words what I can not” (MK_I_M_Mar23 #20). There were many readers

in our data set who remembered feeling as Maia Kobabe did growing up, and not all identified 2SLGBTQIA+. The readers identified with universal childhood processes of identity formation and questioning, with relationship creation and maintenance, and with feeling love.

McKoon and Ratcliff's (1992, cited in Gerrig and Mumper) theory of memory-based processing tells us that information from the early parts of a book are usually readily available to most readers, which means that interpretation of those parts tends to be quite similar. However, the overall takeaways, the reader responses, often vary. It is the knowledge and experience that individuals bring to the texts that make interpretations unique. We now know that "[readers'] accumulated memories have a substantial impact on their narrative experiences" (Gerrig and Mumper 2017, 240), and that "[Knowledge] will differ as a product of [our own] accumulations of memories" (252). This includes lived memories, and memories of narrative worlds. These are often unconscious, but not always.

In his case study *What American Readers Remember*, Lovro Škopljanač (2023) concludes that "... readers build up such a notion around those texts and their respective parts which were best remembered, for whatever textual or personal reasons." This is important [he writes] "because it may be argued that the readers' own memories of the texts, however imperfect and minute compared to the actual textual volume, *are* literature for them personally" (46). I agree and think this conclusion fits with what we have seen in our memoir reading data. Consider the response to *Gender Queer: A Memoir* in Illustration 2:



Illustration 2 (MK_I_M_Mar23, #87)

We see here that not only is the reader remembering similar life experiences about reading books but also layering life stories upon one another, in a way that is only possible in a multimodal era. To see the post visually allows for my discussion to turn to “the body”, not only through the now-common picture of a reader holding their book, but also through the process of reflecting.

3c. Reflecting

Former distinguished professor of Psychology, Raymond W Gibbs, Jr (2016) writes of embodied dynamics in reading experiences. He argued that “... reading, of all sorts, involves our imaginative, embodied engagement with texts, and that this engagement does not just constitute our reactions to literature, but shapes the very

process by which linguistic meanings are interpreted” (222). This is especially important in thinking about how readers reflect on their own bodies under attack, by themselves or by others. Allow me to illustrate with two examples from our dataset. First, consider the trigger warnings from one reader to their followers in response to *I'm Glad My Mom Died*:

Let's start with a trigger warning list:

Abuse (Child, Physical, and Emotional), Manipulation, Anorexia, Bulimia, Eating disorders, Vomit, Mental Illness, Substance Abuse (drugs & alcohol), Death, Grief, Cancer, Undiagnosed Narcissism, Grooming (JM_Goodreads_ManualScrape02Mar2023Oldest #67)

These warnings are wide-ranging and illustrate the readers' interpretation of physical, emotional and mental well-being. If Gibbs' claim that "... almost all people imaginatively project themselves into texts as a fundamental part of any act of linguistic understanding" (2016, 222), then this reader and others who also offer warnings are articulating memories. We need to remember, however, that as Gibbs also writes:

At the same time, the precise nature of these 'embodied simulations' may differ, sometimes in very subtle ways, depending on the background and experiences of the reader. This perspective asserts that there are important commonalities between recreational and critical understandings of literature, but that the ultimate products of embodied simulation processes can vary considerably given variations in the texts read, the people doing the reading, and their interpretive goals and motivations (ibid.)

This is especially important as we reconsider the banning of *Gender Queer*.

One Bookstagrammer wrote:

With a level of vulnerability and candor while tackling the difficulties of puberty and growth, Maia will have a home on my bookshelf next to other favorites such as *Fun Home*. E addresses eir earliest

childhood memories of gender through present day questions that remain and answers that are continuously evolving. Whether you are confident in your gender and sexuality, hesitant to come out of the closet, or still trying to figure out who you are and how you feel in your body, you can find a home in Maia's words. E acknowledges this was a work e did not initially plan on sharing with the world, but eir courage is so heartwarming and uplifting that I hope this won't be eir last work. (MK_I_M_Mar23 #65)

As Douglas and Tully (2014) have argued, reading, considering and bearing witness to narratives of trauma and violence are ethical acts. When authors are presenting painful memories and experiences, our ethical imperative is to take them seriously. Listening to the voices of these readers is also imperative.

Conclusions

My work demonstrates that readers' engagements with memoir on social media are both multimodal and memory-rich, shaped by transmedia discovery, embodied reflection, and personal recollection. By attending to readers' posts across Goodreads, TikTok, Instagram, Reddit, and X, I show how the genre of memoir elicits connections between authorial life-writing and readers' own lived experiences. These articulations of recognition, nostalgia, and embodied memory illustrate the ways in which memoir reading operates as a site of meaning-making. Our findings highlight how memories surface in digital response spaces, revealing memoir's capacity to foster identification, resistance, and critical reflection.

Our project contributes to Reading Studies by advancing memoir as a central, rather than peripheral, focus for understanding contemporary reading practices. Whereas much existing scholarship privileges fiction, our attention to memoir underscores how readers

mobilize life narratives to make sense of their own identities, histories, and social worlds in a post-digital era. In demonstrating that the multimodal reader cubed navigates across channels, platforms, devices, and formats to remember and reflect, I argue that memoir reading response on social media is not only an act of remembering but also a potential practice of resistance, where readers collectively contest silencing, erasure, and the policing of stories. In this sense, memoir reading in digital spaces is more than private reflection—it is a form of activism that challenges whose lives and memories are deemed important.

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