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**RAPE CULTURE AS PRESENTED IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE:
THE ROLE OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE IN THE PREVENTION,
CAUSATION, AND EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Jada Gohdes

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RAPE CULTURE AS PRESENTED IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE:
THE ROLE OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE IN THE
PREVENTION, CAUSATION, AND EFFECTS
OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

by

JADA GOHDES

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April 24, 2020

ABSTRACT

RAPE CULTURE AS PRESENTED IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE:
THE YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE ROLE IN THE
PREVENTION, CAUSATION, AND EFFECTS
OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Jada Gohdes, B.A. English

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2020

Faculty Mentor: Joanna Johnson

Young adult literature is a reflection of Western norms and standards that allow rape culture to flourish; however, the young adult literature produced in the last ten years indicates a change in the direction and is pushing blame onto the perpetrator rather than the victim. The next change needs to cultivate young adult literature that writes into history the actions that our society must endorse. Instead of young adult literature that focuses on an ambiguous ending, as the stories do today, they need to end on the idea of perpetrators being persecuted. By doing that, new social norms will be implemented, and the effect this new wave of young adult literature will have on young adults, specifically young men, will change the way the Western society views consent, rape, and sex in general.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Defining Young Adult Literature.....	3
1.1.1 YA Literature and Its' Connection to Contemporary Issues	3
1.2 Understanding Rape Culture and Sexual Violence.....	4
1.3 Rape as a Separate Genre.....	7
1.3.1 Narrative Structure.....	9
1.3.2 Writing Justice into History	11
1.4 Teach our Young Boys	12
1.4.1 Consent is Teachable	18
1.5 Give a Voice to the Perpetrator(s)	19
2. RAPE PORTRAYED IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE	21
2.1 Support of Society (Schools and Family).....	21
2.2 Law Enforcement as a Resource?.....	23
2.3 Role of Media	26
3. OVERALL FINDINGS AND IMPORTANCE OF THESE TEXTS.....	28
REFERENCES	29
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	32

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Within the last twenty-five years, the conversation surrounding rape culture and sexual violence has transformed and entered a new arena for exploration. With many new ideas surrounding rape, assault, harassment, and stalking, there have been various opinions and routes that are being explored on how to combat these issues; however, there is a lack in the connection between the fields of academics, societal norms, and the attitudes of younger generations. There has not been an exponential amount of research between the field of literature and its connection to rape culture, in fact, there were less than ten sources, and from that, only a few were scholarly. This is not an area that is examined because the conversation surrounding rape and sexual violence has started to come to fruition, or the idea of connecting rape to literature is too provocative, but it could also be both.

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the ways in which literature, specifically Young Adult Literature, YAL, reflects a society that condones and supports rape culture but also constructs a dynamic to oppose that in which it supports. Challenging oppressive norms and standards inspires and educates younger generations to change the dynamic. A way to connect to a younger generation is by positively manipulating the literature they read. Young adult literature is unique in the sense that it is written by adults for a younger audience. The power that writing for a younger audience holds is immense as it allows them to shape the ways in which the next generation(s) will interpret the world.

To combat rape culture, it first must be defined and deconstructed, and from there, a new genre of YAL can be created. At this point in time, YAL that involves sexual violence is separated from the rest of young adult (YA) novels and is immediately marked as a rape book, and this kind of branding loses the appeal of many readers. An important factor of YAL is that it involves situations that many young adults can relate to. If novels are not addressing situations appropriately or not addressing them at all, it constricts the knowledge that a young adult can have and therefore making it harder for them to appropriately respond when a situation of sexual violence may occur. Every day, young adults are bombarded with ways in which to do the wrong action or taught not to act at all. YAL can also be used to reinforce preventative measures. By writing novels in which victims are able to heal and have a healthy support system and the perpetrator is punished for their crime, young adults can learn the skills to appropriately respond if the situation occurs to them or another.

The first section of this analysis (I-V) examines rape culture, young adult literature, and how to bridge the two into a successful and educational manner by targeting younger generations, specifically boys, 10-18 years old. The second section (VI) examines the group of texts that inspired this analysis. These novels have been published within the last twenty-five years, and all include some form of sexual violence and discuss the idea of rape culture.

Importantly, throughout this analysis, the term “victim” and “survivor” will be used as a gender-neutral term for those who have been impacted by sexual violence and rape culture. It can be singular, or it can refer to a group of people(s). Furthermore, it is necessary to state that sexual violence and rape culture can impact anyone, regardless of

sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, and religion. It is more likely for a woman to be abused and/or harassed by a man, and that is why it is necessary to focus on teaching younger men about rape culture and how their actions impact those around them. One in six women will be the victim of attempted or completed rape her lifetime (“Types of Sexual Violence” 2020). Since anyone can be impacted, the results and findings of the analysis will apply to every gender, sex, sexual orientation, etc. However, it will focus more on the ways in which younger men can join the conversation surrounding rape culture.

1.1 Defining Young Adult Literature

It is necessary to begin by defining Young Adult Literature (YAL) when examining particular texts. YAL is a unique category of literature as it is written primarily by a group that is no longer in the category themselves, i.e., adults. Adults write novels for young adults, usually between the ages of 12-18, for the purpose of this analysis, the range will be extended from 12 to 25 as to include young adults that are regularly reading these novels as well as old enough to create change in legislation and publishing (Cart 2008). YAL can be described as texts in which teenagers are the main characters dealing with issues to which teens can relate; outcomes usually depend on the decisions and choices of main characters and include "all traditional literary elements" of typical literature (Glaus 408 *cit.* Herz and Gallo 2005, 10-11).

1.1.1 Young Adult Literature and Its' Connection to Contemporary Issues

Adults, as the authors of YAL, provide a unique perspective for looking at cultural trends and issues. They are able to look at issues through a dual lens: they see how it impacts the world they are in now, but they can still understand what it is like to be a teenager and face a situation that they do not know how to handle. Adults are able to

examine current issues and then hypothesize how these problems impact a younger generation. Even as times change, the battles that teenagers face remain the same. Common themes explored in YAL are isolation, bullying, class, socioeconomic status, romance and attraction, friendship, growing up, puberty, and identity.

Sexual violence and rape culture have become a more prevalent topic in YA novels, especially within the last twenty years. Sexual violence and rape culture have been established through the norms exhibited within YA novels, but more recent literature is taking a new look at how women are portrayed and victimized.

The texts examined in this analysis meet all the requirements established by Glaus, Herz, and Gallo and address the new conversation surrounding sexual violence:

- All the Rage by Courtney Summer (2015)
- Asking for It by Louise O'Neill (2015)
- Exit, Pursued by a Bear by E.K. Johnston (2016)
- Moxie by Jennifer Mathieu (2015)
- Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999)
- The Female of the Species by Mindy McGinnis (2016)
- The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky (1999)
- Wrecked by Maria Padian (2016)

1.2 Understanding Rape Culture and Sexual Violence

Rape culture is a society centered around accepting norms and standards that oppress certain groups of people and allow violence to occur without justice. Sexual violence includes rape, sexual harassment, incest, pedophilia, and stalking (RAINN 2020). Sexual violence and rape culture impact every gender, sexual orientation, economic class,

race, and religion. For female teens, one in four (24.7%) will be sexually abused before 18. For male teens, one in six (16%) will be sexually abused before 18 (“Lifespan: Sexual Violence...” 2020 *cit.* CDC).

Rape culture revolves around myths that a collective believes to be true. The 2014 study conducted by Victor Malo-Jauvera created a list of the most common rape myths and how many students (8th graders) believed them. If the students believed these myths, then Malo-Jauvera broke down the reason why the students believed it and, the two reasons given were that they thought the victim “wanted it” and/or they “lied” (418-20). Below lists a few of the myths that Malo-Jauvera utilized in his study (419):

- If a girl does not have any bruises or marks, she was not really raped.
- If a girl lets a boy spend a lot of money on her on a date, she owes him something.
- It is okay for a boy to pressure a girl into having sex if she has had sex in the past.
- Many girls who have sex and then change their minds after say they were date raped.
- If a girl does not physically fight back, you can not really say a boy raped her.

These myths deal exclusively with the act of intercourse itself, but there are also more subtle ways that society has encouraged rape culture, such as saying “boys will be boys” when an assault occurs or commenting on a girl’s clothing choice. In every rape myth that Malo-Jauvera established in his study, only two of the myths had over half the sample believe it was not true. For the other 15 questions, over 50% believed the victim had lied, or they had wanted it (108). Not only that, but society demands that women take every necessary precaution to avoid rape. For example, women need to be in a group, have

pepper spray at all times, and use a variety of routes to go home are all ways in which society shifts the blame to the victim rather than the perpetrator, usually male. A relevant example of this is the Stanford assault case in which Brock Turner assaulted Chanel Miller, and all blame was placed on Miller. Turner only served three months of a six month sentence because the judge did not want to feel as though he was ruining the boy's life ("Her Name is..." 2019). Instances such as this case show how corrupt the justice system is when it comes to penalizing the perpetrators. Changes need to be made from within legal institutions and the social norms in communities.

Not only does rape culture force the prevention of rape onto the survivors, but it also isolates the victim when they do decide to report. There are threats of family and friends not believing the survivor, threats of the media blowing up (like it did in *All the Rage* and *Wrecked*). In *The Female of the Species*, an officer had talked to a student assembly where he stated that the right thing to do is report, and law enforcement will be on the victim's side. When one of the characters is bringing it up again and she states: "You're too scared about ratting out your friends to report a crime so it doesn't happen, and he just gets away with it" (175). In many cases, the assailant is somebody who the victim knows, and the fear of others choosing the side of the perpetrator outweighs the thought of possibly receiving justice. Victims have become isolated by society and would rather try to focus on surviving rather than searching for justice because it would be more painful to fight than to stay afloat. When all the cards are stacked against a victim, it is easier to let the bad guys win. At least it means the victim can survive, hopefully.

Rape culture is about using any means necessary to enforce a regime of oppression. Literature is a response to the events and circumstances that make up society. Writing these narratives allow authors to expose the systems that are wrong in our culture. With sexual violence affecting young adults so frequently, it is imperative that authors use their platform to assist and inform.

1.3 Rape as a Separate Genre

The Young Adult genre is a vast genre that contains a multitude of story arcs, plots, characters, and experiences. Novels may contain scenarios of drug addiction, alcoholism, or even mental breakdowns, but those situations do not define the book. If a book, especially a YA novel, contains a scene of, or even talks about, sexual violence, it is immediately classified a “Rape novel,” “#MeToo book,” or a “feminist” novel (“YA Addresses #MeToo 2019). The concept of sexual violence is still so uncanny that it must be contained as the central point of the novel. It is hard for novels to breeze over sexual violence when introducing it in a story because it is so traumatic and because of that, the book ends up becoming about sexual violence. Again, there is a great need to write novels that contain scenes of sexual violence, but it is also okay for authors to not make it the focal point either. There can be both kinds of novels on the shelves.

YA literature written today deals with how sexual assault dominates a victim’s life; it is a trauma. There is no argument there. But the author chooses to victimize the protagonist in a way that they are no longer seen by society as a human, just a victim. Their world view, their friends, their family, their goals, and ambitions have all been tainted as a result of their sexual assault.

For example, in *Asking for It* by O'Neill, the protagonist can only understand her world in how it relates to what happened to her. Specifically, she starts to read people differently. Is the man who is hugging her going to hurt her, or is it just her brother (216)? When she walks into town, are people having mundane conversations, or are they laughing at her (189)? Her sense of paranoia is not unique to just her, but is also central to every protagonist character in books *about rape*. Every interaction is, in one way or another, a result of the attack. The story takes no other route other than tracing the protagonist's story of healing. The only story that a victim has, according to society, is *the one after their attack*. These books represent how our culture sees victims and how it ends up impacting the victim in more negative ways than positive. Rape culture places blame on the victim. Rape culture alienates the victim.

Separating YA literature which contains scenes of rape or sexual violence is another example of singling out the victims. YA novels tackle all different types of trauma, ranging from violence to addiction to murder to loss to depression and much, much more. If these aspects can be contained under the umbrella genre of Young Adult literature, then so should sexual assault, as any issue is available for discussion. In C.J. Hawking's article, "Talk About Taboo: Approaching The Topic Of Rape In YA Literature, she expresses the importance of allowing literature to speak about an array of subjects:

I wouldn't say anything "should" be in literature, just like there are no issues that "shouldn't" be talked about. I don't believe any serious issue should be off limits because these things do happen, so it would be irresponsible not to talk about them. But if an author doesn't want to tackle these topics, they shouldn't. We need all types of stories! Books that compel readers to consider these issues, and to witness

the positive and negative ways characters deal with them, is important. But so are books that are purely escapist reads (Asher 2018).

Examining sexual assault as a plot device is completely acceptable. But a majority of these novels only focus on one plot device (sexual assault as a catalyst), and it creates the image that a survivor is defined by their trauma. There needs to be a variety. These novels are not focusing on other aspects of a protagonist's life. A person is not defined by one trauma. These characters are complex and unique beings that have other ways to describe them rather than just "survivor" or "victim." The narrative structure can become more complex to these stories.

1.3.1 Narrative Structure

If a book is about healing, then yes, it is necessary to make the trauma the focal point of the novel. Just like if a character were attempting to overcome alcoholism, addiction, mental health issues, the reader would want to know what happened for the character to be at this stage in their life. An author can take the liberty to write a story how they choose, as that is their creative license. The problem is that most of these novels, however different the circumstance that lead to the assault is, follow the same narrative structure:

1. Person impacted by sexual assault, whether it is them or someone they know
2. Does not know what happened/does not understand what rape is
3. Questions how it happened/if it happened
4. Chooses to tell some sort of authority
5. Ambiguous ending

The part of the narrative that would be most imperative to focus on is the end. The beginning is always going to be the same; the readers get to know the character and understand that some sort of trauma as a result of rape culture occurred. The middle is where authors have a little bit more liberty, either the character has someone that they trust to turn to, or they do not. They either report or they do not. But regardless of what happens, the end is the same. We, the readers, do not know what will happen. Books can point to an ending, but it is never expressly stated what the outcome is.

This ambiguous ending is not a fault of the author(s) of these novels. This issue is the fault of rape culture. When a survivor decides to come forward about his/her/their story, it is impossible to predict how society, the media, and the legal system will react. An ending cannot be written because an open conversation regarding rape culture is still in the early stages. But as soon as words are written, they become history. If our society wants to create a new ending to the conversations surrounding rape culture, our literature must reflect the changes we want. The endings of these novels need to display the perpetrator being punished and held accountable for what they did and the survivor(s) receiving the resources that they need to heal. The horror that is shown in these books demonstrates how common it is for someone to be assaulted and for no justice to be served. Imagine a world in which these books were written, and the horror came from the unexpected ending of the perpetrator *not* being caught. It should be a shock to society that perpetrators are not held accountable, and yet it is not. Society has become accustomed to this kind of response, or non-response in the case of the justice system. Our society would be completely different.

1.3.2 Writing Justice into History

Writers can write to heal. But they can also write because there was something that our culture could not provide – justice. Writing should not be the only way in which survivors can seek peace, justice, and healing. In the current society, the survivor must lose more of themselves in order for a chance at justice. The twisted part is that justice is never a guarantee. The endings of these novels are “ambiguous” because there is not an ending in which the survivor wholly wins. The author of *Asking for It*, Louise O’Neill, explains why she ended her novel the way she did, and it seems to speak to how other authors end their novels as well:

... I decided to end the stories in rather bleak, ambiguous ways. I didn’t do this to be sensational or to emotionally manipulate the reader. I did it because I wanted to have an ending that was true to the narrative... They wanted to see her [Emma, protagonist] fight, to demand justice for what had been done to her. I would have preferred to see that happen as well but, sadly, it just didn’t feel truthful. Our society may not appear to support sexual violence, but you don’t need to look very far past the surface to see how we trivialize rape and sexual assault... We teach our girls how not to get raped with a sense of doom, a sense that we are fighting a losing battle.

We need to talk about rape.

We need to talk about consent.

We need to talk about victim blaming and slut shaming and the double standards we place upon our young men and women. (319-321)

As O'Neill states, she did not want to write an ending that did not seem true to society. O'Neill wrote this afterword because she had "friend after friend" come up to her and tell her what had been done to them. When she was researching for her novel, out of the twenty women she interviewed, only one had reported. O'Neill wanted to write in response to the current societal issue (319-321). One way to bring reversing the effects of rape culture is by writing into existence what the ending should be. Right now, Western culture is focused on exposing rape culture and deconstructing it, but the next step is to begin creating a culture that is healthy and just. If a cultural trend appeared, and appeared a multitude of times, where YAL involving sexual violence contained endings in which the perpetrator was held accountable, and the victim was supported, then young readers would begin acting in that way. In short, YAL authors must write into existence the direction society needs to go in.

1.4 Teach our Young Boys

Not only do the endings of YA novels need to change, but also the ways in which they are implemented and encouraged in young adults' lives. Education about sexual violence and consent should be targeted more towards pre-teen boys and teenage boys. While anyone can be victimized, there are more men who are perpetrators. Whether the victims are boys or girls, it tends to be men who are the assailants. Teaching boys about rape culture is not happening in their schools or in their homes. One of the only ways to reach them is through these kinds of novels, which they are not reading. The authors and reviewers of these novels seem to understand the need to implement these texts into young male audiences, but it is not happening within younger generations. In the reviews of the selected books for this analysis, there were comments stating the need for these books to

be implemented within the classroom and/or in young adults' lives. Below is a list of reviews and comments found in the opening pages of *Speak*, *The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture and What We Can Do About It*, and *Asking for It*.

I have gotten one question repeatedly from young men. These are guys who liked the book, but they are honestly confused. They ask me why Melinda was so upset about being raped. The first dozen times I heard this, I was horrified. But I heard it over and over again. I realized that many young men are not being taught the impact that sexual assault has on a woman. They are inundated by sexual imagery in the media, and often come to the (incorrect) conclusion that having sex is not a big deal. This, no doubt, is why the number of sexual assaults is so high...It is immoral to not discuss it with them.

-Laurie Halse Anderson *Speak* Interview with the Author

That's what I mean when I say, "We should teach boys not to rape." We should teach them they're worth more and capable of more than this narrowly defined caricature of sexuality that favors dominance and aggression over genuine human connection.

-Harding *The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture and What We Can Do About It* 46

O'Neill's powerful novel digs into deep questions about rape culture that are difficult to read but essential to consider. More graphic and grim than Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, this UK import nonetheless is an important read for mature teen audiences.

-*School Library Journey* review of *Asking for It* by Louise O'Neill

Should be ‘required reading’ for teens... O’Neill’s empathetic approach has created an important thing: a work of fiction that can help readers believe in the reality of injustice and suffering.

-The Barnes & Noble Review of *Asking for It* by Louise O’Neill

This harrowing examination of sex and sexual assault for teens and young adults... deserves the broadest possible audience, and to be widely discussed by teens, parents, and educators.

-Common Sense Media review of *Asking for It* by Louise O’Neill

Asking for It raises hard questions about how society treats rape victims in a way that few other YA books on this subject tend to do. O’Neill’s writing is unflinching in its depiction of Emma’s pain: raw and harrowing and terribly real. It is provocative in its bracing and honest exploration of rape culture and victim-shaming. This powerful book begs to be discussed, and will stay with readers long after they put it down.

-*Worlds of Words* review of *Asking for It* by Louise O’Neill

You won’t come away from [*Asking for It*] feeling happy, but you will come away from it feeling angry and anger is a healthier emotion than despair. If, like me, you’re a parent, I might advise you to buy it for your daughters, but it would do more good if I begged you to buy it for your sons... Young women already know what’s between the pages of this book. It’s the other people in that room who need to read it.

-LitReactor review of *Asking for It* by Louise O’Neill

The overarching message that must be taken away from these reviews and comments is that the people who are reading these books are not the audience who need to read them. These books need to be read by boys so that they can learn what rape culture is and how they can help end sexual violence. The blurb from Kate Harding's book *Asking for It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture and What We Can Do About It*, she talks about how our society needs to be teaching boys from a young age to not rape rather than teaching girls how to prevent being raped. This idea is presented in the reviews and comments of *Speak* and *Asking for It*. The authors and reviewers share a similar viewpoint and, if these ideas are combined, then society acquires the direction that literature and instruction needs to go in: teach boys not to rape through literature.

Teaching boys about rape culture is not just a hypothetical scenario; there have been studies conducted. The study published in 2014 by Victor Malo-Juavera utilized the book *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson to determine if literature had an impact on the acceptance of rape myths in young adults. The study used a classroom of 8th graders, and the instructors utilized class discussion, targeted questions, and reading the book itself to inform the classroom of what rape is. The study showed how the novel impacted a younger generation into understanding what rape is it is presented in society. An increase in understanding of typical rape myths occurred when these myths were deconstructed such as the one, "If a girl lets a boy spend a lot of money on her on a date, she owes him something (419)." Malo-Juavera even went on to connect the importance of teaching social beliefs that need to change through literature (421):

By showing that a literary instructional unit based on a young adult novel could significantly change students' attitudes, the results support numerous educators

who have theorized the positive effects that reading young adult literature may have on adolescents (e.g., Kaywell, 1993, 2004). By adding rigorous quantitative evidence to the growing body of qualitative and descriptive research on young adult literature, this study shows it is possible to measure the impact young adult novels can have and provides a compelling rationale for the inclusion of young adult texts in English language arts curricula. Given the burgeoning efforts in schools to combat problems such as sexual violence, bullying, and homophobia, future researchers may consider conducting similar studies using texts and instruction that may affect the aforementioned issues.

What Malo-Juavera's idea boils down to is that the most effective way to end rape culture is through preventative measures rather than damage control. Instructing a range of genders and age groups about consent, power, and sexual violence will have a much greater impact in the long run rather than focusing on just the after-effects of trauma. Our society needs to continue funding resources for the after-effects of sexual violence trauma, like counseling, but it must begin increasing its emphasis on preventative measures such as instruction and education.

Along with teaching these texts in school, there must be reconciliation between the divide of *girls'* books and *boys'* books. An article written by award winning young-adult author Shannon Hale shows the up close and personal experience she had with the division of these two notions. Hale was touring for her book, which featured princesses. One school she went to only allowed boys and girls in younger grades and *only* girls in the upper elementary grades to attend. There was one boy who hung around and waited for everyone

to leave before he asked Hale if he could have a book because he was too embarrassed to be seen by others reading a girl's book. Near the end of the article Hale states:

It broke my heart that he felt he had to whisper the question. He wanted to read the rest of the book so badly and yet was so afraid what others would think of him. If he read a "girl" book. A book about a princess. Even a monster-fighting superhero ninja princess. He wasn't born ashamed. We made him ashamed. Ashamed to be interested in a book about a girl. About a princess—the most "girlie" of girls.

Hale also talks about how readers must concede and diminish the book if it is about a girl. Her example was:

'Even though it's about a girl, I think you'll like it.' Even though. We're telling them subtly, if not explicitly, that books about girls aren't for them. Even if a boy would never, ever like any book about any girl (highly unlikely) if we don't at least offer some, we're reinforcing the ideology. I heard it a hundred times with *Hunger Games*: 'Boys, even though this is about a girl, you'll like it!' Even though. I never heard a single time, 'Girls, even though *Harry Potter* is about a boy, you'll like it!'

Separating boys and girls from types of literature is another way in which rape myths are perpetuated. Society must be encouraging boys and girls to see books as just that: books. Rape culture is impacting every area of a child's development, including the literature that they read. Literature is meant to unite, not tear apart. Separating books into girls' and boys' literature makes it easier for power imbalances to occur. In order to attack rape culture from a literature standpoint, it is not just about getting books into schools but making sure that *everyone* is able to read them.

1.4.1 Consent is Teachable

Instructors in schools talking about sex is still a taboo subject and it is a precursor for people not being able to distinguish rape from consent. Rape is the act of violating someone through physical, mental, and emotional force, while sex is the act of consenting individuals. Instructors, parents, and any adult in society can make it known that, even if they do not agree with topics associated with sex like pre-marital sex, birth control, etc., every individual deserves to be comfortable and safe in a relationship. It is necessary to enforce a culture where responses are verbalized and/or clearly understood. If a person does not understand, ask. Encourage children and young adults to ask questions if they do not understand what the answer was. Taking the consent away from another person is not about sexual desires, but about control of power. Teach kids what power is and what it looks like through literature.

The books that are being written talk about what happens when it is too late when a survivor is hurt, not believed and the popular boys are able to get away with a crime. When a survivor decides to report, the town hates them. For example, in *All the Rage*, the protagonist is berated, harassed, and abused by her community and school because they refuse to believe that the popular, cute, and athletic boy could rape someone. In order to prevent these scenarios from happening again, young adults, specifically young boys, must be taught what consent and sexual violence is. Boys today may not fully comprehend what consent is, but if we teach what consent is, then power imbalances, sexual violence, abuse can begin to reduce.

1.5 Giving a Voice to the Perpetrator(s)

The reason authors tell stories from the perspective of the survivor or acquaintance is because the perpetrator has already taken too much power. The perpetrator's voice is the one that is already heard by society, especially in the legal system, and that is why they are able to commit crimes and get away with it. Sexual assault is not about sexual urges, but about obtaining power and control over another human being. In a personal story, "Why Give Rapists a Voice?" by Jeannie Vanasco, she attempts to argue why a rapist's voice should be heard in literature. In her story, she talks about her assault by a friend when she was younger. She says that she misses the friendship that she had with him, and she wants to understand why it happened. Many survivors, unfortunately, will never know why their assailant targeted them and, the even more uncomfortable reality is that many of these cases, the survivor will see their assailant on a regular or semi-regular basis. In her article, she also talks about how the #MeToo movement has opened many gateways for survivors to talk about their experienced, but since this movement is so vast, the community should also give a voice to their rapist. Not to extend their power, but to understand what occurred for this person to commit a crime.

Vanasco brings up an interesting idea; however, this idea could easily be misconstrued and end up giving the perpetrators *more* power rather than less. All the narratives examined in this paper look at somebody who has, in one way or another, been impacted by rape culture. There are stories told from the perspective of drug addicts and mentally unstable individuals, but there are not any told from the rapist's point of view. If that happened, the result would be horrific. It would be stomach turning to hear the assault told from the perpetrator, but our young adult readers are able to read stories about

somebody murdering someone else or slicing their own wrists or some other act of violence.

If a narrative is told from the point of view of the assailant, it would follow the same pattern that our culture has: defending the perpetrator and demonizing the victim. It would romanticize the perpetrator instead of understanding ways in which society could have prevented the assailant from getting to a point where they wanted to hurt another. Hearing the narrative told from the point of view is not to sympathize with the assailant, but to understand what factors influenced the individual to get to a stage in life where they felt the need to dominate another person and take away the power of their consent. That way, our legal system and government institutions can take more preventative measures to ensure the safety of its citizens. It would be interesting to hear from the point of view of the rapist(s), but it must be end in a way that demonstrates how the rapist realized that what they did was wrong. *Wrecked* dives a little into the side of the rapist, but they never own up to what they did. They ended up leaving the school because they were worried about their reputation, and that is all the punishment they received.

CHAPTER 2

RAPE PORTRAYED IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

The texts examined for the purpose of this analysis all deal with sexual violence or rape. The protagonist is either a victim of the assault or knew somebody who was the victim. But, in all texts, the protagonist is a victim of rape culture. Each of these texts provides an extension of the conversation surrounding Rape Culture, and there are ways in which these texts are successful and ways in which these texts could be improved.

2.1 Support of Society (Schools and Family)

A majority of these novels demonstrate the unfortunate reality of many survivors; the support of the community is not healthy nor beneficial. *Wrecked*, *The Female of the Species*, and *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* had the strongest support from family and community, even it was shown in differing ways. *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* was written to show the victim's perspective of what would happen if her community did believe her. The protagonist, Hermione, does not remember exactly what happened, only that she woke up in a lake after being assaulted. Her friends, teammates, coaches, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and parents never doubted her. As the author, E.K. Johnston states, "...I was able to give her [Hermione] so much support (from other characters), she never has to worry about the things a real-life rape victim would face" (An Interview with the Author). Hermione is able to have as much time off as she needs from school and cheerleading in order to process her trauma. With the support and belief of those around her, Hermione does not let the trauma define her. In the final paragraph of the novel, Hermione states, "I

am not worrying about the people who prayed for me or about being the ‘raped girl.’ I will not be a frozen example, a statued monument to there-but-by-the-grace-God (243).” The character will not let what happened to her define who she is and who she is going to be because those around her see her for who she is, not the trauma that she went through. Because of the immense support from those around her, Hermione is able to process her trauma and grow from her experience.

YA novels look at a pre-teen and teen audience, and that usually means incorporating a school or educational system some way or another into the storyline. *Moxie*, *Wrecked*, *Asking for It*, *All the Rage*, *The Female of the Species*, *Speak*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* all incorporate the school system into their story. In all of these novels except *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* and *The Female of the Species* the school system and those in authority did not know what happened, believe the victim, or attempt to help the victim. Consequently, the victims have a much harder time coping with and processing their trauma.

The other novels discussed here do not contain any kind of support. The community and those in authority come together to poke holes in the survivor’s story and gaslight them into questioning their own trauma. While the main focus on this analysis has been on that kind of response, there is also another response that society forgets is damaging to the survivor. Outwardly rejecting the survivor and becoming a passive bystander are the same forms of denying the validity of the victim’s truth. For example, in *Wrecked*, two characters are talking about the girl who was raped. The female character is stating that a person would not act like how the survivor was acting unless something tragic happened to them. The male she is talking to responds as follows:

I'm not saying it did, and I'm not saying it didn't. I wasn't in the room with them. What do I know? But I do know Jordan [the perpetrator], and while he's definitely a douche, I don't think he'd attack some girl. It's probably more likely that things went further than Jenny expected, she felt yucky about it the next day, and now Carrie [the rape crisis hotline respondent] has her convinced it was rape. (145)

This kind of response is far too common in today's global culture. It shifts the blame to the victim because the individual believes that someone they know could never commit a crime so heinous. These select YA novels often explore how the survivor feels responsible for what happened. With acts of trauma, it is normal for the survivor(s) to replay the situation in their head and determine where they could have made a different choice ("Relieving the Heavy Burden... 2019). In other crimes involving victims, like if somebody was shot at gunpoint or they were robbed, society would ensure that the victim did not do anything wrong and that it was the perpetrator who is in the wrong. That response is not the same to those who are victims of sexual violence or harassment.

2.2 Law Enforcement as a Resource?

Asking for It and *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* include strong support systems within the legal system and law enforcement. In *Asking for It*, the police and lawyers were urging the protagonist to go through with the case as they were confident that they could win, but the protagonist ends up dropping the case because the social ramifications almost destroyed her. *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* was a very different novel in terms of the support system that the victim received. The author, E.K. Johnston, states that she wanted to create this different kind of narrative for her character, "It was very important to me that Hermione

[protagonist] have an excellent support system in this book... The police are gracious and helpful. This is not standard procedure (*Exit, Pursued by a Bear*, author's note)." In each of these novels, law enforcement and others in the legal field were supportive of the survivor, but only in one of these two novels was the victim and law enforcement able to successfully confront the perpetrator.

Two novels that had a mix between support and non-support are *Wrecked* and *The Female of the Species* because they show both side of the legal system: the side of the victim and the side of the rapist. It was difficult to determine which category *Wrecked* went in, but ultimately it goes to the side of non-support as the perpetrator is able to get away, and the victim does not receive the closure they need. *The Female of the Species* did contain an officer that encouraged teenagers to report, but otherwise, there was really no mention of that support again. It was almost effective, but it lost the touch that it needed to demonstrate the power that the legal system has in condemning perpetrators. While law enforcement and others may have good intentions, the follow up is often lacking, and the survivor is on their own again.

Many of the novels that were used for this analysis are placed in the category of non-support by law enforcement and others in the legal field. Either because the legal system obviously did not support the survivor, or they were never brought up in the first place. *All the Rage* and *Moxie* demonstrate novels where the police were in league with the school administrations to ensure that the perpetrator, who was the popular and athletic boy, never had his reputation tarnished. *Moxie* is novel focused on Rape Culture in different depictions, from school dress code, to sexist sayings, to sexual harassment from sports team members. Near the end, an anonymous girl incites a walkout because the principal and the

sheriff do not believe that the popular boy attempted to rape her. In order to receive the support that the survivor needed, she needed to find peers who were willing to help. She could not depend on the legal system and the education system to support her. In *All the Rage*, near the end, the protagonist, Romy, finally confronts the sheriff whose son she accused of raping her. She was almost raped again by another classmate, and the sheriff still does not believe her, “Alice [Romy’s mother], you want to do something about your daughter. I have *never* seen anyone so desperate for attention in my life” (304-5). Between 2% and 6% of all *reported* rapes are falsified. It is believed that nearly half of all sexual assaults that occur are never reported, so the number of false reports is much lower. As Kate Harding says, “The fact is, men are far more likely to be victims of sexual assault than of lying, vindictive women (61-75).” There are very few individuals who decide to report a false crime, yet, society looks at that 2% and assumes that it applies to every victim.

Perks of Being a Wallflower and *Speak* did not include legal enforcement, and if they were mentioned, it was not to report a rape or to go after the perpetrator. Melinda, the protagonist in *Speak*, did call the cops to disrupt the party where she was assaulted, but she did not approach the officers or report a crime. It did not occur the characters in any of these novels to reach out to the legal field as a support system because one, they did not know it was a resource, and two, the survivors felt as though there would be no support. While they were not necessarily included in the novel, they still fall under the category of non-support because it was not even an option to go to the police for the characters. There were the sheriffs who openly called the characters liars, and then there were the ones who were not there at all.

2.3 Role of Media

Media can play a significant role in the healing of a survivor. When somebody's life and their trauma is exposed to the public, the public cannot help but bring down their own judgment against the victim. *Asking for It* is a prime example of just how much impact it can have when Emma states the titles of recent newspaper articles (182-183) :

Reasons why people are interested in the Ballinacoom Case:

1. Four boys, one girl.
2. The effect of social media on young people today.
3. When will young people learn the value of privacy?
4. Should the photos of the Ballinacoom Case be admitted as evidence?
5. The Americanization of Irish culture.
6. Does "jock culture" support rape culture?
7. Does "rape culture" even exist?
8. One in three reported rapes happens when the victim has been drinking.
9. We need to talk about consent.

Emma is all over the news, and it seems like everyone thinks they know her story. When a survivor's story is displayed for the public, the public feels as though they have input into what actions the victim should have taken and what steps they should take now. O'Neill had the intention of portraying the media as the bully, which is the reality for many victims. The media helps to perpetuate the rape myths, as discussed before.

The media will usually construct an image of the victim such as Emma (*Asking for It*) being the sexy girl or Emma (*Moxie*) as the nice girl. Society enforces this notion that a person's image can justify if they should be assaulted and also if they are or are not lying about it. Article titles and titles give survivors impact the way they heal and the way they carry on with their life. Society is constantly berating a survivor(s) for the actions they took to survive. It is not fair to place the blame on someone who did what they could to stay alive during a trauma, such as sexual violence. The media could have stayed out of Emma's case, or they could have used their power to push for her justice and provide resources and support for her. Instead, they continued to traumatize and humiliate her, which happens to survivors on a daily basis.

CHAPTER 3

OVERALL FINDINGS AND IMPORTANCE OF THESE TEXTS

Exploring YAL has exposed how Western society allows rape culture to flourish. The young adult readers that pick up these books and read them in class, read them for “pleasure” multiple times, or watch them turned into movies absorb the destructive nature that our society creates. Rape culture trickles down from policies and legislation to societal norms, and it can be seen through Young Adult Literature. The literature that is being written right now is not effective enough. In order to create change in society that allows for survivors to come forward about their story, younger generations must be taught what warning signs to look for and how to handle those situations. Specifically, targeting young men and encouraging them to read stories about victims can help them develop the knowledge and sympathy that is required of those situations. Looking at the literature that has been published now is a step in the right direction. These stories end with bleak and ambiguous endings, just like the stories of survivors today. These authors have the power to write into existence the endings that should happen for survivors. YAL authors can create a cultural standard of respect and consent. Ultimately, the combination of reimagining these written stories and pursuing a younger audience is potent to the toxicity of rape culture.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jada Gohdes is graduating May 2020 at the University of Texas at Arlington with an Honors Bachelor of English. She has spent time volunteering at SafeHaven Women's Shelter and the Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center. She plans to attend law school in Fall 2021 and work as a prosecutor in the sexual assault of those over 18 division for a major city. Eventually, she plans to open a foster home for at-risk teens. Jada plans to continue her research surrounding sexual violence and commit her time to helping various sexual violence awareness organizations.

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2568-8070>