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“READY TO STAY HIDDEN FOR A LONG, LONG TIME”: ANALYZING MALE VICTIMS
OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Public discussion of male sexual assault is minimal. Young adult literature featuring male victims is similarly under-acknowledged and under-represented. This thesis analyzes the portrayal of male victims of sexual violence within six young adult novels. As the novels act in conversation with one another, each work presents a different but relevant depiction of the costs of toxic masculinity in the aftermath of sexual violence, as evidenced by the victims' coping mechanisms and ongoing trauma. Oftentimes, these literary portrayals reflect real-life stigmas that impact adolescent male victims. As the novels discussed in this paper demonstrate, these stigmas vary depending on a variety of characteristics, including sex/gender of the perpetrator, the victim's relationship with his offender, and the age difference between victim and perpetrator.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

Introduction..... 1

Chapter 1 Peer Perpetration 5

Chapter 2 Adult Male Perpetration 17

Chapter 3 Adult Female Perpetration 32

Conclusion 49

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 51

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Introduction

“I wanted to scream and roar and tear the place apart stone by stone with him still in it, and yet a dull ache still rumbled inside me, the memory of a time when his voice calmed me, his words assured me, and my belief in him guided me. All that was gone now” (162). This quote from Brendan Kiely’s *The Gospel of Winter* describes the protagonist’s internal struggle in the aftermath of his sexual abuse. Additionally, the quote accurately reflects the conflicting feelings many adolescent males encounter when victimized by sexual violence.

Globally, the voices and experiences of male victims of sexual violence are largely erased and generally ignored. Along these same lines, research about male victims in literature is significantly under-studied: it has not kept pace with studies of female victims. The need for male survivors to recognize aspects of their experience in others’ narratives, however, is great.

The representation of male victims of sexual trauma, though still rare, is increasingly present in young adult literature. These novels are part of a subset of fiction that is directed toward an adolescent audience. As a result, the novelist behind each work faces a unique set of challenges when attempting to publish such sensitive material.

Young adult fiction is typically targeted at teen-aged audiences, most frequently including ages 12-18. Typically, novels of this type discuss common issues faced by teenagers, including starting high school, dealing with bullies, and peer pressure involving drugs, alcohol, and/or sex. However, because these works are aimed at a younger crowd, the presence of such topics as sex or violence is controversial among publishers, editors, and readers of YA. Though some assert that such issues should not be censored, many parents are reluctant to allow their

children to learn about such sensitive material through young adult fiction. Thus, these topics are not typically handled within YA in graphic detail.

Nevertheless, many authors succeed in creating works that accurately reflect the real life experiences of survivors of sexual violence, individually contributing to a larger conversation surrounding sexual violence and giving a face to a largely underrepresented population. Included among these authors are six novelists whose works will be analyzed in this thesis for their representation of toxic masculinity and the common side effects and experiences adolescent boys experience in the aftermath of sexual violence. These novels include *Leverage* by Joshua C. Cohen, *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock* by Matthew Quick, *Bait* by Alex Sanchez, *The Gospel of Winter* by Brendan Kiely, *Prey* by Lurlene McDaniel, and *Boy Toy* by Barry Lyga.

Generally, in the aftermath of the victims' trauma, the boys in these novels turned to various forms of negative coping, including substance abuse, self harm, and--in the most severe cases--attempted homicide and suicide. Though these aspects remained consistent throughout the novels in the corpus (continuing to reflect real life) every character's experience varies depending on his relationship with his offender(s), as well as the perpetrator's age and sex/gender.

To begin discussing how male victims of sexual violence are constructed on the page, it is important to first understand how male rape is typically viewed in American society. Though this topic is underresearched, scholars typically agree on one major theme: the main reason that male victims of sexual violence do not come forward is directly related to how masculinity is defined within our culture.

In the United States, we are slowly beginning to progress past the idea of a heteronormative sexual binary, where one's anatomy is closely tied with gender demonstration.

However, because driver's licenses, birth certificates, and other forms of identification still largely operate under the assumption that there are still only two genders/sexes, these identities continue to imply certain characteristics that have long been used to recognize their differences. As a result, "masculinity" brings up specific associations that help to define what society perceives to be a "real" man. Real men are supposed to be tough, aggressive, and largely self-sufficient, able to fend for themselves in any physical altercation. In terms of personality traits, "real" men are conditioned to be stoic, to not show emotion. Furthermore, in comparison with the typically feminine characteristics of submission and emotional vulnerability, "real" men are expected to be assertive and impenetrable. From a young age, boys are taught that these characteristics are necessary to find success in any facet of their lives (love, academia, work force, etc.). An inability to exhibit these traits often leads to feelings of failure or incompetency.

Therefore, when men are the survivors of rape, they are reluctant to admit to this failure to live up to society's standards for masculinity. In her article "Male Rape and the Careful Construction of the Male Victim," Ruth Graham addresses this reluctance. Recognizing this socialization of strength and aggression in men, she states, "[Men] tend not to be so consciously aware of their personal safety, and resist being labeled a 'victim,' as they see this label as being in direct conflict with masculinity" (Graham 188).

As researcher and activist Michael Scarce recognizes in his book *Male on Male Rape: the Hidden Toll of Stigma and Shame*, this reality often leads the victim to feel as though he is to blame for his assault, a symptom that is common in sexual assault survivors, regardless of gender. Within his book, Scarce presents the testimonies from many survivors to demonstrate how these feelings of helplessness and guilt directly apply to male victims. One narrative describes an anonymous survivor's own feelings of guilt. The victim states, "It really upset me

that I let him do that to me. I can't believe I didn't find a way to make it stop" (Scarce 20).

Though this narrative does not reflect the feelings of every male survivor, it reflects a common theme caused by the internalization of masculine ideals. Men are thought to be tough, independent, and the "protector" of the (presumed) weaker female. Thus, when they are unable to protect themselves, they ultimately feel as though they have failed to uphold the ingrained ideal of masculinity.

Sociologist Karen G. Weiss addresses this same issue in her article for the *Men and Masculinities* academic journal. Within her work, she recognizes that a man's ability to exhibit masculine qualities has as much to do with fitting the standard stereotype as it does differentiating his traits with typically feminine characteristics. She states, "With 'real' men expected to avoid behaviors associated with femininity, men who are overpowered by others may be judged to have failed in their masculine duty to stick up for themselves" (Weiss 277). When a man does not demonstrate strength or dominance, he is acting in a feminine way; therefore, his masculinity--and, essentially, the standards that formed his identity--is uprooted, leaving him not only confused and conflicted, but also ashamed, guilty, and embarrassed, as Scarce indicated.

The circumstances addressed by Graham, Weiss, and Scarce ultimately come together to form a suffocating atmosphere for male survivors. In other words, this negative construction of what it means to be a "man" forms a toxic environment where the voices of male victims are stifled by the expectation that men must be silent and stoic. The phrase "toxic masculinity" is used throughout this thesis to represent this very phenomenon.

Chapter 1

Peer Perpetration

In most of the novels in the corpus, the protagonists are victimized by perpetrators much older than them, often in positions of authority in their lives. However, in both *Leverage* by Joshua C. Cohen and *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock* by Matthew Quick, the victims in the novel experience sexual violence perpetrated by their peers.

Leverage by Joshua Cohen centers around the brutal rape of a freshman gymnast by the captains of the football team, witnessed by the two protagonists, Kurt and Danny. In the rape's aftermath, the boys are forced to confront the power dynamics that set the standard of masculinity in their high school. Though the protagonists are not abused themselves, the novel provides a strong critique of toxic masculinity and homophobia, regarding how males are conditioned while participating in athletics during adolescence.

The concept of masculinity in the novel is primarily explored through a power differential between the football team and the gymnastic teams. The football players represent the stereotypical “dumb jock” most often shown in popular culture: straight, white, and large framed. Thus, like most contemporary entertainment featuring high school athletics, they set the standard of masculinity in their high school.

In the scene where the rivalry begins, the gymnastics team has to “earn their right” to use the weight room alongside the football players. Since the football players are allowed to choose their opponent, Danny, one of the smallest gymnasts on the team, is selected. While attempting to decide between Danny and the team's smallest member, Ronnie (who is later the victim of

rape at the hands of the football captains), one of the football players shouts “pick the midget pussies” (43). Because Danny and Ronnie do not possess the same large build that the football players do, they are perceived as less masculine.

As the scene continues, Cohen uses animalistic language to demonstrate this difference in size. The football players are described throughout the scene as “gorillas,” while the gymnasts are described as “nervous monkeys” (38). Monkeys, in comparison with the image of a heavy, powerful, and sometimes violently aggressive gorilla, are lithe and graceful, characteristics typically associated with femininity. This somewhat feminized depiction of the gymnastics team further emphasizes the football players’ power in the weight room, an environment linked more frequently to masculinity. Danny recognizes these implications among the two different types of athletes attempting to prove their worth. The use of this language demonstrates both the tendency of the football players’ to prey on those they perceive as weak, as well as the characters’ correlation of size and desirable masculinity. Therefore, when Danny easily defeats his opponent, his win threatens the football players’ masculinity. Feeling dethroned, the football team seeks revenge on Danny and his teammates, beginning a prank war that ultimately results in Ronnie’s rape.

Ronnie’s rape is described through detailed, straightforward language. This use of violent imagery sets a scene more graphic than typically seen in young adult literature. Additionally, the rape politics involved in the football captains’ attack emphasizes the ultimate costs of toxic masculinity. These concepts set *Leverage* apart from the other novels analyzed in the corpus.

Ronnie’s attackers initially penetrate him with a broom handle. Before beginning their assault, Scott, the quarterback and ringleader, states, “We’ve got a lesson to teach” (166). The

captains intend to punish Ronnie for undermining their masculinity by asserting their physical power over him. Because they feel as though Ronnie stepped outside of the rules of their social hierarchy, the football players felt like they had to put him back in what they see as his “rightful” place. Alongside this “lesson,” the football players divert the blame further by implying that Ronnie wants to be penetrated. While attacking him with the broom handle the first time, the boys laugh, mocking Ronnie, and claiming that he is “begging for it” (167). Later, they tell him, “shut your little faggot mouth” (168). Implying that Ronnie is “asking” to receive the attack and using a homophobic slur against him, the boys are suggesting that Ronnie finds the forced penetration pleasurable and should be ashamed for feeling this way. Through this implication, the football captains are feminizing Ronnie while also blaming him entirely for the attack. The football players, by insinuating that Ronnie is gay and using these taunts to assert their power over him, are once again demonstrating the unbalanced power dynamic between the standard of masculinity--aggression, control, and heterosexuality--and everything that falls outside of that realm.

As Danny stands witness to the anal rape of his teammate, hidden behind a mat in the storage room, the actions he sees are described in harsh, violent language: “Scott wads up the rubber mask and *jams* it into Ronnie’s mouth...Tom *rips* down Ronnie’s pants. Scott *shoves* the mop handle inside him” (167). Cohen’s active verbs serve to once again solidify the act as an assertion of dominance while relating these factors to the power dynamics involved in athletics.

In her book *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football*, former professional athlete Mariah Burton Nelson demonstrated the relationship between athletics, violence, and masculinity: “Whether hockey fights, football tackles, or baseball brawls, intentionally hurtful acts are portrayed as natural--for men. Sports violence is considered appropriate. It is

considered masculine. Our concept of violence is inextricably interwoven with our concept of expected condoned male behavior” (141). This violence, which Burton Nelson acknowledges is present mainly in men’s sports, is a cornerstone of camaraderie among sports teams. Teammates are rewarded for making aggressive plays and for fouling the opposition to get ahead in the game. Boys feel as though they must demonstrate this definition of masculinity in order to fit in among the team. When they don’t fulfill this role, boys are often somewhat unable to fully bond with the rest of the team. Thus, when males demonstrate aggression, it is not only celebrated, but perceived as natural.

Burton Nelson goes on to demonstrate that this celebration of aggression, and fouling, contributes to the correlation between masculinity and violence. She states, “[An athlete] has broken lots of rules--holding, grabbing, kicking, elbowing--that are considered ‘part of the game.’ He has rarely, if ever, been punished. He has rarely, if ever, had to apologize for making mistakes, or for hurting others through aggressive acts. In fact, he has been rewarded for aggression, ridiculed for gentleness” (147). The line begins to blur, then, once these players leave the field. These aggressive tendencies will still be present, and reward as a result of this aggression will then be expected.

She goes on to acknowledge the presence of sports-related language when discussing sex, referencing sociologist Miriam Johnson’s *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives*: “if one learns about sexuality in the context of being rewarded by other males for ‘scoring,’ for ‘getting pussy’ or just ‘getting it,’ then this does not augur well for egalitarian sex” (qtd. in Burton Nelson 140). “Scoring,” then, can be used in two contexts: sports and sex. Because males who are involved in athletics from a young age are taught that aggression and violence oftentimes leads to a favorable outcome,--scoring, and the potential to win--Burton Nelson suggests that this correlation will

transfer to their relationships off the field. As a result, when “scoring” is an objective with a potential sexual partner, males could transfer this idea of using aggression to achieve a desirable endgame from the field to their sexual pursuits.

Though the attackers’ actions are aggressive, their reactions are celebratory. Instead of remaining silent, the attackers seem to be viewing their treatment of Ronnie as a triumph. As one of the captains, Mike Studblatz, rapes Ronnie himself, he is encouraged by his peer: “Scott cheers on his teammate. ‘Get some,’ Scott cackles” (167). Their support of one another in this act of violence contributes to the power they seem to hold over Ronnie, as to them, this violence parallels actions that are encouraged on the field. Their act of dominance and control should be celebrated in their eyes, as it is not dissimilar to the aggression that leads them to athletic success.

Burton Nelson recognizes their actions as primarily cementing a bond between the captains. She references anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday who, in her book *Fraternity Gang Rape*, calls gang rape “a no-holds-barred orgy of togetherness” where the victim “whose body facilitates all this is sloughed off...like a used condom” (qtd. in Burton Nelson 143). To the boys, their act of dominance is not specifically punishing Ronnie; after all, it was *Danny* and not Ronnie who served as the catalyst for the prank war. Rather, the body of Ronnie serves as the literal vessel for the captains to connect to each other. Committing this violent act is just another physical activity through which they can support each other, similar to their relationship on the football field. To Ronnie, however, the football players’ attack is personally traumatic and painful. As Ronnie is brutalized by the captains, they gag him with a rubber mask in an attempt to quiet his cries. Danny describes, “even choking on the rubber mask, Ronnie screams and screams and screams” (167). The repetition of the word screams emphasizes the impact of

Ronnie's cries as ongoing, loud, and invasive to Danny's mind. As the attack continues, Ronnie's screams become less severe as he becomes more physically injured. His screams turn into a "muffled cry" as his head is pushed into the mat, and, eventually, his reaction is diminished to a "dull moan," (167). Ronnie's eventual descent into silence once again mirrors the power dynamic between the attackers and their victim. By asserting their dominance and control, and, thus, asserting the aggression that they have always been encouraged to demonstrate on the field, the football players are able to silence Ronnie's voice.

Ultimately, Danny's inability to intervene stems from the football players' abuse of power. As he watches Ronnie's rape occur, Danny's inner dialogue represents his fear of victimization: "And me? I stay hidden...Are those guys really gone? Or are they coming back? Are they bringing reinforcements? Too useless and weak to help anybody, I hug the blue mat tight to my body, ready to stay hidden for a long, long time" (175). Danny recognizes victimization as a possibility because of his similarity to Ronnie, particularly when Ronnie calls him following the assault. Danny says, "I despise how small and weak [Ronnie] is, and I despise that it was only luck and timing that kept the two of us from switching places" (190). He does not have the courage to risk his own safety in order to save Ronnie.

In his book *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*, Jackson Katz acknowledges the correlation between the pressure to conform to standards of masculinity and bystander intervention. He states, "Sometimes men feel as if they have to participate in sexist and even violent practices in order to be accepted into the brotherhood" (123). Building off the ideas of sociologist Sharon Bird, Katz argues that "emotional detachment, competitiveness, and the sexual objectification of women are often the criteria by which men judge each other. When men do not 'measure up' in those terms--and many do not--they often

keep their objectifications to themselves so as not to threaten their standing in the group” (123).

Because Danny knows that he lacks the physical power to stop the football players, he acknowledges his place on the submissive side of the power dynamic. As the witness to this sexual trauma Danny is able to recognize the violent consequences of stepping outside the bounds of masculinity. Ultimately, risk of these consequences outweighs the reward of intervening in Danny’s eyes, and he keeps quiet as a means of self-preservation, to avoid victimization himself.

Danny’s lack of physical power is directly countered by Kurt’s ability to step in and put an end to the attack. As Kurt intervenes, Cohen parallels his reaction to Ronnie’s rape through the use of equally aggressive action verbs: “My foot *bombs* Studblatz’s gut. My elbow *blasts* a chunk of Miller’s shoulder...I return fire. I *rock* them. I inflict, *bruising* something, *cracking* something else” (173). Kurt’s strength and use of aggression characterize him as masculine as the football players define it. Because he is able to inflict pain upon the boys in a way that Danny is not, Kurt seems to be on an even playing field with the football captains. Thus, as he enters the locker room where the rape is occurring, Kurt, unlike Danny, does not need to worry about victimization himself. Instead, he is invited to participate. Scott asks Kurt, ““You want a shot, Mr. Wolf?”” (172). The captains recognize that Kurt is “one of them,” giving him a playful nickname, and offering him the opportunity to rape Ronnie himself.

However, Kurt’s intervention also reveals his previous history as a bystander. He flashes back to his time in foster care, when the foster brother he is closest to, Lamar, is raped by their caretaker as “punishment” for breaking his rules (171). A young boy at the time, Kurt did not have the power to intervene, and Lamar is ultimately suffocated by their foster father. Unlike the past, when his fear of victimization deterred him from intervening, Kurt uses the power that his

physical capabilities grant him to stop the attack. Kurt's violent reaction is almost involuntary, as he is "unable to scream or breathe, unable to think" unless he "[destroys] them" (173). Though he is still acting violently and using his size to assert dominance over the football team, Kurt's masculinity is *not* portrayed as toxic; instead, his intervention puts an end to a truly toxic act.

Following the attack, Cohen once again emphasizes the role that expectations of masculinity plays on bystander intervention through Ronnie's ultimate fate. Searching for companionship and finding none--instead being told by Danny and Kurt to "Get over it" and "Shut up"--Ronnie commits suicide (190-193). Ronnie's death, then, seems to be a result of toxic masculinity on three fronts: the football players, conditioned to associate aggression with success, used violence to enact revenge on someone weaker than them; Danny, feeling the pressure to fit into the expectations of masculinity, failed to intervene; and Kurt, unwilling to relate himself to Ronnie because of his history with sexual violence, fails to provide support.

Through his depiction of both Ronnie's trauma and Kurt and Danny's reactions, Cohen constructs the peer-to-peer violence as rooted in aggression and based in toxic masculinity. Similarly, Leonard Peacock in *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock* by Matthew Quick begins doubting his identity after experiencing sexual trauma at the hands of his best friend.

The novel begins on the main character Leonard's birthday, as he loads a Nazi P38 gun into his bookbag, preparing to kill his former best friend Asher Beal before taking his own life. The reason for Leonard's anger toward Asher is, at first, unclear. However, as the novel progresses, Quick reveals that, when Leonard and Asher were 12 years old, Asher used to regularly sexually abuse Leonard, under the pretense of "wrestling."

The language used to describe the sexual abuse between Asher and Leonard in *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock* is far less graphic in comparison with *Leverage*. Rather than being

victimized by a group motivated by vengeance, Leonard is assaulted instead by his best friend, who was a victim of sexual abuse himself. In describing the abuse, Quick, in contrast with Joshua Cohen's violent imagery, never explicitly describes Asher's actions. Instead, the abuse is implied through Leonard's reactions of detachment, anger, and eventual violence.

When Asher begins abusing Leonard, Leonard initially describes it as "something exciting, something dangerous" (187). Because he genuinely loves his friend—and, at this point, has little reason not to trust him--Leonard does not, at first, recognize that Asher's actions are abusive. He instead seems to feel uncomfortable, describing it as "something [he] didn't understand" as well as something [he] didn't really want" (187). Though Leonard realizes that what is occurring between himself and Asher is negative, he is torn between wanting to keep Asher happy to maintain their friendship and wanting the "wrestling" with Asher to come to an end.

As the assaults continue, Asher begins to manipulate Leonard into keeping the abuse a secret. Leonard states, "he said if I stopped doing what we were doing he'd tell people in great detail all about what we had done together and then everyone would call me a faggot and maybe even beat the shit out of me" (186). By manipulating Leonard in this way, Asher is adding to the conflicting feelings that Leonard had already been feeling. Like the captains in *Leverage*, Asher uses a homophobic slur to threaten Leonard, manipulating him into silence. If he comes forward, he risks public humiliation and losing Asher as a friend; if he continues going over to Asher's house, he must endure sexual trauma at the hands of someone he previously trusted.

Quick continues to use indirect language as Leonard reveals the truth about his experience with sexual violence. Instead of referring to Asher's actions as sexual assault or rape, Leonard describes it as "what he wanted me to do" or "what was happening" (186). Quick's

language adequately reflects the medium of young adult literature, as not only is graphic sexual language considered unfit for an adolescent audience, but often, this type of audience is uncomfortable speaking about sex explicitly. Therefore, as Leonard is twelve years old at the time of his assault, this indirect language mirrors an adolescent tendency to avoid speaking graphically about sex while also demonstrating Leonard's continued discomfort and denial about the violence that Asher inflicted upon him. By describing it only implicitly, Leonard can distance himself from what really happened between them and does not have to address the way it continues to make him feel.

This form of coping is further emphasized as Leonard reflects on his trauma. When Asher would abuse him, at first, Leonard states that he would "detach and float above," recognizing that "for a while that was enough to protect [him] from feeling too bad" (186). By removing himself mentally from the situation, Leonard can continue to distance himself from the situation. If he does not feel as though he was personally there, he does not have to face the immediate consequences in the abuse's aftermath. This coping mechanism is present throughout the entirety of the novel through Leonard's tendency toward sarcasm. Through this ironic voice, Leonard distances himself from those around him, calling his peers "uber-morons" and referring to Asher throughout the novel as "Primary Target" (185). By doing so, Leonard is using this humor to attempt to make light of an otherwise extremely serious situation.. Consequently, he can remove himself emotionally from the impending murder-suicide he is planning.

Leonard resorts to these poor coping mechanisms partially due to the lack of parental support present in his life. His father was largely absent from his life. Having produced a hit song before Leonard was born, Ralph Peacock fled the country in Leonard's early childhood to avoid gambling charges. Additionally, Leonard's relationship with his mother is extremely

strained. Throughout the novel, Leonard implies that his mom, who he refers to as Linda, spends much of her time in Manhattan, rather than at home in New Jersey, and often neglects him in order to spend time with boyfriends.

As a result, the most influential adult figure in Leonard's life--and one of the only positive male influences Leonard comes into contact with--is his history teacher Herr Silverman. Silverman's class is a bright spot in his school day, something that he admits is largely due to the teacher's attentiveness to him. As Silverman goes out of his way to connect with each of his students individually, greeting them personally each day. Leonard admits that, sometimes, this is the only direct interaction that he receives. Leonard admits, "There have been days when Herr Silverman was the only person to look me in the eye. The only person all day long" (114). Due to his neglectful upbringing, Leonard connects to Herr Silverman in a way he is unable to with his own parents. Silverman's kindness is something that Leonard is generally not used to, and "Herr Silverman's smiles always make me feel better for some reason" (106).

Thus, Herr Silverman is not characterized as the typical male role model. He does not demonstrate the tough, emotionally distanced, coach-like behavior that characterizes prominent male figures in young adult fiction. Instead, he is portrayed as empathetic, sensitive, and caring, traits that are typically associated with the maternal archetype and female characters in general. This unconventional masculinity helps Leonard to dissociate sexual orientation with abuse when, in the climax of the novel, Leonard attempts to commit suicide before realizing that the gun he has been carrying all day is no longer functional. In a moment of desperation, he calls Herr Silverman, who immediately comes to talk Leonard down from committing violence. In doing so, Silverman reveals the tattoo he has on his arm: a pink triangle that Nazis used to identify homosexuals during the Holocaust (219).

Herr Silverman demonstrates to Leonard the difference between homosexuality and the sexual abuse that he endured. In fact, when Silverman informs Leonard of his sexual orientation, Leonard recognizes the contrast between Asher's abuse and this facet of Silverman's identity. Leonard still, however, is unable to distinguish between male-male sexual violence and homosexual intercourse. As he tells him why his relationship with Asher ultimately fell apart, Leonard reveals to Silverman that he is certain that Asher is gay. Leonard states, "[Asher's] not gay like you. He's horrible" (222). After revealing his assumption about Asher's sexual orientation, Leonard ultimately confesses his entire history with Asher to Herr Silverman, something he has not admitted to anyone.

Afterward, Silverman reaches out to comfort Leonard, patting him on the shoulder and giving him a hug. Leonard states, "He's really careful about it--cautious--but I can tell that he's only trying to comfort me. It feels right. Safe" (223). Though Leonard is unaccustomed to physical affection, he is able to reconcile this discomfort through his trust for Silverman. Because Silverman is a positive role model in his life, and because Silverman has consistently demonstrated compassion toward Leonard, this trust does not falter when he learns of his sexual orientation, though he still troublingly associates Asher's abuse with homosexuality. Through Herr Silverman's mentorship, however, Quick is destroying the link so often made between homosexuality and ma

Chapter 2

Adult Male Perpetration

Adolescent males who have been sexually abused by adult men question their identities, including their sexuality, similar to the aftereffects of perpetration among peers,

As research indicates, a crisis of sexual identity is a common after effect in adolescent victims of male-male rape. In one study presented in *Male on Male Rape*, Michael Scarce recognizes the existence of this phenomenon, stating, “No single factor is more responsible for the stigma attached to male rape than homophobia” (57). As introduced previously in this thesis, homophobia stems from the cultural fear of straying from heteronormative standards. Because boys are taught to associate masculinity with aggressive sexual nature (and with desiring sex with females in particular), this phobia has historically been based on the false ideals that homosexuality is unnatural or not masculine.

The stigma against male victims, Scarce recognizes, comes not only from the cultural fear of homosexuality but from the common misconception within rape culture that ties this type of violence with sex. Homophobia, Scarce states, only exacerbates this misunderstanding: “The cultural confusion of where sex ends and rape begins places sexual preference at the center of insensitivity, injustice, and disbelief directed at survivors of same sex rape” (57). The focus on this particular aspect of his attack often confuses a male survivor in his state of emotional vulnerability. Especially in those socialized to believe that homosexuality is unnatural or morally wrong, male victims may find their self worth directly linked with the societal perception that same sex rape is not violence but, rather, sex between two men.

As a result of perception, Scarce notes, “some men who have been raped may interpret their experiences as an act of sex, concluding they have had a homosexual encounter” (27). As a result, these victims will find themselves questioning their sexuality. Coupled with the common belief that male victims “allowed” the violence to occur, adolescent males may feel as though, because they did not stop the attack, they encouraged or influenced their attacker to “choose” them or, in some way, indicated to the attacker that they desire gay sex.

Bait by Alex Sanchez centers around this association of homophobia with male/male sexual violence. After being abused by his stepfather, Diego falls into another misunderstanding connected with homosexuality. Operating with the belief that homosexual men always sexually abuse adolescent males, he lives in fear of both being perceived as gay, as well as becoming an offender himself.

In the novel, juvenile detention forces Diego to confront his past abuse by his stepfather, Mac, who has recently committed suicide. As Diego lives out his probationary period through regular appointments with Vidas, his probation officer, he begins to come to terms with Mac’s abuse. Additionally, much like the relationship between Herr Silverman and Leonard in *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock*, Vidas provides adult, parental support that helps Diego to accept himself and to move beyond his nightmares and self harm.

At the beginning of the novel, Diego is facing charges for breaking the nose of an out gay student. Fabio is initially described as “a junior, who painted his fingernails purple, wore eye makeup, and told the entire school he was gay” (5). Fabio’s makeup and colored fingernails cement the feminized stereotype of homosexuality in Diego’s mind. In the aftermath of punching Fabio, Diego uses homophobic slurs as a method of distancing himself from being perceived as homosexual. During a meeting with Vidas, as he is explaining the reason behind his

arrest, Diego notes how uncomfortable he was when Fabio was looking at him: ““People made fun of me for it. They’d be like, ‘Fabio’s smiling at you. He wants to be your butt boy.’...So I told him, “Stop looking at me like that!” but he just laughed and said, ‘Like what?’ He knew what he was doing” (36). Though Diego attempts to explain his actions, he grows upset, escalates in volume, and calls Fabio a “faggot” and a “queer” (36). Diego is just as uncomfortable with the judgement he receives from his peers as he is with Fabio’s attention. As a result of these feelings, he acts against the feminized stereotype of homosexuality, displaying masculine violence and aggression to distance himself from this perception. Therefore, in the aftermath of this abuse, Diego’s tendency to act out in homophobic ways can be attributed to this intense fear of being called gay himself because he has internalized the shame and fright he used to feel when Mac would abuse him.

As Diego begins confronting his violent tendencies alongside Vidas, he also opens up to his probation officer about other negative symptoms that resulted from his traumatic past. In the months directly following his stepfather’s death, Diego is hit with a multitude of conflicting emotions: not only is he still attempting to hide the reality of his relationship with Mac from his mother, but he is unsure of how to grieve the man who had sexually abused him for years. He begins coping with his inner conflict through cutting himself with the shark tooth necklace that Mac gave to him. Attempting to hide these cuts allows him to focus on keeping a different secret from those around him: “the secrecy of cutting brought back a familiar feeling from when Mac had been alive: once again, Diego had begun to live a double life” (17). Managing this double life allows Diego the control that he does not have over his emotions, partially granting him a distraction from his other stresses.

Among these stresses is the lingering fear that Diego still feels, manifested in the nightmares he regularly has. Diego has a recurring nightmare that features a shark aggressively approaching him, signalling an attack. In one particular instance, Diego describes his feelings during one of these dreams. He states that “he wanted to scream, but his voice caught in his throat. Besides, who would hear him? He was alone. Powerless” (52). As Diego wakes from his sleep, reminded of his fear of Mac, he is sent back to these times of powerlessness: “he listened carefully for the sound of Mac’s cigarette cough from his mom’s room, the footsteps in the hall, the doorknob turning” (52). Mac’s impending arrival obviously represents danger to Diego, in his eyes an inevitability that he could not escape from: “Diego would retreat to his room, but Mac never allowed him to have a lock on his door” (86). These nightmares are a transparent metaphor for how Diego must have felt enduring Mac’s abuse. Not only was Diego unable to fight back against Mac, but he also had nowhere to turn and felt as though he had no one to tell. As a result, Diego’s mental wellbeing suffered, because he lacked control over his own safety. His nightmares demonstrate that Diego still feels as though there is little he can do to escape from these memories, and contribute largely to Diego’s inability to trust those around him.

Diego’s strained relationship with his mother further contributed to his inability to feel safe even after Mac’s death. Throughout the novel, Diego and his mother are in conflict with each other. As a single working mother, she grows increasingly frustrated with Diego’s behavior. However, though she has struggles of her own, she appears largely unsupportive of Diego, even when he explains Mac’s abuse to her. After learning that her husband on their camping trip raped Diego, Mrs. MacMann reacts angrily. She asks Diego a multitude of accusatory questions, including “You know Mac loved you. After all he did, how can you say such things?” and “If that happened, why didn’t you ever tell me?” (207-8). In this way, she

seems to represent every stereotype that stifles survivors' voices in mainstream rape culture. By reacting with disbelief, by demanding to know why Diego did not immediately come forward, she demonstrates the hostile environment that he confronted in the aftermath of his abuse.

Though Diego's mother ultimately apologizes to him, revealing that she had suspected abuse but instead chose to keep the peace with her husband, this conflict remains largely unresolved. The pair never truly discuss his complicated relationship with Mac, and their relationship remains rocky and mostly unchanged.

Though *Bait* is one of many in the range of young adult novels that feature poor coping mechanisms such as cutting or other forms of self harm, this novel uses Diego's expression of trauma to emphasize the fragility of his masculine persona. Because the readers have access to Diego's thoughts,--including his nightmares--this perspective shows a vulnerable side that he usually actively attempts to hide. This vulnerability directly counters the masculine exterior that Diego portrays to those around him, representing the double life that Diego is living. Therefore, his displays of aggressive masculinity are ultimately two-dimensional: they are simply a flashy distraction to what Diego fears is undesirable weakness.

Thus, when Vidas begins to gain Diego's trust, the energy that Diego puts into this relationship begins to replace his violent or self destructive tendencies. Because Diego's father died young, and his relationship with his stepfather was stained with violence and abuse, Vidas fulfilled the role of a strong male figure that has been largely absent from Diego's experience. Thus, as Diego continues his regular meetings with Vidas, the two attempt to confront Diego's poor coping mechanisms and the reasons behind his nightmares. For example, Vidas makes Diego promise that he will not cut himself as part of the requirements of his probationary period. Additionally, Vidas coaches him through more productive types of therapy, attempting to get

him to stop his self harm and confront his nightmares. Therefore, Vidas plays a significant role in Diego's healing as a redemptive adult male. By providing unwavering emotional support, even when confronted with anger, he demonstrates a trustworthiness that Diego has not experienced from the adults in his life. Diego recognizes this relationship, stating that "He felt safe with him. He trusted him. More than he'd ever trusted anybody" (165).

His trust in Vidas is amplified when he learns that his probation officer is also a survivor of male-male sexual violence. Though Diego is initially taken back, as he is described as having "a million questions" and feeling "overwhelmed simply knowing that something similar had happened to this man sitting across from him," he is ultimately comforted (165). Upon learning this information, he can look up to Vidas not only as a mentor and a potential parental figure, but he can also view him as a role model. Knowing that Vidas lived through the same type of trauma that he did, Diego is reassured in the hope that he can live through his trauma as well.

However, because Diego naturally associates the abuse he endured with homosexuality, he begins to associate homosexuality with violence and predation, something that compromises his relationship with Vidas when he sees him in public with his husband. Upon seeing the couple, Diego immediately feels offended and even frightened, as if Vidas intentionally hid his sexual orientation from him: "He'd trusted Vidas, just like he'd trusted Mac and his mom. And just like Mac and his mom, Vidas had betrayed him" (179). Though being gay is just one small aspect of Vidas' identity, Diego is unable to separate homosexuality from his past abuse.

It is only after his best friend Kenny directly points out that there is a difference between homosexuality and pedophilia that Diego begins to recognize and acknowledge his negative bias. Before letting this bias go, however, Diego accuses his probation officer of lying to him, asking him, "How do I know that you won't make me become like him?...How can I be sure I won't do

to some little kid what he did to me?” (199). As Vidas promises that he will not hurt Diego, as well as assuring him that his trauma does not lock him into a future as an abuser himself, Sanchez uses this affirmation to portray the same lesson to his readers, working to break yet another common stereotype. Afterwards, Vidas is once again redeemed in Diego’s eyes, implying an extended future of mentorship and further healing.

In novels that feature sexual abuse to adolescent males by adult male perpetrators, the perpetrator is often someone with a close relationship to the victim. This reflects the real-world statistic that most sexual trauma is committed by someone that the victim knows, rather than the “stranger in the bushes” stereotype.

Brendan Kiely’s *The Gospel of Winter* addresses this very phenomenon through his depiction of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. The novel centers around Aidan, a Catholic altar boy who is abused by priest Father Greg, a man who he views as a mentor. However, when Aidan witnesses Greg treating a younger boy as he was treated, he begins reflecting on his own relationship with his mentor and remembering initial fear and discomfort. Aidan only truly recognizes Father Greg’s behavior as abusive when he reads the *Boston Globe* one morning at breakfast and sees the infamous newspaper article that brought the Catholic Church sexual abuse scandal to light in 2002.

As depicted in the movie *Spotlight* directed by Tom McCarthy, the *Boston Globe*’s team of investigative journalists, called “Spotlight,” began to expand research on a previously published article that discussed sexual abuse in local Boston churches. While performing this research, the journalists uncovered approximately 250 cases of molestation by priests in the Boston area that had been covered up by the Catholic Church. The Spotlight team broke this

story in January of 2002. Though young girls were also abused, it is important to note that boys were the primary victims within this particular stream of cases.

As depicted in the movie, this team of reporters released thirteen articles throughout 2002 as more evidence came to light. Though more than 300 victims came forward after the first article was published, the pieces that followed contained little victim testimony. Instead, the investigation focused on the tactics used by the archdioceses to hide decades of sexual abuse within Catholic parishes as well as the key characters involved.

The first article released, however, focused on one particular perpetrator's abuse. In this article, titled "Church allowed abuse by priest for years," the Spotlight team details the timeline of then-ordained John J. Geoghan's continuous perpetration as he was transferred from church-to-church. As the Globe article states, more than 130 victims came forward with accusations of sexual violence toward Geoghan, beginning in the mid-1990s. However, in July of 2001, evidence surfaced, which revealed that Cardinal Bernard F. Law knew about Geoghan's abusive behavior as early as 1984. An archdiocesan record from 1980 stated that Geoghan's "repeated abuse of seven boys in one extended family was not a serious problem" (Rezendes et al).

The article also gave insight into how Geoghan "chose" his victims, including Patrick McSorley, a boy who was abused in 1986 at the age of 12. At the time of his abuse, McSorley lived with his mother in a Hyde Park housing project. Geoghan offered to help McSorley's mother with childcare--a characteristic grooming habit--by taking Patrick for ice cream and praying with him near bedtime. The boy's initial discomfort and confusion quickly amplified when Geoghan "put his hand on [McSorley's] genitals and started masturbating [him]" before he "began masturbating himself" (Rezendes et al). As McSorley stated to the Boston Globe, "I didn't know what to think...he said, 'we've very good at keeping secrets'" (Rezendes et al). In

the aftermath of his trauma, according to the *Globe*, McSorley fell into alcoholism and depression.

This particular case, as well as Geoghan's initial immunity within the church, are not isolated incidents. As the *Spotlight* film features, Geoghan's methods of "grooming" McSorley, as well as McSorley's reactions in the abuse's aftermath, are common threads throughout many victims' stories. Additionally, the movie indicates that priests were commonly re-assigned to other parishes, as well as given extensive sick leave and in-patient treatment to help "cure" them of their predatory tendencies. Though, in cases like Geoghan's, priests from around the country were removed from priest duty or defrocked, many were kept within the seminary, working closely with altar servers and youth groups, and protected from criminal charges.

When the confidential church personnel files became public, the *Globe* had even more substantial evidence that the church was deliberately hiding sexual abuse within its parishes. As published in the *Globe*, "The archdiocese, racked by scandal and pondering bankruptcy, is now faced with the public airing of an archive that describes in sometimes stunning detail how it acted when it learned of sexual attacks by some of its clergy" (Farragher and Pfeiffer). Not only were they hiding this sexual violence, they continued to enable the offending priests by keeping them within the public, directly working with children. This same complicity, and the deliberate covering-up of sexual abuse within a parish, is directly mirrored in Kiely's novel, as Father Dooley recognizes and disguises Father Greg's abuse as "sickness."

As the very first article on this topic revealed, Cardinal Law was highly complicit in keeping this abuse hidden. As the year continued, more evidence surfaced. As the members of the *Spotlight* team describe, he "reacted to the explosive charges by quietly transferring rogue priests to other parishes and treating them with a gentleness and sensitivity apparently unshaken

by the heinous allegations against them” (Farragher and Pfeiffer). Eventually, Law resigned in December of 2002 as the Spotlight team was completing their investigation. Inevitably, this deliberate decision by the archdiocese to hide and enable sexual violence for decades led to a suffocating environment for victims. David Clohessy, the national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, directly acknowledged these difficult conditions, as he told the *Globe* in February of 2002, “the most that victims who came forward could hope for was silence from others, if not ostracism in their parishes” (qtd in Robinson).

In Kiely’s novel, Aidan’s experience reflects the experience of McSorley and the hundreds of other victims affected during this time period. Toward the end of the novel, he discovers an article addressing this very material, published by the *Globe* the day before. Reading it, though Father Greg is not explicitly mentioned, he begins to recognize similarities between his past and these cases. When he hears that these cases are being described as “an epidemic of abuse,” he is taken aback: “*Abuse*. I had a hard time reading the word. It seemed like a misnomer, inaccurate” (230). His conflicting feelings for Father Greg gives this novel its unique place in the corpus, as they mirror real life experiences in Boston and across the world.

Long before he understands the true meaning of Father Greg’s violence toward him, however, Aidan looks up to him as a mentor. Because Aidan’s relationship with his parents is complex and distant, Father Greg filled a specific void in his life. Yet, Aidan also witnesses the abuse of James, the young boy that Greg had recently taken under his wing. Because the priest prefers to abuse boys over adolescents, he replaces Aidan with James. In response, Aidan feels as though yet another paternal figure appears to have abandoned him, and he resents James. Aidan’s past abuse creates an inner conflict: he realizes that his longtime mentor sexually abused him, but still an innate human need of feeling wanted and valued.

When his jealousy escalates, Aidan chooses to wait in the basement of the church where Father Greg used to take him. There, he witnesses Greg sexually abusing James. Witnessing James' immediate discomfort, Aidan remembers his own inability to get himself out of an identical situation: "I had just let him come up against me as I closed my eyes and sank into myself....but a glow of pleasure had washed across Father Greg's face and I felt strange and oddly important because I knew I had given it to him" (78). Though Aidan is uncomfortable with the way his relationship with Father Greg unfolds, his complex feelings reflect a common conflict experienced by victims abused by someone that they not only know but care about or love. He wants to please Father Greg because he respects him as a mentor and a pseudo-father figure. He wants not only attention but love from Father Greg, to be viewed as "special" in his eyes. Therefore, though he instinctively suspects that Greg's behavior is dangerous but because he also harbors this love for the priest who has guided him in his faith throughout his adolescence, Aidan's desire to please Father Greg, to be obedient to his wishes, outweighs his fear and discomfort.

Kiely's depiction of Aidan's abuse can sometimes seem straight out of a textbook: Father Greg's pedophilic grooming techniques and treatment of Aidan follow an extremely similar formula to the rest of the books in the corpus that feature adult perpetrators. Nevertheless, by detailing Aidan's poor coping mechanisms through substance abuse and inability to identify his relationship with Father Greg as abusive, Kiely successfully personalizes the larger scandal that affected hundreds of boys within the Catholic Church.

Thus, through Aidan's relationship with Father Greg, Kiely attempts to accurately reflect this historical moment. Because Aidan looks up to Greg as a mentor in his faith, he connects the priest's actions with religion. As a result, Greg uses religion as a way to manipulate Aidan. In a

flashback, Aidan remembers the words that Father Greg told him the first time he was abused: “This is what our Lord asks of you, Aidan. This is what I ask of you...This is love, Aidan. This is love” (70). Because it is a common belief within the Catholic Church that God can forgive sins through an ordained priest, Aidan has been taught that Father Greg is almost a direct conduit to his god. Therefore, following Father Greg’s demands is almost an ingrained instinct: if being obedient to Father Greg will bring him close to God, this obedience is a no-brainer. Though when Aidan is young, he sees Greg’s manipulation as mentorship, the reader is able to recognize a different perspective. Greg uses this mentorship to strengthen Aidan’s trust in him. He tells him, “You must believe in me, Aidan. You must believe that I love you. Everything will be okay if you have faith in this love between us. Love is God in action” (72). Because Father Greg directly links his abusive actions with God and the church, Aidan is unable to separate not only his religion but the concept of love from this sexual abuse, a factor which paralyzes him from coming forward. Because the importance of religion is so thoroughly ingrained in his life, he is reluctant to lose his connection to God.

Additionally, the other priest at Most Precious Blood, Father Dooley, hides the abuse within his own parish, directly demanding that Aidan keep Greg’s abuse a secret. When Father Dooley confronts Aidan, claiming that he’s simply wondering how he’s doing, he excuses Greg’s behavior by saying that he is a “complicated” and “sick” man (184). Overall, besides protecting Father Greg, Dooley protects the church as a whole. He states, “I’m saying we should forgive and move on...it’s religion, Aidan, and it is bigger than you or me or Father Greg. It will survive” (185). Though Dooley is acting as though religion is guiding his statements, he does so in a threatening and intimidating manner to emphasize the influence and power of the Catholic Church, something much bigger than Aidan.

Additionally, while being forced into secrecy by the men at the church, a seemingly trustworthy adult in Aidan's life is complicit in keeping his abuse a secret. In Aidan's case, because of his estranged parental relationships, Aidan often turns to his housekeeper and nanny Elena for comfort and guidance throughout his childhood and adolescence. However, as he learns at the end of the novel, Elena recognized symptoms of abuse in Aidan's childhood but did not come forward. When Aidan asks Elena if she suspected anything, she replies, "I washed your clothes. I watched him drive you home. I saw how you looked at him. It wasn't right. But you also stayed, m'ijo. You stayed. God has his reasons for all things, and I believe in him. I will always trust in him" (269). Inside her unwavering faith, Aidan undoubtedly sees flaws within his own. The same religion that Elena, the woman who had a great hand in raising Aidan, forever trusts in is the very religion that brought Aidan to his abuser. Just as Father Greg and Father Dooley had used religion to manipulate him into abuse and secrecy, Elena is using it to excuse her complicity. Aidan's experience reflects that of this particular population of sexual abuse victims, many of whom were brought up in families whose traditions revolve around a strict religious culture only to find themselves doubting this faith and therefore doubting the groundwork of their lives.

Readers see Aidan's desire for faith when he continues to return to the church, to seek his company. However, though he desires Father Greg's attention, he simultaneously cannot shake the negative feelings spurred by witnessing James' abuse. These feelings begin to bleed into every aspect of Aidan's life, including his social life, affecting his mental state even further. In one particular instance, Aidan is attending a party to celebrate New Year's Eve with his friends. Though he is surrounded by others who are all having fun, he begins to feel alienated, unable to stop his mind from straying to thoughts of Father Greg and his abuse: "I still felt a hole widening

within me. I shouted ‘Three minutes!’ with everyone else, and yet that hole was like the tunnel left behind by something burrowing within me” (133). As this hole widens inside of Aidan, it begins to separate him from the party he is currently attending. This forces Aidan to dissociate from the party, recognizing that he is not truly living in the moment. He states, “It was like there were two Aidans at the party: the one stomping and shouting and chanting ‘New Year, New Year, New Year!’ and the one standing quietly in the darkness, listening to Father Greg, being told how the secret makes it meaningful” (133). Here, Aidan directly addresses the double life that he is attempting to live. Remembering the negative feelings caused by Father Greg, despite being told that he is special and that this priest can connect him to God, he feels different from those around him, though he is going through the motions of an average teenage lifestyle.

In a similar pattern to the other novels, Aidan’s abuse also begins to impact his relationships, especially when he begins spending time with a classmate, Mark. Their friendship shines a light on yet another individual story of abuse within the Catholic Church. When Aidan and Mark grow close, Aidan learns not only that Mark is gay (something that leads him to question his sexuality himself), but that he was also abused by Father Greg. Here, Kiely seems to be arguing against the frequent misconception that connects homosexuality with male/male sexual abuse. Mark also expresses the difference between his abuse and his own sexuality, “Father Greg told me it was love...but it wasn’t right with Father Greg. What I feel right now, and what I also *know* right now, is that I like guys. He didn’t love me. I thought he did, but it wasn’t love. But I could love another guy. I know that, too” (204). Again, Mark’s character seems to serve a specific representative purpose within Kiely’s novel by his explicit differentiation between homosexual love and sexual abuse. Whereas Aidan’s character was conflicted through his desire to please Father Greg as a parental figure, Mark’s character was

equally struggling to reconcile his natural attraction to men with Father Greg's abuse, violence that might appear to look like gay sex from an uninformed perspective. Thus, Kiely uses Mark as not only reflection of this commonality but a confirmation that this perceived connection is a myth, giving those victims who are gay an ability to recognize and validate themselves within the novel.

Chapter 3

Adult Female Perpetration

In comparison with other populations of male victims, there are far different stigmas and stereotypes that surround adolescent boys who are abused by older female perpetrators--attitudes that excuse and dismiss traumatic behavior.

Though many researchers have addressed these attitudes, they are clearly and concisely explained in the book *The Male Survivor: the Impact of Sexual Abuse* by Matthew Parynik Mendel. The primary purpose of this book is to present Mendel's research of the first national study of male survivors assembled through questionnaires and personal interviews; however, Mendel first uses the research of other scholars to present the history of male sexual violence, including the underrepresentation of male victims of female perpetrators.

In this section of his book, Mendel discusses the common assumptions society has that surround not only female perpetrators, but women in general. For example, he notes that, due to the typical "softer" construction of femininity and the socialization of young girls to be meeker and mild-mannered, the sexuality and aggression of females is often denied (25). Therefore, because women are often viewed as far less violent than men, the idea that they could commit acts of sexual violence is similarly dismissed. Additionally, Mendel recognizes the ideas of doctors Groth and Kast, who further asserts that this population of victims is less recognized because of the variance in nature between women and men, which results in different forms of abuse. He notes that because female perpetrators often abuse by "caressing, fondling, inappropriate bathing, seductive or exhibitionist behavior, and so forth, rather than the acts of penetration and violence," these practices are often deemed more acceptable by the public, and

even, sometimes, celebrated (28-9). He goes on to emphasize this point, recognizing the “grateful” stereotype often seen in movies like *The Graduate*, where an impressionable younger male is seduced and “instructed” by an older woman characterized with experienced sexual skill. He notes that this type of relationship, even when between an adult woman and an adolescent boy is, “often glorified or seen as sort of an ‘initiation’ of the ‘fortunate’ boy into manhood” (29). Lurlene McDaniel’s *Prey* portrays this same problematic glorification of the teacher-student “forbidden love affair.” Her protagonist Ryan, at the end of the novel, chooses to pursue a long-term relationship with his teacher, despite her conviction for child sexual abuse.

These attitudes, Mendel notes, creates a double standard within rape culture. He directly quotes F.G. Bolton, L.A. Morris and A.E. MacEachron, as they state, “Age discrepant heterosexual contact with young females is viewed with disdain at best and sexual abuse at the worst. The same situation involving a young male be seen as an introduction into sexual prowess and manhood” (qtd in Mendel 30). Though Bolton et al.’s observation holds true for the relationship between adult women with younger men, this same age gap between older men and young women is not always viewed with disdain. Perhaps most prominently symbolized by Hugh Hefner’s infamously lavish and often envied lifestyle, American society often fetishizes the sexuality of a “barely legal” 18-year old woman. Older men who pursue relationships with these young adult women are then viewed as teachers as well, as this age group of females is typically portrayed as naive and infinitely curious (or even as a “good girl gone bad” stereotype),

Nonetheless, Mendel recognizes that this stigma is the heaviest contributor to the underrepresentation of young male victims: “one does not report sexual abuse when one sees instead a ‘lucky dog’” (31). Whereas male-male and male-female child sexual abuse are kept secret for other reasons, the idea that a young boy is fortunate to be sexually involved with an

older woman, even at the very beginning of his pubescent years, is unique to this same population.

This research has frequently been reflected in real life cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by adult females. In a case that made major waves in mainstream media, elementary school teacher Mary Kay Letourneau was convicted of child rape for sexually abusing her 13 year old student. Having first met Vili Fualaau when he was a 7 year-old student in her second grade class, Letourneau recognized artistic talent in Falaau when he entered her sixth grade class as a 13 year-old. The pair began to develop a close emotional relationship as she mentored him, a bond that quickly developed when the school year grew to a close . As Letourneau told Barbara Walters in a 2004 interview, Fualaau had directly asked her if she would ever have an affair, confessing that he was in love with her. Though Letourneau attempted to hide her growing attraction to her student, she admits to Walters that she reciprocated this “love,” and their “relationship went from emotional to sexual” in the summer following his sixth grade year, when Falaau was just a year and a half older than her oldest son (“2004: Barbara Walters’ Exclusive Interview). Ultimately, Letourneau was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison after pleading guilty to child rape and violating her parole. Shortly after she was released, having given birth to two children with Falaau, they got married. Though Letourneau and Fualaau have recently separated, their relationship remains perhaps the most recognizable real-life case of an adolescent male sexually coerced by his adult female teacher.

The media coverage of the abuse, which catered to an already fascinated audience, reflects these same ideals: outlets from not only Seattle but across the country referred to Letourneau as the teacher who “had sex” with her student. Phrases such as “illicit” or “forbidden love affair” were often used as well (Letourneau and Fualaau). By using the words “love” and

“sex,” with most media outlets failing to use terms such as “sexual abuse” or “rape,” their language portrayed the story as a thrilling secret. Thus, these journalists continued to perpetuate the idea that Letourneau’s relationship with her 13 year old student was one based in love and good intentions. In doing so, they perpetuated the myth that their age difference is acceptable because the older perpetrator is a woman and failed to recognize or acknowledge the true abuse beneath the story.

Journalist Barbara Walters is no exception to this type of coverage. Walters had exclusive access to interview Mary Kay Letourneau twice, in 2004 when the recently married Letourneau was released from prison after seven and a half years, and again after the couple’s ten year anniversary in 2015. Though in both interviews she asks probing questions, Walters ultimately approached their relationship as, in her words, a “sex scandal.” Referring to Falaau as Letourneau’s “young lover,” as seen in these televised interviews, Walters leans in interestedly, asking, “What’s the marriage like? Fill me in” (Letourneau and Fualaa). As a result, Walters’ interview is reminiscent more of a celebrity gossip segment than one that presents a serious case of sexual trauma.

Nonetheless, her investigative journalism reveals a reality that accurately reflects Mendel’s research, particularly in the dynamic that presents itself throughout their 2015 interview. When asked about how his attraction to Letourneau began, Fualaa admits, “I was her second grade student. I thought she was very pretty. I thought she was like a movie star” (Letourneau and Fualaa). Through this statement, Falaau subconsciously acknowledges that, at the time, he idolized his teacher. Therefore, when Letourneau began to reciprocate this infatuation, the sexual relationship that resulted appeared to be more of an accomplishment and less of a coercion. In the public eye, just as Mendel indicated, Fualaa seemed to be growing

into manhood, rather than facing a traumatic and abusive relationship. This idea was further emphasized when he impregnated Letourneau both at age 14 and at 15.

Additionally, Fualaau reveals more about his struggle with mental illness in the years before and during, indicating his ultimate dependency on Mary Kay Letourneau. This dependency further emphasizes their unequal dynamic: Fualaau seems to rely on Letourneau for his happiness, and the audience knows that this relationship began when his brain was not fully developed. Therefore, Letourneau's careful development of their relationship seems like the careful manipulation of an emotionally vulnerable pubescent boy, rather than "love" between two consenting parties.

Similarly, these same attitudes have been reflected across popular culture platforms, including within young adult literature. *Boy Toy* by Barry Lyga centers around Josh Mendel, a senior in high school who was sexually abused by his history teacher when he was in seventh grade. With the news that his abuser, Eve, is being released from prison comes disturbing flashbacks, and Josh is forced to face his past, coming to terms with his sexually coercive relationship with Eve.

Boy Toy is the most sexually explicit book in the corpus, as Lyga details specific instances of abuse between Josh and Eve. Graphic language is used to demonstrate the depth of the effect sexual abuse has continued to have on Josh's physical and emotional development, even after his abuser is convicted.

At the beginning of the novel, the news that his former teacher Evelyn Sherman is getting out of prison forces Josh to reflect on the sexual abuse he endured in middle school. He flashes back to seventh grade, as a twelve year-old. From the very first time Josh sees Eve (then "Mrs. Sherman" to him) she is immediately depicted as extremely attractive. His descriptions of her

are based purely on sexual allure, as he notices first her long black hair, then her chest, then her “red lips, full and soft-looking,” (106). These descriptions are classically seductive, drawing Josh in. Based on black and red, colors most often associated with lingerie and lust, Eve is immediately associated with sexuality. However, though Josh’s descriptions are very sexually based, they are depicted as cartoonish and exaggerated. His reactions are overtly childish, reminiscent more of a pubescent boy than of a potential lover. Josh acknowledges his inexperience as well, stating, “I was a typical American adolescent male--I had zeroed in on any number of chests and rear ends in my life, but Mrs. Sherman’s were the first hips to make me go, *Wow!*” (108). Because Josh identifies himself as “typical” and “adolescent” as well as admitting that he is attracted to hips for the very first time, the reader can clearly see his difference in age from Eve. Hips are associated not only with child-bearing but with the standard, centerfold ideal of voluptuousness, and, as a result, Eve is characterized as a capital-W Woman, different from any other “girl” Josh has been attracted to previously. Thus, Josh’s masculinity is displayed as a conventional youthful boyhood: he’s experiencing the natural results of puberty through his hormonal attraction to Eve.

This superficiality is something that his parents recognize after their parent-teacher conference with Eve. When Josh admits to them that Eve is his favorite teacher, his dad chuckles “like he knew a secret,” and his mom responds with “yeah, I bet” (114). His parents naturally dismiss Josh’s feelings as just a crush. After all, it is “expected” (and heteronormative) for a young boy to have a crush on his pretty teacher. Thus, Josh’s parents have no reason to distrust Mrs. Sherman. However, because Josh is young, with a mind clouded by hormones and inexperience, he desires the closeness that Eve is offering, making it easier for her to manipulate him. Though her behavior is predatory, Josh is unable to recognize it as such, not only because

of his attraction to her but also because it disguised with a kind of motherly care. Eve takes him out to dinner, drives him home from school, and makes him snacks after school, acting more as a parent than a lover. Additionally, Eve is aware that Josh is attracted to her, something that makes her maternal nature toward him all the more disturbing. Later on, Josh recognizes this contradiction himself, when Eve calls to check in with his mother: ““He’s a terrific little helper,’ she would say in complete innocence, usually while we were half-naked together on the sofa or floor” (206).

Nevertheless, Eve uses his attraction to initially gain Josh’s trust, and through this trust, she is able to easily manipulate him. Eve first brings Josh to her apartment alone when he is stranded at school during a snowstorm, and she continues bringing him over under the pretense that he is helping her with a project for her Master’s degree. However, Eve begins grooming Josh from the very first time that he enters her apartment. When she accidentally swears in front of Josh, she says, ““Our secret, right?”” (125). Lyga is indicating to the reader that this is a deliberate power move by Eve. Josh likes having a secret with a beautiful woman; it inflates his ego, setting him apart from his peers in his own mind. Because Eve pledged him to secrecy with, Josh feels like he must be more mature, and therefore more masculine, than the rest of his classmates.

This manipulation intensifies as Eve starts to pursue a sexual relationship with Josh. Not only does she implore him to keep everything a secret, but she also continues to prey on his desire to appear more mature than he actually is. On the day that Josh describes as “the day everything changed for good,” he turns on Eve’s Xbox, revealing pornography instead of the usual video game he plays after school (157-8). When she found out what Josh had discovered, Eve acts shocked and embarrassed, but she quickly uses the video as a means to begin a physical

relationship with Josh. She questions him in a seemingly innocent way about how the porn made him feel, asking, “Did it make you think of anything? Or anyone?” (173). This line of questioning quickly escalates, and Eve eventually kisses Josh, officially changing their relationship. Eventually, Josh watches the pornography in full with Eve. As Josh notes, much of what is happening on the screen is familiar to him, “except for when they pressed together, as close as Eve and I had pressed, but without clothing... ‘I want to do that,’ I whispered” (207). In response, Eve once again acts as a teacher to Josh: “She held me tight to her and kissed me long and deep... ‘I’ll teach you’” (108). Even in these circumstances, Eve is acting as an authority figure to Josh. Though she treats him as an equal and “adult” to gain his trust, she must instruct him, and, by doing so, she exercises ongoing control over him.

As Josh begins to feel guilty about the sexual abuse, Eve continues to use this teaching role to her advantage, telling him, “Look, we’re making each other feel good. Like when you play with your friends. When you play baseball, you feel good right?... This is like that... but it’s just for us, ok? This is for grown-ups, and you’re so grown up that it’s ok” (193). Eve is making Josh feel like he is her equal, blinding him from the reality of the situation. She makes him feel as though he has agency in their relationship, a factor that Josh continues to believe throughout the entirety of the novel.

Eve’s manipulation continues to affect Josh, even six years later. Because Eve ingrained the idea of proving one’s love for someone through sexual favors into his mind, Josh is unable to separate physical affection from sexual feelings in his interactions with all other females, including his mother. When Josh learns that Eve is being released from prison, Josh’s mother attempts to comfort him: “Suddenly I’m being hugged by my mom for the first time in years... but I end up crushing her to me, flattening her breasts against my chest, too aware of

them, letting go--” (26). In a way, Josh’s sexual education was stunted: even with his own mother, he cannot separate an act of physical affection from sex.

Eventually, his relationship with Eve comes to light when readers see the impact of Josh’s abuse in the aggressive nature of his sexuality, so unlike that of his peers. When Josh is invited to a party after he turned thirteen, he is pulled into the closet with his friend, Rachel, during a game of spin-the-bottle. Though he describes Rachel as “the first girl [he] noticed when [he] started noticing girls in fifth grade,” Josh is generally uninterested when Rachel tries to kiss him (7). However, after some persuasion, Josh mimics the same actions that Eve has trained him to perceive as normal sexual behavior. His aggressive actions reveal his sexual experience, and Rachel is reasonably scared and pushes him away. As Rachel runs away and Josh’s best friend Zik asks him what happened, Josh comes back to consciousness: “I hardly knew...I was clutching Rachel’s panties, the edges torn and shredded” (297-8). The aggressiveness of Josh’s actions is in direct contrast with the normalcy of the situation. Four thirteen year-olds playing spin-the-bottle should have been a light-hearted middle school experience for Josh. Instead, it demonstrated that Josh has had sexual experiences beyond that usually encountered by a boy his age. This incident reveals to his parents that he was abused.

Unfortunately, Josh is unable to recognize that his relationship with Eve was abuse, and, as a result, feels resounding guilt even five years later. In the moment, Rachel’s family was quick to blame him, only seeing the immediacy of the situation. Josh internalized this guilt, not questioning his victimization of Rachel. Since their violent encounter, Josh has not interacted with Rachel, avoiding her place of employment if he knows she is on the clock, and refusing to spend time with her, though her best friend is dating Zik. The thought of speaking to her paralyzes him with anxiety, exemplified when he accidentally runs into her at the grocery store.

Josh freezes, “wondering with sick horror what she’ll say” (42). Though their relationship slowly evolves to friendship and then romantic love as the novel progresses, Josh struggles with this guilt alongside the guilt that he was personally responsible for ruining not only Eve’s marriage but her life.

Josh comes to this conclusion not only because of Eve’s manipulation and testimony, but also by her husband’s reaction after his abuse came out. George comes to Josh’s house after the trial, violently confronting Josh. He tells Josh, “You little fucking perv! This is your fault! You ruined my marriage! You fucking piece of shit!” (341). After George physically beats him, Josh feels guilty for the actions of which George accuses him. Josh’s guilt is further emphasized by his father’s reaction. As George is attacking him, Josh sees his father standing at the door: “Dad stood there for a second, frozen, as George kept hitting me, popping my nose” (341). Though his dad is later one of the voices telling him that it is not his fault, because Josh sees his father hesitate, his self-blame is emphasized. He feels as though he is deserving of the physical pain that George and that those around him see the situation the same way. Continuing this thought process, Josh begins isolating himself in school, cutting out everyone except for Zik, who, as Josh notes with gratitude, “has never asked about it” (21).

Josh accepts the blame until his very last interaction with Eve, when he goes to see her after she is released from prison. He tells her, “I ruined your marriage. I ruined your life!...I took advantage of you” (396). Josh has not spent the duration of Eve’s conviction reflecting on his abuse; rather, he spends it guiltily attempting to forget what he sees as an illicit affair that he initiated. His mind is only changed when he asks Eve when she decided to abuse him. She answers, “The day we met, Josh. The first time I laid eyes on you...there was no grad school project...I made the whole thing up so I would have an excuse to bring you to my apartment and

keep you there” (398-99). Here, Lyga is emphasizing the abusive, one-sided power dynamic between Eve and Josh. Though the entirety of the book is based on the dramatic irony that the reader recognizes Eve’s abusive behavior while Josh does not, Josh’s lack of agency is further emphasized when he recognizes it himself. Leaving Eve’s apartment following their final meeting, he states, “Oh. My. God. I was molested when I was twelve. And everyone in the world knew it except for me” (399).

By demonstrating the long-term negative effects of sexual abuse by a female perpetrator, Lyga successfully presents a case against the common perception that preteen to young teenage boys who are molested by older women are consenting. Due to gender norms that paint women as seductresses and men (particularly teenage boys) as sex-crazed and the overwhelming heteronormative standard that exists in America, this type of sexual trauma is often viewed and discussed as sex rather than abuse. Abuse between an adult female and a male around Josh’s age, because it is also often times less physically violent than male-on-male rape is perceived to be can be ignored or dismissed.

There is a common popular culture stereotype that a young boy is grateful and satisfied after his stellar sexual experience, and would mourn the loss of his hot older girlfriend as she is ripped away from him for a minor prison sentence. Yet, Joshua differs from this stereotype entirely. As a senior in high school, he is both extremely anxious and prone to isolation. At no point in his 18 year-old narrative does Joshua celebrate himself for having sex with a beautiful, older woman. At no point does he think back on his time with Eve as a positive memory. Mostly, he lives in fear that he will see her again and guilt in thinking that he destroyed the lives of both Eve and Rachel. The resolution of the novel, as Josh realizes that he was molested and begins to cultivate healthy relationships with those around him with Eve finally absent from his life, aptly

disrupts the stereotypes that surround young male victims of female perpetrators. Furthermore, Lyga presents Eve's character as manipulative and predatory, characteristics that are sometimes ignored in similar, real-life scenarios.

Like *Boy Toy*, the novel *Prey* features an adolescent male being coerced into a sexual relationship with his high school teacher. However, Lurlene McDaniel's portrayal of the sexual relationship between Ryan and his teacher Lori is an exploitative plot device. Though the entirety of the novel contains clear elements of both sexual and emotional abuse through Lori's possessive manipulation that isolates Ryan from his friends, McDaniel attempts to reframe this manipulation as seduction. Furthermore, the novel works to absolve Lori of blame by giving her a tragic backstory that represents her as a victim rather than a perpetrator.

Lori's manipulation of Ryan is set up in much the same way as Eve's in *Boy Toy*. Ryan is immediately extremely physically attracted to his teacher. In order to establish a personal relationship with Ryan, Lori emphasizes his difference from the rest of the boys in his class. By doing so, she makes him feel mature and masculine, establishing the trust necessary to push their relationship from professional to personal to sexual.

Unlike *Boy Toy*, however, McDaniel's novel contains Lori's perspective, allowing the readers to see the rationale behind Lori's predation. Lori's fixation on Ryan is made evident in the very first chapter. Meeting her class for the first time, Lori sees Ryan and thinks, "He's beautiful. Dark hair, blue eyes, dimples--not yet a man, yet more than a child...I stare at him and the room seems to recede. A halo of light encircles him and suddenly, I know... he'll be the One" (15). Thus, the reader recognizes the meaning of the novel's title early on: we are meant to see Lori as a hunter, zeroing in and stalking her prey from the novel's first scene. However, through McDaniel's description, Ryan is represented as a heavenly being. With the careful use of

the word “halo,” Ryan is surrounded in light, a detail typically reserved for angels and otherworldly beings. Therefore, Ryan appears to be a godsend in Lori’s eyes, a viewpoint that is both unrealistic and extremely melodramatic. This depiction of the relationship makes it seem as though the pair has the blessing of a higher power, serving little purpose except to make Lori a more sympathetic character. Since Ryan is The Chosen One, Lori cannot help but be attracted to him, and, as a result, cannot help but pursue a relationship with him.

As the novel continues, McDaniel consistently allows readers to understand the motivation behind Lori’s actions. Lori does not ever recognize these actions as abuse; she is never characterized as remorseful, or even aware that her actions are predatory. Rather, her deliberate manipulations are painted as seductive. She admits early on, “I knew that, with planning, we’d be at this place where we are tonight. Ryan, with me, in my bed” (81). By recognizing In one particular instance, Lori recognizes her overwhelming attraction to Ryan, stating, “He always makes me want him” (151). Here, Lori seems to blame Ryan for this attraction, again portraying her “seduction” as inevitable. He is irresistible to her, and any attraction that she may feel for him is a result of the things that *he* says and does. As a result, Lori does not seem to be “the bad guy” in Ryan’s story. Other factors are always to blame for her abuse of Ryan, a trend that is even further exemplified in the final chapter of the novel when McDaniel reveals that Lori is a victim of abuse herself.

However, it is a result of Lori’s treatment of Ryan throughout *Prey* that, in another similarity to Josh in *Boy Toy*, he begins to recognize the appeal of power and control in sexual relationships. Like Josh, Ryan’s first sexual experience is somewhat submissive; Lori never truly exits her role as Ryan’s teacher, even outside the classroom, and, as a result, her control over Ryan continues to escalate as their relationship deepens. However, Ryan seems to

internalize this control as appealing in a relationship, consciously noting the pleasure he feels from being in control. Ryan's assertion of power seems to ultimately spawn few negative consequences, something that contributes to the problematic ending of the novel.

It is perhaps due to this heightened masculinity and desire for control that Ryan's narrative voice seems to change in the final chapter. He appears arrogant and standoffish, unlike his prior characterization as nervous and hesitant. On multiple occasions as the novel progresses, Ryan is able to recognize the flaws in his relationship with Lori. Ultimately, Ryan's relationship with Lori is reframed as consensual seduction, though the entirety of the novel up to that point had portrayed its abusive qualities.

In one pivotal scene as Ryan's relationship with Lori continues to persist, he notices how his old life differs from the changes that have occurred. When Ryan tells Lori that he plans to see his friends from school, she requests that he "forget them," telling him, "You don't need them. We have each other. Aren't I enough for you?" (122). In response to Lori directly taking advantage of the trust she gained in Ryan, his internal response demonstrates the superficial nature of this trust. He thinks, "I wish I had the guts to tell her I'm afraid of being totally cut off from all the other things that mattered in my life until she came along. I'm afraid to even mention going to the girls' basketball game on Friday night, then out for burgers and a movie" (122). Ryan explicitly expresses his fear of Lori, demonstrating the depth of her manipulation of him. In other words, Ryan fears the consequences, should he not follow her demands.

As the novel progresses, Ryan continues to recognize this behavior as problematic because Lori grows increasingly possessive of him. As he begins to grow apart from his friends, he recognizes the difference between their behavior and Lori's possession: "They don't analyze every word I say. Or have a breakdown if I want to do something they don't want to do" (129).

Though hanging out with his friends provides some relief from Lori's manipulation, Ryan feels guilt when he spends time with people his own age. He states, "Only thing is, when we go out and do stuff together, I feel as if I'm cheating on Lori. (129). This passage is another indication of Lori's ultimate emotional abuse of Ryan. At the end of the novel, this facet of their relationship is the only indication of abuse that McDaniel does not attempt to neatly tie up. At the end of the novel, McDaniel problematically resolves the negative consequences of their relationship by revealing that the age of consent where Ryan lives is 16. As a result, Lori can only technically be charged for her abuse of Ryan when he was 15, which is conveniently a very small portion of the novel. Nevertheless, because she so openly relies on him for her happiness, their relationship remains abusive. Though he is technically consenting according to McDaniel, Lori's unhealthy isolation of Ryan is highly problematic.

In the final chapter, which takes place after Lori's release from prison, all of the problems that presented themselves throughout the novel are quickly and conveniently resolved. As Ryan reflects on the long-overdue therapy he and his father are receiving to cope with his mother's suicide (a plot point that simply adds to Ryan's unhealthy attachment to Lori, the only adult female figure in his life), he states, "Therapy is helping Dad, but I'm bored with all the psychobabble, so I sit and nod and pretend I care. Mom killed herself. It happened. Ancient history. I grew up, went after something I wanted. No one seems to get that part" (189). Though this could be read as McDaniel's attempt to demonstrate the depth of which Lori's manipulation succeeded, Ryan's original thought is supported when he reveals that sixteen is the age of consent in Georgia, so "the system could only get her for having sex with me when I was fifteen" (189). Therefore, McDaniel portrays Ryan's ability to consent as fairly stable. He not

only admitted that he desired a sexual relationship with Lori, but he conveniently reveals that he was old enough to consent to this relationship almost from its very start.

Additionally, Lori's background as an abuse victim herself seems to be included simply for convenience as well. Ryan reveals: "I learned that Lori was sexually abused by her father. Her mother knew but didn't protect her. Classic breeding ground for her obsession with young boys, the doc says. 'It's about control, not sex,' [the doctor] told me. Whatever" (191). He also goes on to state, "Lori is bipolar--something that her attorney used in court to her advantage. She suffers from depression and then swings into manic high gear" (191). Though McDaniel could have sensitively included Lori's history of abuse to thoughtfully discuss mental illness or the stereotype that all victims grow up to be abusers, she does not do so. Instead, these facets of Lori's character are exploitatively used as the scapegoats for perpetration of sexual violence. By blaming a history of abuse and bipolar disorder for the rape of multiple young boys, McDaniel plays into these stereotypes rather than disrupting them, adding to the social stigmas that surround two populations: the sexually abused and the mentally ill. This characterization becomes even more problematic when Ryan reveals, "But Lori's taking meds now, and they're supposed to be helping her control her moods" (192). Again, McDaniel seems to be conveniently writing off Lori's perpetration as just a symptom of bipolar disorder, something that can be easily fixed with medication. This detail further adds to the problematic nature of the novel's conclusion: ultimately, the desire to sexually assault others does not simply stem from mental illness, nor can it be quelled with a prescription.

McDaniel's easy solution of choosing a state with a lower age of consent--and her ultimate portrayal of Lori and Ryan's relationship as one of forbidden love rather than abuse--contribute to what is overall an exploitative and harmful portrayal of sexual violence. Unlike Lyga's

disruption of the stereotypes that surround male victims of female perpetrators, McDaniel perpetuates the idea that these types of relationships contain love and healthy attraction rather than manipulation and sexual coercion.

Following the final chapter, McDaniel makes a statement regarding the content of the novel. In this statement, she calls attention to the commonality of sexual violence, while also discussing the likelihood that a boy in Ryan's shoes would endure long-term emotional trauma. Clearly, in McDaniel's eyes, *Prey* is a didactic novel about the dangers of sexual abuse. The novel does not actually read this way, however. Instead, by presenting Ryan's abuse with a happy, neatly-tied ending, McDaniel constricts the space for real-life male victims of sexual violence into a mere stereotype. Ryan found love with his abuser and plans on pursuing a relationship with her after her release. Therefore, his existence as a character undermines the voices of victims who, like Joshua in *Boy Toy*, are emotionally damaged and resentful of their abusers.

Conclusion

The novels in the corpus of this thesis point to the similarities between the experiences of male victims of sexual violence, regardless of the gender/sex/age of their perpetrators. That being said, each novel works to highlight different stigmas and challenges that male victims battle in the aftermath of their abuse. Whether this abuse is a one-time assault, like Ronnie's rape in *Leverage*, disguised as heteronormative sex, such as Joshua's experience in *Boy Toy*, or a consistent pattern of molestation similar to Aidan's trauma in *The Gospel of Winter*, each adolescent is faced with both internal struggle and judgements from those around him. As the victims represented in the corpus encountered insensitivity and disbelief, they were often placed into superficial stereotypes by their parents and peers. These stereotypes, based largely in the expectations of masculinity that boys are conditioned to accept from birth, differ from victim to victim, depending on his relationship with the perpetrator, as well as the perpetrator's age and gender. Like the experiences of Ronnie and Aidan, male victims of male perpetrators encounter homophobia, feeling emasculated by their inability to meet the expectations of society's standards of gender. Joshua, on the other hand, represents the male victims of female perpetrators who have difficulty being recognized as legitimate victims, instead being placed into the role of naive, grateful students making their triumphant transition into manhood. Ultimately, these judgements contribute to identity crises, poor coping mechanisms, and (in the most extreme cases) self harm and suicide in the aftermath of trauma.

Each novel in the corpus ultimately adds a face and a narrative to different voices within a largely ignored population. Nonetheless, in conversation with each other, the novels serve as a relatable reference source for real-life boys who have experienced sexual violence.

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