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A Culture of Rape: In Twentieth Century American Literature and Beyond

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A CULTURE OF RAPE:
IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE
AND BEYOND

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
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2016

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A CULTURE OF RAPE: IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE AND BEYOND

This project examines rape culture in American literature and society, exploring factors of rape culture through the narratives of literary protagonists and current women alike. Each chapter is grounded in a work of literature, which serves as a lens through which to analyze a factor of rape culture, and is then broadened in scope to incorporate recent court cases that have had significant sociocultural impacts. The introduction includes a critical review of rape in feminist theory, from Susan Brownmiller to Ann J. Cahill. The first chapter treats the rape of Dolores Haze and victim blaming in Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 *Lolita*, and the 2010 Cleveland, Texas gang rapes of an eleven-year-old girl, who was cast as a "Lolita" by her community and the media. The second chapter discusses the rape of women with disabilities in Elmer Harris's 1940 *Johnny Belinda*, and two 2012 cases in California and Connecticut involving the rapes of women with disabilities and the issue of consent, both of which influenced legislation. The third chapter focuses on the use of mass rape as a weapon of war in Lynn Nottage's 2009 *Ruined*, and the narratives and testimonies of rape survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where nearly 2 million women have been raped since 1998. As the literature illustrates, when rape functions as an instrument of power and control certain similarities arise, such as victim blaming, consent, and the use of rape to demoralize and subjugate women, all of which are primary features of rape culture.

KEYWORDS: American Literature, Drama, Feminist Theory,
Rape Culture, Violence against Women

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April 28, 2016

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A CULTURE OF RAPE:
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Chapter 1: Introduction
A Brief History of Rape and Rape Culture
in Feminist Theory from 1975 to 2001

In 2010, an eleven-year-old girl was gang raped in Cleveland, Texas by at least twenty boys and men over a period of three months. Despite her young age, the media coverage focused on the provocative way the girl dressed and the fact that she often socialized with older boys. In short, an eleven-year-old girl was blamed for “asking for it,” meaning that she put herself in a position to be violently gang raped. Her situation is strikingly similar to that of Dolores Haze, the twelve-year-old girl in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, who is repeatedly raped by her step-father, Humbert, and yet is blamed for initiating the sexual encounters. Humbert claims, “it was she who seduced me,” and for the most part his ploy has been successful (132). For example, a current dictionary definition of “Lolita” is: a “sexually precocious girl.”¹ The stories of both Dolores Haze and the eleven-year-old girl illustrate the prevalence of victim blaming in society, and are invaluable contributions to the study of rape and rape culture. In this project I examine rape culture in American literature and society, exploring factors of rape culture through the narratives of literary protagonists and current women alike.

Each chapter is grounded in a work of literature, which serves as a lens through which to analyze a factor of rape culture, and is then broadened in scope to incorporate recent high-profile court cases that have had significant sociocultural impacts. The introduction includes a critical review of rape in feminist theory, from the work of Susan Brownmiller to Ann J.

¹ From the 2015 *American Heritage Dictionary*.

Cahill. The first chapter treats the rape of Dolores Haze and victim blaming in Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 *Lolita*, and the 2010 Cleveland, Texas gang rapes of an eleven-year-old girl, who was cast as a "Lolita" by her community and the media. The second chapter discusses the rape of women with disabilities in Elmer Harris's 1940 *Johnny Belinda*, and two 2012 cases in California and Connecticut involving the rapes of women with disabilities and the issue of consent, both of which influenced legislation. The third chapter focuses on the use of mass rape as a weapon of war in Lynn Nottage's 2009 *Ruined*, and the narratives and testimonies of rape survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where nearly 2 million women have been raped since 1998. As the literature illustrates, when rape functions as an instrument of power and control certain similarities arise, such as victim blaming, consent, and the use of rape to demoralize and subjugate women, all of which are primary features of rape culture.

Building an understanding of rape and rape culture necessitates the study of feminist theory's contribution to the conversation. It is not enough to rely on legal definitions and legislation, although the work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the House Committee on the Judiciary are essential components in the struggle against rape. As such, I will examine rape and rape culture through the work of Susan Brownmiller, Angela Y. Davis, Andrea Dworkin, Catharine A. MacKinnon, and Ann J. Cahill. Further, I will discuss the influence of feminist theory's work on rape, including the impacts on legislation addressing rape and sexual assault.

Susan Brownmiller was not the first feminist theorist to discuss rape, but it is her 1975 book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, that is often cited as the foundational text in the field. Brownmiller's extensive treatise covers a wide array of topics, such as law,

war, history, race, and power. She believes that “rape has played a critical function” in society since prehistoric times—specifically as “a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear” (15). While it is problematic to deal in absolutes, and there are many men who do not strive to control women through fear, Brownmiller is proposing an interesting argument. “All men” represents a patriarchal society that is seeking to systematically subjugate and control “all women.” Violence against women, including sexual violence, is a weapon in this conquest. As such, “rape became not only a male prerogative, but man’s basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear” (14). For Brownmiller, rape is a weapon of the patriarchy used to control women through fear. Symbolically, rape takes on further significance, becoming “the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood” (14). In other words, in a patriarchal society rapists are rewarded for conquering women, because it is through conquering women that men display their strength and thus triumph as men.

Brownmiller, for example, discusses possible historical reasons for rape, including the practice of raping a woman to gain possession of her through marriage. Because a raped woman was no longer chaste, and was thus irreparably damaged and unfit for marriage to anyone but her rapist, a man could secure a wife and possibly wealth (including land or livestock) by raping a woman and then acquiring possession of her from her father. Today, however, that is not the case in the industrialized world. As Brownmiller explains, “Today’s young rapist has no thought of capturing a wife or securing an inheritance or estate. His is an act of impermanent conquest, not a practical approach to ownership and control. The economic advantage of rape is a forgotten concept” (377). Instead of gaining power through

acquiring a wife and possibly wealth, the modern rapist gains power by establishing his strength and manhood, which are badges of success in a patriarchal society. As a result, rape becomes “a hit-and-run attack, a brief expression of physical power, a conscious process of intimidation, a blunt, ugly sexual invasion with possible lasting psychological effects on all women” (377). Rape is an attack meant to display physical dominance in order to force women into submission through fear, a “sexual invasion” that causes physical and psychological damage. “All women” experience the psychological effects of rape because all women live in “a state of fear,” which is ultimately a fear of male violence. For Brownmiller, then, rape is symbolic of “the basic male-female struggle” within a patriarchal society (377).

In a more literal sense, Brownmiller posits that when rape is examined “within the context of modern criminal violence,” the crime of rape “fall[s] midway between robbery and assault” (377). She is not arguing that rape is akin to robbery or assault, as some of her critics have suggested. She even states, “the differences between rape and an assault or a robbery are as distinctive as the obvious similarities” (377). What Brownmiller is suggesting is that rape, when considered as a crime in a court of law, is a physical assault and a theft of a woman’s bodily integrity and privacy—“a ‘taking’ of sex through the use or threat of force” (377). And because rape is such a personal, bodily crime, there are physical and psychological effects. As Brownmiller explains, rape is “both a blow to the body and a blow to the mind” (377). A rapist’s intention is not only to violate a woman sexually, but to also “humiliate and degrade,” thereby gaining physical and psychological power over the victim and thus gaining status in society (378). For Brownmiller, this is “the modern reality of rape as it is defined by twentieth-century practice” (378).

However, as Brownmiller continues, the legal definition of rape is more restrictive. As she writes in 1975, rape is defined as ““forcible penetration of the vagina by the penis, however slight”” (qtd. in Brownmiller 378). This definition is problematic for a number of reasons. For example, it assumes heterosexual encounters in which a male penetrates a female, excluding the rape of men by women and homosexual rape. In addition, it excludes oral and anal penetration, and penetration by objects or body parts other than a penis. Finally, it casts vaginal rape as separate from other types of sexual assault, resulting in inadequate sentencing for crimes “lumped together under the label of sodomy” (378). The 1975 legal definition thus needs to be broadened to include all types of penetration, regardless of the genders of the perpetrator and victim. As Brownmiller suggests, “All acts of sex forced on unwilling victims deserve to be treated in concept as equally grave offenses in the eyes of the law, for the avenue of penetration is less significant than the intent to degrade” (378). And because the “intent to degrade” is no less present within a marriage, the legal definition of rape also needs to be broadened to include married and divorced women.

Brownmiller discusses rape within the confines of marriage, explaining that in 1975 a husband could not, by definition, rape his wife. She writes, “Rape, as the current law defines it, is the forcible perpetration of an act of sexual intercourse on the body of a woman not *one’s wife*” (380). This is because “our Biblical forefathers” believed that “any carnal knowledge within the marriage contract was, by definition, ‘lawful’” (380). In other words, a husband has a perpetual right to his wife’s body, which is secured through the marriage contract. As such, he cannot rape her—because one cannot rape what one owns. According to Brownmiller, “the idea that a husband could be prosecuted for raping his wife was unthinkable” (380). She includes a seventeenth-century quotation from Sir Matthew Hale,

who stated: “A husband cannot be guilty of rape upon his wife for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind to her husband, which she cannot retract” (qtd. in Brownmiller 380). The wife, then, “gives up herself” to her husband, which means that her husband has a right to force her to have sexual intercourse when he desires it, regardless of her will. Brownmiller calls for a “clean break” from legislation that undermines married women’s consent, arguing that rape is “an invasion of bodily integrity and a violation of freedom and self-determination wherever it happens to take place, in or out of the marriage bed” (381). Marriage does not give a husband the right to rape his wife, and the damage to her bodily integrity and violation of her rights are no less severe because she is married to her rapist. For Brownmiller, “the principle of bodily self-determination must be established without qualification” (382). The marital status of the survivor does not negate the impacts of the violation of rape. And married women do not forfeit their right to give or deny consent when they say “I do.”

Brownmiller addresses the issue of consent, challenging the notion that rape survivors must prove without a doubt that they did not consent to being raped, while victims of robbery are never presumed to have consented to being robbed. She explains, “victims of robbery and assault are not required to prove they resisted, or that they didn’t consent, or that the act was accomplished with sufficient force, or sufficient threat of force, to overcome their will” (384). This is because everyone knows that no one wants to be robbed or assaulted. And for the most part, with the exception of domestic violence, victims escape blame. By contrast, as Brownmiller suggests, rape survivors “do need to prove these evidentiary requirements—that they resisted, that they didn’t consent, that their will was overcome by overwhelming force and fear—because the law has never been able to satisfactorily distinguish an act of mutually

desired sexual union from an act of forced, criminal sexual aggression” (384). Rape survivors, unlike victims of other types of crime, are expected to prove that they are victims of a crime. They have to prove that “an act of forced, criminal sexual aggression” occurred, by proving their resistance and lack of consent, and by proving that they were physically overcome. Otherwise, their stories may be doubted. Another factor that casts doubt on a rape survivor’s veracity is her sexual history.

Brownmiller discusses the practice of disclosing a rape survivor’s past sexual history during a rape trial in order to “form a moral judgment on her character,” explaining that this practice is rooted in “old myths of rape” (386). Defense attorneys are notorious for shifting blame from the rapist to the survivor in an attempt to exonerate the accused. By claiming that a rape survivor is immoral—meaning that she has had multiple sexual partners—defense attorneys are effectively claiming that a rape did not occur, because unlike virtuous women, a promiscuous woman, who is always already open to sexual encounters, cannot get raped because she “wants it.” As Brownmiller explains, “the feeling persists that a virtuous woman either cannot get raped or does not get into situations that leave her open to assault” (386). A promiscuous woman, by contrast, gets herself into situations in which she is “open to assault”—meaning that it is her fault that she was raped, or that a rape did not occur because the sexual encounter was consensual. Obviously, this logic is flawed. Modern women tend to have multiple sexual partners, which has nothing to do with their proclivity for being raped. As such, Brownmiller calls for an “overhaul of present laws and a fresh approach to sexual assault legislation,” as well as a “fresh approach to enforcing the law” (386). Without a complete overhaul of the system, rape survivors will continue to face blame.

Victim blaming of rape survivors is unfortunately common. Victim blaming includes questions such as: What was she wearing? Why was she walking by herself at night? Why did she go into his apartment if she did not want sex? and so on. The assumption is that women can avoid being raped if they avoid dressing provocatively, going anywhere unaccompanied after dark, and entering the home of a man. Of course this assumption is false. The prevention of rape lies with the rapist, not the survivor. But it is easier for society to falsely believe that women are to blame for rape—because then one can falsely believe that women can take steps to avoid being raped. Otherwise, all women are at risk, even “virtuous” women. As such, victim blaming becomes a way to minimize the threat of rape. Brownmiller takes victim blaming a step further, explaining the misconception that women want to be raped, “that there is no such thing as forcible rape, and that it is the *will* of women to be ravished” (312). The rape fantasy genre is an excellent example. Stories generally include a lonely woman, a handsome stranger, and wild, orgasmic sex, and generally exclude fear, violence, pain, and trauma. In short, these fantasies are about having wild sex with a stranger, not about being raped. The belief that women want to be raped is misguided and dangerous, and yet it persists. Brownmiller writes, “Sometimes the idea is floated that all women want to be raped and sometimes we hear that there is no such thing as rape at all, that the cry of rape is merely the cry of female vengeance in postcoital spite. Either way, the woman is at fault” (313). The bottom line is that victim blaming is far too common. Someone will always find a way to fault the survivor for being raped. This is a defining factor of rape culture.

Although Brownmiller does not use the term “rape culture,” her work has much to contribute to the discussion. She explains that the “ideology of rape” is more than “lenient

laws” and a legal system that favors men, writing, “The ideology of rape is fueled by cultural values that are perpetuated at every level of our society, and nothing less than a frontal attack is needed to repel this cultural assault” (389). The cultural values she mentions include the patriarchal validation of men and denigration of women, which is apparent in advertisements and media, as well as in the workplace and home. The ubiquitous objectification and devaluation of women is an assault on women’s identity and sense of worth, and the repercussions are very real. Men are taught they are superior to women, which has the effect of disempowering women. As Brownmiller suggests, “cultural sexism is a conscious form of female degradation designed to boost the male ego by offering ‘proof’ of his native superiority (and of female inferiority) everywhere he looks” (389). Many advertisements, for instance, present men in positions of power over women, affirming the patriarchal dominance of men and subordination of women. Men thus see examples of their sociocultural power everywhere they look, which serves to normalize that power. Once normalized, violence against women, including rape, becomes a mere assertion of that power, an acceptable and even expected means of keeping women in a subordinate position. Brownmiller argues that “elements in our culture” promote male power over women, in turn offering men “the ideology and psychologic encouragement to commit their acts of aggression *without awareness, for the most part, that they have committed a punishable crime*, let alone a moral wrong” (391)—because their “acts of aggression” have been normalized. And if they are normal, how can they be wrong? Boys are taught “that being a male means access to certain mysterious rites and privileges, including the right to buy a woman’s body,” or to “take” her body without payment (391). In short, boys are taught that “taking” a woman’s body is a normal part of manhood, which is why we need a “frontal attack” on rape culture.

Eliminating or even reducing rape is not possible in a society that promotes male dominance over women.

While Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* is a foundational text in the field, it is not infallible. Brownmiller has been criticized for her treatment of race by Angela Y. Davis, among others. In her "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist," from her 1981 book *Women, Race and Class*, Davis accuses Brownmiller of helping to resuscitate "the old racist myth of the Black rapist" (52). Davis is referring to Brownmiller's chapter, "A Question of Race." Davis writes, "It cannot be denied that Brownmiller's book is a pioneering scholarly contribution to the contemporary literature on rape. Yet many of her arguments are unfortunately pervaded with racist ideas" (52). These racist ideas include the assertion "that Black men are motivated in especially powerful ways to commit sexual violence against women" (53). The framing of Black men as rapists is intrinsically tied to racism in the U.S. Black men are presented as animalistic, as unable to control their sexual desires, which they satisfy by raping White women, who must be protected at any cost. This protection often took the form of lynching Black men. After the Civil War, as Davis explains, lynching became a routine method by which to terrorize and thus attempt to control Black people. But the violence of lynching needed to be justified to garner acceptance. As a result, the "myth of the Black rapist" was "spawned," as a charge of rape was "the most powerful of several attempts to justify the lynching of Black people" (55). In other words, Black men were cast as rapists in order to justify lynching and other forms of violence against the Black community. Davis argues that lynching "became an essential ingredient of the postwar strategy of racist terror," along with the systematic rape of Black women (55).

Davis explains, “One of racism’s salient historical features has always been the assumption that white men—especially those who wield economic power—possess an incontestable right of access to Black women’s bodies” (51). During times of slavery, White slaveholders literally owned the bodies of Black women and men. Black women were raped for a number of reasons. Black women were raped in order to procreate and thus increase the slaveholder’s property through children. Black women were raped in order to protect the purity and piety of the slaveholders’ wives. And Black women were raped in order to instill fear, and thus subservience, in the women and their families. Davis writes, “The reliance on rape as an instrument of white-supremacist terror predates by several centuries the institution of lynching. [. . .] Together with flogging, rape was a terribly efficient method of keeping Black women and men alike in check. It was a routine arm of oppression” (55). The terror for Black women included the extensive physical and psychological damage of rape, which is “both a blow to the body and a blow to the mind” (Brownmiller 377). For the families of Black women, especially fathers and husbands, the terror included the knowledge that they were unable to protect their daughters and wives from being raped. This served the purpose of undermining the self-worth of Black men, as their abilities to perform the duties of fathers and husbands was called into question. As such, rape was an efficient means of oppression during times of slavery in that it enabled slaveholders to subjugate both women and men.

After the Civil War, rape continued to be an efficient means of racial oppression. As Davis explains, “The pattern of institutionalized sexual abuse of Black women became so powerful that it managed to survive the abolition of slavery. Group rape, perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist organizations of the post-Civil War period, became an uncamouflaged political weapon in the drive to thwart the movement for Black equality”

(51). As a weapon, rape was effective in inflicting harm on the Black community through challenging their self-worth, damaging their bodily integrity, and violating their right to self-determination. Although Black men have been greatly harmed by the systematic rape of Black women, it is the women who bear the brunt of this burden, because it is their bodies that become targets. It is their bodies that are violated. For centuries, Black women in the U.S. have been on the front lines, taking the blows of a weapon aimed at subjugating them and their families. And they are not without war wounds. As Davis writes, “Throughout the history of this country, Black women have manifested a collective consciousness of their sexual victimization” (55). As women, they face the oppression of sexism. As Black people, they face the oppression of racism. As such, Black women are sexually victimized due to sexism and racism, as well as classism.

Davis explains, “rape laws as a rule were framed originally for the protection of men of the upper classes, whose daughters and wives might be assaulted” (50). Upper-class women are thus afforded a modicum of protection. But Black women, who are predominantly of the lower classes, are deemed unworthy of the same protection. Davis continues, “What happens to working-class women has usually been of little concern to the courts; as a result, remarkably few white men have been prosecuted for the sexual violence they have inflicted on these women” (50). Indeed, White male upper-class rapists rarely face prosecution for the rapes of socioeconomically poor women, especially Black women in the south during the Jim Crow era. Part of the problem, aside from the sexism and racism inherent to the judicial system, is that economically disadvantaged women often lack access to legal guidance and adequate representation. Lawyers are expensive. And women whose households rely on their income often cannot afford to take time off from work to pursue

criminal charges, which is a lengthy process. As a result, poor Black women face many insurmountable obstacles to seeking justice for rape—and the judicial system turns a blind eye to their plight because they are “of little concern to the courts” (50). Black women are thus disempowered at every turn.

Davis, in the effort to draw attention to the problem, calls for the integration of race in the fight against rape. She states, “The struggle against racism must be an ongoing theme of the anti-rape movement, which must not only defend women of color, but the many victims of the racist manipulation of the rape charge as well” (63). Because women face intertwining systems of oppression, it is inadequate to focus the discussion on sexism alone. Race and socioeconomic class are equally vital factors to consider. And while all women face the threat of rape, the threat is not the same. White women and women of color have different experiences of rape, as do wealthy and impoverished women. For the anti-rape movement to be successful, it must consider these differences and embrace the experiences and needs of all women. Only then will change be possible, because change, as Andrea Dworkin suggests, “requires a change in power relations, a redistribution of power, an equality of worth that is socially true” (173).

Dworkin’s controversial 1987 book *Intercourse* contributes much to the discussion of rape in feminist theory. The controversy stems from Dworkin’s claim that intercourse—not just rape—is often an expression of patriarchal power. She writes, “Intercourse as an act often expresses the power men have over women. Without being what the society recognizes as rape, it is what the society—when pushed to admit it—recognizes as dominance” (126). While a close reading reveals that Dworkin includes “often” as a caveat, most critics focus on her comparison of intercourse to male dominance. As a result of this criticism, in her 1995

preface to the paperback edition Dworkin offers a clarification of her argument to refute those who misread her. She asks, “If one has eroticized a differential in power that allows for force as a natural and inevitable part of intercourse, how could one understand that this book does not say that all men are rapists or that all intercourse is rape?” (x). In other words, Dworkin is arguing that rape occurs when there is a “differential in power” and when “force” becomes “natural and inevitable” to intercourse. She presents her text as a potential catalyst for change, and seeks to address “what it means that men—and now boys—feel entitled to come into the privacy of a woman’s body in a context of inequality” (xi). As such, Dworkin explores both the issue of bodily privacy and the inherent nature of power and exploitation in acts of rape.

Dworkin discusses the story of Joan of Arc, who claimed a “right to physical privacy that was fundamental but had not yet been claimed by any woman, the right to physical privacy being essential to personal freedom and self-determination” (102). In an echo of Brownmiller’s claim that rape is “a violation of freedom and self-determination” (381), Dworkin builds the argument that an invasion of physical privacy is an affront to one’s personal freedom and self-determination. Physical privacy, then, is a right. But, she continues, “No woman had this right absolutely,” and “it barely existed as a possibility” for women” (102). This is because of women’s subjugated status. As the property of their fathers and husbands, women did not have the right to determine their physical privacy. As such, Joan of Arc’s claim to physical privacy in the early 1400s was groundbreaking, especially upon considering that 600 years later women are still required to prove that their physical privacy was violated in cases of sexual assault and rape.

According to Dworkin, a rape robbed Joan of Arc of her physical privacy, but Joan “never admitted to being raped” because doing so would have robbed her of her integrity and diminished her standing in the church (104). She would have become “nothing, no one, so low,” because in losing her virginity—even to rape—she would have lost her worth or value in society as a potential wife or servant of the church (104).

Dworkin also discusses power and exploitation in acts of rape, describing rape as a “slow murder in which terror and assault are mixed” (171). The murder is the metaphoric death of the self, which occurs through the violation of both physical privacy and “personal freedom and self-determination.” The terror is manifested through the fear of this death. And the assault comes at the hands of someone who seeks to undermine the self through domination and control of the body. This domination and control of the body amounts to a form of slavery, in that neither the self nor the body enjoys the power of self-determination. Dworkin draws on the nineteenth century work of Victoria Woodhull, who “understood that rape was slavery” in terms of “its insult to human integrity and human dignity” (135). Metaphorically, rape can be viewed as slavery in that rape denies the survivor of the right to self-determination, and robs her of her integrity and dignity. Further, Dworkin explains that Woodhull “understood that in a society of male power, women were unspeakably exploited in intercourse” (135). As such, women who are in relationships with domineering men who consider “force as a natural and inevitable part of intercourse” can be viewed as sexual slaves, forced to forfeit all rights to bodily self-determination and to act according to the sexual whims of their masters (x). Women, then, could only experience true “sexual freedom in intercourse” by “having real and absolute control in each and every act of intercourse, which would be, each and every time, chosen by the woman” (135-36).

Dworkin suggests that Woodhull's standard should replace the "consent standard," meaning that a woman should not merely consent to sexual intercourse, but should instead initiate and maintain control over the encounter, because "the woman should have authority and control over the act" (136). Without authority and control, the woman risks being "unspeakably exploited" through the loss of her physical privacy, personal freedom, and self-determination. But in a patriarchal society, giving a woman authority and control over sex is a controversial move, because as Dworkin suggests, "giving the woman power over intercourse was giving her the power to be equal" (137). And her equality undermines the stability of the patriarchal system, which requires the subjugation of women. As such, the sociocultural and political equality of women is necessary for intercourse to be completely severed from rape.

For Dworkin, sex is intrinsically linked to power, and exploitative sex is classified as rape. She explains that the institution of rape "impede[s] any experience of intercourse as freedom," because rape "negate[s] self-determination and choice for women" (143). Rape is, then, more than an assault on the body; it is also an assault on a woman's freedom, self-determination, and agency—because one cannot have agency without power over one's body. Ending rape thus requires a multifaceted approach. First, feminists must keep working to amend and introduce legislation concerning rape and sexual assault because, as Dworkin states, we need "rape laws that work" (126). And second, feminists must continue working to establish equality for women through disrupting and dismantling the power structures of the patriarchal system, from the bedroom to the boardroom to the courtroom. This is because, as Catharine A. MacKinnon explains, rape is ultimately "a problem of sexism, a problem of the inequality between women and men" (81).

In MacKinnon's 1987 book *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, she adds to feminist theory's understanding of rape. MacKinnon, like Dworkin, grounds rape in the subordination of women that is inherent to a patriarchal society. She explains that while rape "is defined around penetration," which is "what men think violates women," in reality women's experiences of violation extend beyond penetration, and it is the violation itself that constitutes rape (87). As such, MacKinnon defines rape as "whenever a woman has sex and feels violated," and posits that more women would report being raped if the "definition of rape" were "based on our sense of our violation" (82). The violation MacKinnon is referring to is more than the violation of the body. It is also the violation of the self. Rapists gain power in a patriarchal society by dominating and controlling another person—body and mind. And they are undoubtedly influenced by ubiquitous images in advertisements and the media that eroticize male domination over women. As such, dominance becomes sexualized, and normalized. MacKinnon states, "I think men rape women because they get off on it in a way that fuses dominance with sexuality" (92). This is why rape is "a problem of the inequality between women and men" (81). In a patriarchal society, men are taught that dominating a woman is sexy, expected, and symbolic of one's manhood. As a result, men who dominate women are often unaware that they are committing "a punishable crime, let alone a moral wrong," to borrow from Brownmiller (391). This is because they are merely mirroring behaviors they witness on a daily basis in advertisements and the media, which helps to explain the prevalence of domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape in a patriarchal society.

MacKinnon discusses the pervasiveness of rape in society, explaining that women from all walks of life experience rape. She writes: "rape happens to women in all contexts,

from the family, including rape of girls and babies, to students and women in the workplace, on the streets, at home, in their own bedrooms by men they do not know and by men they do know, by men they are married to, men they have had a social conversation with, and, least often, men they have never seen before” (169). Rape survivors come from every race, socioeconomic class, sex, and gender. Girls and women are raped in their homes, their friends’ and acquaintances’ homes, their schools, their places of work, and even “on the streets.” In short, rape is an unfortunately common occurrence among women. It is important to note that MacKinnon places greater emphasis on rapes that occur in familiar and generally comfortable spaces for women, as opposed to a dark alley, the stereotypical location of rape. In addition, she draws attention to the myth of the stranger rapist, adding, “Most rapes are by a man of the woman’s race and by a man she knows: her husband, her boss, an acquaintance, or a date” (81). MacKinnon’s intention is to dispel falsehoods about rape and rapists. Women are “least often” raped by strangers in dark alleys. They are more likely to be raped by their husband, boyfriend, friend, or acquaintance, at a location that is familiar to them. Once this is accepted as fact, it becomes easier to understand why many women are reluctant to report rape.

The reluctance of women to report rape can be difficult for some to comprehend. These people assume that any victim of a crime would choose to report that crime to the police. But rape is not a typical crime with a typical criminal. Rape, as previously discussed, has physical and psychological impacts on survivors. For some survivors, the violation experienced is so severe that it renders them incapable of coping with daily life, much less an invasive physical exam and hours of questioning and revisiting the painful details of the rape. For survivors who are raped by their husbands or family members, the psychological wounds

run deep, and the repercussions can be life-changing. MacKinnon offers an explanation of why many women choose to remain silent after being raped, including a “fear of retribution” and “retaliation,” a “fear that their boyfriends or husbands will beat them or reject them,” a fear “that they will be kicked out of the house,” especially in instances of “incest,” a fear of being mistreated and degraded by “police, hospitals, and the legal system,” and a fear that the courts will not present the case from a woman’s “point of view” (82). Unfortunately, as MacKinnon states, “these fears have, on the whole, proved accurate” (82). Rape survivors who file a police report against a man they know are often met with his vengeance, commonly in the form of physical violence. They may also become homeless as a result of pressing charges. And they face the doubt and blame of law enforcement officials, judges, and juries who are not adequately trained in assisting survivors of sexual trauma.

For other rape survivors, there is an emotional element to their reasoning. Some rape survivors choose to remain silent because they “want to forget about it,” they “feel embarrassed and humiliated,” and telling others “adds to that sense of exposure, the sense of utter loss of privacy” (82). These survivors are silenced by the psychological trauma of rape, which is a violation of their bodily integrity, physical privacy, and right to self-determination. A final factor is blame. MacKinnon continues, “Women also blame ourselves. We fear being blamed by other people, and they do blame us” (82). Victim blaming rape survivors has become so pervasive that women have internalized the message to the point of feeling guilt for having been raped. This is why rape is unlike any other crime. It is a violation of the body and mind. Survivors who experience an “utter loss of privacy” are “embarrassed and humiliated” to have put themselves in a position to be raped. Instead, survivors should accept that only a rapist can prevent rape. And the rapist alone should be blamed for the crime. But

expecting rape survivors to exist in a vacuum is illogical. Survivors are being taught to blame themselves by a culture that rewards men for dominating and subjugating women, and the lessons are everywhere they look—in television commercials and advertisements on billboards, their computers, and phones, in television shows and Hollywood films, in legislation that strips women of their right to control their own bodies, in their workplaces, and sometimes even in their homes. As such, it is impractical to expect rape survivors to transcend the sociocultural lessons they are bombarded with on a daily basis. The victim blaming of rape survivors is expected in a patriarchal society that always already casts doubt on women. What is needed to combat generations of miseducation is reeducation on a mass scale. This is because, as Ann J. Cahill explains, “Just as individual men learn to rape from a culture that celebrates their sexual aggression and dominance, so can they learn not to rape from a culture that refuses to tolerate either” (205-06).

In her 2001 book *Rethinking Rape* Cahill discusses “two distinct schools of feminist philosophy concerning rape,” one represented by Brownmiller and the other by MacKinnon (2). She summarizes Brownmiller as positing that “rape is ‘violence, not sex,’” as rape is “an act of power that sought to dominate and degrade the victim” (2). For Cahill, Brownmiller’s theory neglects the complexities of the sexual implications of rape. Cahill summarizes MacKinnon as positing that “rape was in fact continuous with most heterosexual sex,” as rape is the “logical extension” of a heterosexual sexuality that maintains “women’s inferior status with regard to sexual freedom, their social and economic dependence on men, and the social constraints on their sexuality” (3). According to Cahill, MacKinnon’s theory is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it belies women’s ability to resist the strictures of a patriarchal society. Second, it overestimates the power of those strictures, assuming them to

be “omnipotent” and thus inescapable (3). And third, it has the effect of undermining women’s agency, including sexual agency. Cahill disagrees with both Brownmiller and MacKinnon, arguing that their theories “fail to account sufficiently for the intricate interplay of social and political power, sexual hierarchization, and embodiment” (3). While I disagree with Cahill’s polarizing assessment of Brownmiller and MacKinnon because she neglects to acknowledge important nuances of their arguments, I agree with her call for a more inclusive theory. For Cahill, that theory combines Brownmiller’s violence and MacKinnon’s sexuality with the concept of embodiment.

She explains, “my theory does not reduce rape to either violence or sexuality, but presents it as an assault that includes both elements. More particularly, my theory will blur those lines by arguing that the particular violence of rape is sexual, and that the sexuality inherent in it is violent” (8-9). For Cahill, rape is both violent and sexual; it is sexualized violence. As such, theories that privilege one over the other are misguided. Cahill defines rape as “the imposition of a sexually penetrating act on an unwilling person” (11). Rape is, then, a violently sexual act committed on a person against her will. The will of the victim is of great significance because it represents her selfhood and agency. Rape is thus more than an assault on the body. It is an assault on what Cahill calls “embodied selfhood,” meaning that rape challenges the “bodily integrity” of a woman and threatens “her status as a person” (8, 10).

Cahill describes the “embodied subject” as a “particular incarnation of a particular constellation of political, social, historical, and material forces” (103). Because women face intertwining systems of oppression, they are affected by prejudices stemming from sex, gender, race, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and so on. As Cahill

explains, “Rapes that occur in different situations and to different (and differently embodied) subjects can have radically different meanings to the victim, and indeed can constitute radically different harms” (114). For example, a Black woman’s experience of rape is different from a White woman’s experience, a homosexual woman’s experience differs from that of a heterosexual woman, and so on. Each act of rape is a violation of the body, but it is also a violation of the self or subject, which is embodied. Like her predecessors, Cahill is arguing that rape is both a physical and psychological violation—one cannot be separated from the other. But she expands on the theory to argue that each individual woman experiences rape differently, depending upon the sociocultural discourses that mark her body, and the circumstances of the rape. Understanding rape as an “embodied experience,” then, is essential to an inclusive theory that “accounts for both the distinguishing violence of rape and its sexual content,” which enables one to distinguish rape “from other acts of heterosexual sex” without undermining the “sexual meaning” of rape as a violent crime (198). Without the acknowledgment of a rape survivor’s “embodied experience,” one cannot comprehend the impact of rape on the personhood, or sense of self, of a survivor.

As Cahill explains, rape “is a sexually specific act that destroys (if only temporarily) the intersubjective, embodied agency and therefore personhood of a woman,” and is thus an attack on “the integrity of her person” (13-14). Echoing Brownmiller and Dworkin, Cahill acknowledges the significance of rape as a violation of the survivor’s bodily integrity. She then expands the theory to argue that this violation challenges the very personhood of the rape survivor. Cahill writes, “In the act of rape, the assailant reduces the victim to a nonperson” (192). What she is positing is that rape robs the victim of her agency, which is accomplished in part by violating the bodily integrity of the survivor, which has the effect of

relegating the survivor to the status of “nonperson.” As a nonperson, a rape survivor is denied the right of self-determination, which disempowers her. Rape is, then, “a traumatic, violent, embodied experience” that assaults “the victim’s sexuality,” “her sense of safety,” and “her physical being,” because rape “destabilizes the personhood of the victim and the victim’s intersubjectivity at the most fundamental level” (133)—because, as Cahill suggests, rape profoundly affects the “embodied being” of the survivor. The trauma of the violence destabilizes her sense of self. This becomes clear upon examining rape through the lens of “embodied intersubjectivity,” which enables one to understand a rape survivor as a “person whose experience of victimization is a crucial element, among many crucial elements, of her being” (9). As such, the survivor’s “experience of victimization” becomes a part of her “embodied being,” and thus threatens the stability of the self, which helps to explain why rape is so traumatic. Rape “destroys (if only temporarily)” the very personhood of a survivor (13).

Cahill’s work on embodiment and the impact of rape on the personhood of the survivor is an important contribution to feminist theory’s conception of rape. The work of Brownmiller, Davis, Dworkin, MacKinnon, and Cahill represents twenty-five years of feminist theory’s treatment of rape and rape culture. Of course this is more to consider, especially the work of Third Wave feminist theorists like Cahill, who emphasize individualism, diversity, and the inclusion of multiple identities within feminism. But what the work of these five theorists can teach us is that the definition of rape is more complex than one would think. Yes, rape is a sexually penetrating act that occurs against the will of the victim. But that is only one aspect of rape. Rape is also sexualized violence, in that rape is a violent sexual assault. In addition, rape includes exploitative sex that is common in

abusive relationships, and which occurs when there is a power differential between two partners and when one partner regularly uses force to dominate and control the other. In effect, rape is a physical and psychological violation of the survivor—an assault on her bodily integrity and privacy, her sense of freedom, her self-determination, her agency, and her embodied selfhood and thus personhood, which disempowers her. Further, the impacts of rape on a survivor cannot be understood without recognizing the intertwining systems of oppression that women face in a patriarchal society, including sexism, heterosexism, racism, and classism, and how those prejudices affect individual women in different ways. Finally, it is important to note that women from all walks of life experience rape, and they are far more likely to be raped by someone they know, including their romantic partners and friends, than by a stranger in a dark alley.

The work of these feminist theorists also sheds light on the reasons behind rape. Rape is not about sex. It is about power and control. The intention of rapists is to sexually violate, as well as humiliate and dehumanize, their victims. In this way, rapists gain and maintain dominance, thereby securing their statuses as men in a patriarchal society. White slaveholders, for instance, used rape as a tool of racial oppression, as a means of dominating and controlling Black women and their families. As such, dominance becomes fused with sexuality, as men are taught that dominating women is sexy, and that it is even expected of them as men in a patriarchal society. The lessons influencing men—and women—are ubiquitous in popular culture, especially in advertisements and the media, to the point that sexually dominating women becomes normalized, blurring the line between sex and rape. As a result, violence against women, including rape, also becomes normalized. What is one to expect when we are inundated with sexualized images of male dominance and female

subordination? Those images influence both men and women, especially their views on male-female relationships and sexuality.

The proliferation of violently sexualized depictions of male dominance in popular culture is just one aspect of rape culture, which is also explained by the work of these feminist theorists. The term rape culture refers to a culture in which sexualized violence against women is normalized. Further, that violence becomes the standard by which sexual relationships are measured, which is reflected in sociocultural norms, as well as in legislation and legal proceedings. Rape culture, then, explains victim blaming, which occurs when police officers ask rape survivors what they were wearing, if they had been drinking at the time of the assault, and if they had a prior relationship with the assailant—and which occurs when friends, family members, and even romantic partners ask the same questions, illustrating the pervasiveness of victim blaming. The presumption is not that any of these behaviors justify rape, but that the sexual encounter in question was not rape, because the behaviors of the survivor imply that she was “asking for it,” and that she thus consented to the encounter. Rape culture also explains why consent is even an issue. No one asks the victim of a robbery if they consented to being robbed. And yet rape survivors are expected to prove without a doubt that they did not consent to sexual intercourse and were thus raped, which has traditionally been more difficult for women with a history of multiple sexual partners. As such, rape culture also explains why the survivor’s sexual history is a factor in determining whether or not she had been raped. Here, the presumption is that promiscuous women cannot get raped, because they are always already open to sexual intercourse. Rape survivors thus face overwhelming obstacles in reporting rape and pursuing criminal charges. At every turn their privacy and integrity are violated, extending the trauma of the rape. Rape

culture, then, also explains the reluctance of survivors to report rape. For many survivors, the physical and psychological effects of rape are enough to bear.

The work of feminist theorists on rape and rape culture has undoubtedly influenced sociocultural notions concerning sexuality, rape, and violence against women—to the point that rape legislation has been revised. For example, Laura X, a feminist advocate, began working in 1974 to raise awareness about marital rape, which was legal at the time, as Jennifer A. Bennice and Patricia A. Resick discuss in their 2003 article, “Marital Rape: History, Research, and Practice.” They state that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) joined the fight against marital rape in 1977, and that the U.S. government passed the Federal Sexual Abuse Act in 1986, which “criminalized marital rape on all federal lands” (231). By 1993, marital rape was criminalized in “at least one section of the sexual offense codes in all 50 states,” as the authors point out (231). But it was not until 1998 that the last exemption was repealed, effectively classifying marital rape alongside non-marital rape. Despite the gains made in legislation concerning marital rape, Bennice and Resick explain that marital rape is still viewed as a less severe form of rape, which means there is more for feminists to accomplish on this front.

In addition, the work of feminist theorists has undoubtedly influenced how rape is defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In 2013, the FBI revised its definition of rape, as is explained in “Rape Addendum: Uniform Crime Reporting Program Changes Definition of Rape.” As the FBI states, it was time to update the law, which had stood for 80 years. The original law defined rape as: “carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will” (1). The new law was amended to remove the requirement of force, thereby broadening the definition to include instances in which alcohol or other drugs incapacitated

the survivor's ability to consent. In addition, the new law disregards the sex of the survivor and perpetrator, as well as the method and means of penetration, thereby broadening the definition to include the rape of men by women, homosexual rape, anal and oral rape, and rape involving body parts or objects other than a penis. The new 2013 law defines rape as: "Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (1). The FBI hopes that the new law will provide more accurate statistics regarding rape, and the results are promising thus far. Crime statistics based on the revised rape law show a 41.7 percent increase in rape crimes, primarily due to the inclusion of male rape survivors in the data, as the FBI suggests (3).

Further, the work of feminist theorists has undoubtedly influenced rape shield laws, which protect rape survivors in court. They have been in place since 1978, when Rule 412 of the Federal Rules of Evidence went into effect. According to the House Committee on the Judiciary, Rule 412 prohibits the "sexual behavior or predisposition" of the rape survivor from being admissible in court (7). As the Committee notes, Rule 412 was amended in 1988, 1994, and 2011. As of 2014, Rule 412 states: "The following evidence is not admissible in a civil or criminal proceeding involving alleged sexual misconduct: (1) evidence offered to prove that a victim engaged in other sexual behavior; or (2) evidence offered to prove a victim's sexual predisposition" (7). In other words, Rule 412 ensures that a rape survivor's sexual history and reputation—i.e., whether or not she is perceived to be sexually promiscuous—are not used against her in "sexual misconduct" cases, including those involving rape and sexual assault. Rule 412, then, is an attempt to protect the privacy and integrity of rape survivors in federal court, and it is a welcome effort. However, there are

exceptions to the Rule, and these exceptions are broad enough to weaken and ultimately undermine Rule 412.

For example, pertaining to criminal cases, the first exception allows “specific instances” of the sexual history of the survivor to be admitted in order to prove that another person was the source of “semen, injury, or other physical evidence” (7). So, if a survivor was raped by multiple assailants, or if she was raped before or after having consensual sex, parts of her sexual history would be admissible. The second exception allows for “specific instances” of the sexual history of the survivor—“with respect to the person accused of the sexual misconduct”—to be admitted in order to prove consent (7). This exception effectively undermines Rule 412 for survivors who are raped by romantic partners or previous sexual acquaintances, who oftentimes offer evidence of previous sexual encounters to argue that the encounter in question was consensual. The final exception for criminal cases allows for evidence to be admitted if the exclusion of that evidence “would violate the defendant’s constitutional rights,” which is so vague that it could feasibly apply to every case of rape before the courts (7). There is, then, more for feminist theorists and activists to accomplish on this front, as well. To borrow from Dworkin, we still need “rape laws that work” (126).

Finally, the work of feminist theorists has undoubtedly influenced the national conversation regarding rape and rape culture. For instance, media coverage of rape cases has drastically increased, including coverage of campus rape cases. This in turn has drawn attention to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which protects the rights of students. As a result, colleges and universities across the nation are adding Title IX coordinators and updating their approaches to campus rape and sexual assault, which benefits students. Further, in 2014 President Obama announced the “It’s On Us” initiative, which

works to raise awareness of sexual assault on college campuses. In Tanya Somanader's White House blog post, she explains, "It's On Us asks everyone—men and women across America—to make a personal commitment to step off the sidelines and be part of the solution to campus sexual assault." The media's increased attention to rape on college campuses has been largely beneficial, as has been their increased attention to rape in the greater public sphere.

For example, the 2010 Cleveland, Texas gang rape of an eleven-year-old girl captured national attention, as did two cases involving the rapes of women with disabilities that spanned from 2009 to 2012. In addition, the use of rape as a weapon of war entered the public consciousness at roughly the same time, when the media began to report on mass rapes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Each of these cases is addressed in the following chapters, which explore rape culture through the lens of American literature. Nabokov's *Lolita*, Harris's *Johnny Belinda*, and Nottage's *Ruined* provide a means through which to analyze important factors of rape culture, including victim blaming, consent, and the use of rape to demoralize and subjugate women.

In the first chapter I examine Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and victim blaming, explaining that Dolores Haze (i.e., Humbert's "Lolita") is indeed raped by Humbert, despite his claims to the contrary. I then explore victim blaming in the text, the film adaptations, and popular culture, including the dictionary definition of "Lolita," which is "a precociously seductive girl."² Finally, I draw a comparison between Nabokov's text and the Cleveland, Texas case involving the gang rapes of an eleven-year-old girl, who was blamed by her rapists, her community members, and the national press. She was accused of "asking for it"

² From the 2015 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.

because of the provocative way she dressed, which effectively turned her into a “Lolita” figure, meaning that it was presumed that she, an eleven-year-old girl, had initiated the sexual encounters.

In the second chapter I turn to Elmer Harris’s *Johnny Belinda* and the rape of women with disabilities. In Harris’s play, Belinda, who is Deaf, is raped and becomes pregnant with her rapist’s child. I explain that women with disabilities are marginalized by society, which makes them vulnerable to abuse by both sexual predators and the criminal justice system. For example, the character Locky rapes Belinda because he believes he will be neither caught nor punished. I use two cases in my analysis. The first involves a California facility for persons with developmental disabilities. Over a three year period, incidents of molestation and rape were reported 36 times by patients, but the facility did nothing to remedy the problem. The second involves a Connecticut case in which a woman with developmental and physical disabilities was raped. Her rapist was originally found guilty, but he appealed the ruling, which was ultimately overturned because her lawyers failed to prove she was incapable of denying consent.

In the third chapter I focus on Lynn Nottage’s *Ruined* and rape as a weapon of war. Nottage’s play treats women in the war torn Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who are forced through life circumstances and economic necessity to work in a brothel. The characters relay stories of being raped by militia members and soldiers, casting light on acts that have made the DRC the “rape capital of the world,” as United Nations Special Representative Margot Wallstrom declared in 2010 (qtd. in BBC). I discuss the use of rape as a weapon of war, including why it is an “effective” weapon, and the impacts on the survivors and their communities. I then connect Nottage’s characters to rape survivors in the DRC who

have bravely come forward to share their stories with the international community in order to effect change through legislation. Ultimately, my aim is to contribute to the body of feminist theory on rape and rape culture, primarily through the examination of rape through the lens of literature and current high-profile cases that have garnered national attention.

Chapter 2: “Remember she is only a child”:

The Rape of Dolores Haze in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*¹

Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* is one of those rare masterpieces of fiction that transcends the boundaries of the page to inform popular culture. The novel was first published in 1955 in Paris, after being rejected by five U.S. publishers who were concerned that *Lolita*’s “scandalous” subject matter would bring “charges of obscenity,” as Ellen Pifer explains in her introduction to *Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita: A Casebook* (3). The charges were sufficient enough to leave a lasting impression. As Elizabeth Patnoe states in “Nabokov’s Novel Offspring: *Lolita* and Her Kin,” “Nabokov’s novel has never fully recovered from the charges of obscenity that greeted it, despite the fact that they were quickly dismissed by the courts as well as by prominent critics” (83). *Lolita* was likely rejected by U.S. publishers due to the novel’s controversial and disturbing storyline, which treats a middle-aged man’s “obscene” sexual obsession with young girls “[b]etween the age limits of nine and fourteen” (16)—nine and fourteen. Nabokov’s middle-aged man, Humbert Humbert, is overwhelmed by this obsession when he meets a twelve-year-old little girl named Dolores Haze, whom he names and thus defines as his Lolita. Nabokov, however, is careful to maintain the distinction between his Dolores and Humbert’s Lolita within the text. I will, therefore, follow Nabokov’s lead and use the young girl’s given name. She is Dolores. It is Humbert, a “master of imagery,” who turns her into Lolita, as Richard Rorty suggests (157). Rorty explains in “The Barber of Kasbeam: Nabokov on Cruelty,” that Humbert is “content to turn the lives of other human beings into images on a screen, while simply not noticing that these

¹ From Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*. Humbert thinks: “Remember she is only a child, remember she is only—” (112).

other people are suffering” (157). “[T]hese other people” refers in this case to Dolores Haze, who is a human being turned into (an image of) Lolita by Humbert, who conveniently does not “notice” (but more accurately *acknowledge*) Dolores’s suffering—because in his mind she is no longer Dolores, a child; she has become Lolita.

This essay is an effort to help end the silence and erasure of the rape of Dolores in Nabokov’s *Lolita*. I begin with an analysis of Humbert, providing evidence that he is a child molester, pedophile, and preferential sex offender. I then prove that Humbert does indeed rape Dolores, and that he himself provides the condemning evidence. I argue that Humbert is not seduced by Dolores, but is instead seduced by his conception of her as a “nymphet,” as *his* Lolita—a dehumanized sexual object that cannot be raped, per se. This leads to a discussion of the questions of silence and erasure surrounding the rape of Dolores, in the Stanley Kubrick and Adrien Lyne film versions, and in Pia Pera’s novel, *Lo’s Diary*. Finally, I address the impacts of misreading *Lolita*, both the novel and the character Humbert creates, as I examine the 2010 Cleveland, Texas gang rapes of an eleven-year-old girl, who becomes yet another Lolita, another nymphet, who is accused of “seducing” her attackers, just as Humbert accuses Dolores of seducing him.

Nabokov’s protagonist is “Humbert Humbert,” which is a “bizarre cognomen” invented by Humbert himself, who also narrates his own story (3). Because Humbert is the narrator, it is his version of the story that readers get in *Lolita*, and thus his version of the events. Nabokov makes this quite clear in the opening “Foreword” by Dr. John Ray, who is asked to edit Humbert’s “manuscript” by his lawyer after Humbert’s death. Ray writes, “Save for the correction of obvious solecisms and a careful suppression of a few tenacious details that despite ‘H.H.’’s own efforts still subsisted in his text as signposts and tombstones

. . . , this remarkable memoir is presented intact” (3). As such, Humbert is established as the narrator, whose “memoir” is “presented intact.” To sum up, Humbert names Lolita, names himself, and narrates the story. Nabokov is giving Humbert control over, and responsibility for, the narrative. But that does not mean readers should blindly take Humbert at his word.

Nabokov writes Humbert as a complex, conflicted character who doubts his own integrity. He is “strangled” by taboos, as his body is sexually drawn to young girls who represent a sort of forbidden fruit (18). Humbert is a brilliantly written character, in that this struggle between doing what feels right (to him) and doing what he knows is right (in terms of sociocultural norms and regulations) is overwhelming and consuming. So, while Humbert claims “it was she who seduced me,” in an attempt to justify his despicable behavior to the jury, he reveals fragments of a truer account (132). Nabokov, as Eric Goldman explains in “‘Knowing’ Lolita: Sexual Deviance and Normality in Nabokov’s *Lolita*,” “forces readers to reconsider Lolita’s apparent deviancy and exposes the myths by which Humbert and many critics turn Lolita into a deviant ‘nymphet’” (89). Nabokov gives us a victimized child, but he forces us to see the child through the mindset of an admitted pedophile intent on manipulating our perceptions of the facts. Humbert’s manipulation is so effective that many have taken his bait and see Lolita the “deviant nymphet” as opposed to Dolores the child. As a result, Humbert does not face blame for his pedophilic behavior; instead the child faces blame for “seducing” him.

Pedophiles are skilled manipulators, and they are very good at justifying their sexual desires and actions. In *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis: For Professionals Investigating the Sexual Exploitation of Children*, Kenneth V. Lanning, a former FBI Supervisory Special Agent, offers an in-depth analysis of child molesters, some of whom are

also pedophiles and/or preferential sex offenders. Nabokov's Humbert meets the criteria for all three, which is evidenced by Humbert's behavior in the novel. As Lanning explains, a child molester is defined as "a significantly older individual who engages in any type of sexual activity with individuals legally defined as children" (18). Humbert has a sexual relationship with Dolores, a twelve-year-old child, so he can clearly be classified as a child molester.

A pedophile is a preferential sex offender who prefers to have sex with children, but who may also have adult sexual partners, like Humbert. In addition, Lanning states that pedophiles will often "have sex with adults as part of their effort to gain or continue their access to preferred children" (21), which is what Humbert does when he marries Charlotte, Dolores's mother, in order to gain access to the child. Pedophilia is a paraphilia, which is a "psychosexual disorder" (19). This is why Humbert cannot control his sexual urges for prepubescent girls, even though he knows what he is doing is wrong. His pedophilia is an all-encompassing disorder that greatly impacts Humbert's life. There are certain diagnostic criteria that apply to pedophiles, all of which Humbert meets. They include: "fantasies, urges, or behaviors that are recurrent, intense, and sexually arousing and all of which involve prepubescent children, generally age 13 or younger" (19). This is illustrated through Humbert's consistent sexual desire for young girls, and his repeated attempts to secure access to girls in this age group.

Humbert is also a preferential sex offender. These offenders tend to be intelligent and of higher socioeconomic classes. The behavior of preferential sex offenders is "primarily fantasy-driven," and "often rooted in their sexual fantasies and need to turn fantasy into reality" (34)—which describes Humbert's relationship with Dolores, whom he turns into

Lolita, the nymphet, a sexual object of his own creation. Humbert thus creates what Lanning calls a “fantasy-fueled and elaborate script” involving the nymphet, a sexually promiscuous child (34). As a preferential sex offender, Humbert selects Dolores “based on [her] similarity to and consistency with that script” (34). She ceases to be Dolores in his eyes, and instead becomes only a nymphet. Nabokov’s Humbert thus meets the criteria for child molesters, pedophiles, and preferential sex offenders.

Humbert’s criminal sexual behavior fits neatly into the category of acquaintance molestation, which is the most common type of child sexual exploitation cases, aside from child prostitution. Acquaintance molesters, like Humbert, “rarely use physical force on their victims,” as Lanning states (9). Instead, many acquaintance molesters “befriend, romance, or marry women who already have children,” and tend to “control their victims primarily through the grooming or seduction process and by exploiting the immaturity of their victims” (9-10). Humbert marries Charlotte to gain access to Dolores, willfully exploits her immaturity, and grooms her with attention, friendship, favors, and gifts. This grooming process is very common among pedophiles, who “literally seduce the children by befriending, talking to, listening to, paying attention to, spending time with, and buying gifts for them” (57-58). Grooming requires long-term access. This is why some acquaintance molesters, like Humbert, use marriage “just to gain access to children” (10). In addition, like Humbert, “The acquaintance child molester might get involved in ‘abduction,’ usually by not allowing a child he knows and has seduced to return home” (10). Humbert abducts Dolores after her mother’s death and does not permit her to leave him. He even repeatedly steals her money to prevent her escape. Because of the extensive grooming process, children such as these “often voluntarily go with the offender,” but their “cooperation in their victimization

must be viewed as an understandable human characteristic that should have no criminal-justice significance” (10). They are, after all, children, who are being exploited and molested by skilled manipulators.

It is important to note that a child’s “cooperation,” whether voluntary or coerced, is not an element “in determining if a child was criminally sexually victimized by an adult,” as the child is always the victim (26). In fact, as Lanning points out, “children who nonviolently initiate the sexual activity with an adult can be victims,” because the adult has “the legal obligation and maturity to say ‘No’ to such advances” (26). It is my contention that Dolores does not “seduce” Humbert, as he claims, but even if she did, she still would not be culpable, because she does not have the maturity to understand the ramifications of such an act. Lanning explains that the issue of consent should not be a factor in the rape of children, because “children are seduced and manipulated by clever offenders and usually do not fully understand or recognize what they were getting into” (71). Unfortunately, that is not how society operates. Many people do not hesitate to place blame on the child victims, who experience “shame, guilt, and embarrassment” as a result of being defined as “not ‘real’ victims” (26). They are, however, “real” victims. As Lanning states, “When an adult and child have sex under these circumstances, the adult is always the offender and the child is always the victim” (26). As such, who seduced whom does not matter. Humbert is the offender, and Dolores is the victim. But this does not stop Humbert from defending his actions by claiming that Dolores “seduced” him.

According to Lanning, pedophile defenses include denial, minimization, and justification. Humbert attempts all three strategies in his defense, which is presented through the narrative of the novel. Although Lanning is not writing about Nabokov’s *Lolita*, his work

is directly applicable to the character of Humbert. In terms of denial, Humbert implies that “his actions were misunderstood,” and claims “a mistake has been made,” which is common of pedophiles (Lanning 169). He also makes repeated attempts to “convince himself” that his elaborate denial, which is based on his belief that he did not “sexually assault” a child, represents “the truth” of the situation (169). As for minimization, Humbert “minimizes what he has done both in quantity and quality” (169), which is illustrated through his countless attempts to convince the jury, the reader, that no harm comes to Dolores. Further, as Lanning explains, “Some molesters minimize their activity by emphasizing the older age of their victims” (169). While Humbert does not use age to minimize his “activity,” he does use his classification of Dolores as a Lolita, a nymphet, to attempt to justify his sexual relationship with a twelve-year-old child. This brings us to justification, at which Humbert is an expert.

Humbert’s first step in justifying his behavior is to convince himself that his sexual desire for nymphets, and thus Dolores, is natural, normal. “Many child molesters, especially preferential molesters, spend their lives attempting to convince themselves they are not immoral, sexual deviants, or criminals,” as Lanning explains (169). Nabokov’s *Lolita* is littered with Humbert’s examples of man-girl sexual relationships that were not considered taboo at the time. As such, Humbert “prefer[s] to believe” his behavior “is misunderstood or politically incorrect at this time in history” (170). Humbert also attempts to convince the jury, the reader, that his sexual relationship with Dolores “was not harmful,” but was actually “beneficial” to the child (170). Finally, in “probably the single most common rationalization of all child molesters,” Humbert shifts the blame to the child victim, claiming it was she who “seduced” him (170). As Lanning states, “The offender may claim the victim seduced him, wanted and initiated the sexual activity, enjoyed and needed the sexual activity, or is

promiscuous or even a prostitute” (170). This description is a perfect fit for Humbert. As the evidence suggests, Humbert is a textbook case of a child molester, pedophile, and preferential sex offender. And his repeated attempts to deny, minimize, and justify his behavior serve as the very premise of the novel.

Consider that Humbert defines their first sexual encounter as a seduction initiated by Dolores with the clear intention of manipulating the jury—which is, in effect, the reader. Dr. John Ray tells us that Humbert dies on November 16, 1952, “a few days before his trial was scheduled to start” (3). Humbert’s “memoir” is written as a defense of his actions—intended for the jury at his trial. Because he dies before the trial can begin, the jury becomes quite literally the reader. Thomas R. Frosch writes in “Parody and Authenticity in *Lolita*,” “Humbert subtitles his story a confession. More accurately, it is a defense. Portraying himself as a man on trial, Humbert repeatedly refers to his readers as his jury” (42). The reader, then, is faced with the task of the jury—to decide Humbert’s guilt or innocence. Humbert, as all faced with the task of defending themselves are apt to do, manipulates the telling of the events in his favor. Because Humbert is intentionally manipulating the reader, he cannot be taken at his word. Readers must thus read between the lines to discover the glimmers of truth that Humbert leaves for us like breadcrumbs in a forest. The glimmers of truth are there, but they remain hidden for those who choose to not see them.

But a careful reader will easily pick up on the fragments of truth that splinter the narrative, causing the reader to cringe right along with Dolores, who becomes yet another “wincing child” (135). The “wincing child” appears in the very short Chapter 31, which is placed directly after the chapter in which Dolores allegedly “seduces” Humbert. He “tread[s] carefully,” “speak[ing] in a whisper” (134), because he is attempting to justify his rape of a

child. Humbert describes a “mural” he would paint, a scene that would include a depiction of a “callypygean slave child” and a “fire opal dissolving within a ripple-ringed pool, a last throb, a last dab of color, stinging red, smarting pink, a sigh, a wincing child” (134-35). The “wincing child” is yet another child victim of rape, her innocence destroyed, which is evidenced by the “throb” and the “stinging red, smarting pink”—a clear reference to the blood spilled when she is violated, leaving her to only “sigh” and “wince.” It is also significant that this chapter comes directly before Humbert attempts to justify his actions by citing ancient “Roman law,” which stipulated twelve as the age at which a girl could marry (135). Humbert, the manipulator, is once again attempting to convince the reader that his actions with Dolores are justified and even proper (maybe even “normal”). In addition, consider the chapters in which Dolores is first taken advantage of by Humbert. He calls her a “victim . . . locked up in [a] dungeon” (125). She is “wary” (128). She is the “enchanted prey” and he the “enchanted hunter” (131). She calls him a “brute,” and a “revolting creature,” and accuses him of “rape” (140-41). At the end of the novel, Humbert even states that he would sentence himself to “at least thirty-five years for rape” (308). It is thus quite clear that Humbert is, in fact, violating Dolores—and he knows it. Dolores does not “seduce” him. Humbert rapes her, and he does it over and over again during her two-year-long captivity.²

However clear this rape may be, it has been silenced and erased like so many others. No one, it seems, wants to talk about it. For instance, although Humbert ultimately admits to raping Dolores, he never describes his sexual aggressions as rape, nor does he discuss the

² Humbert moves into the Haze house in May of 1947 (40), when Dolores is 12 years old. Humbert places her age at 14 years just before she becomes ill (234), and then disappears from the hospital with Quilty.

topic. Stanley Kubrick and Adrien Lyne, the directors of the film versions of *Lolita*, don't want to talk about it either. As Susan Bordo explains in "The Moral Content of Nabokov's *Lolita*," their versions of the story present Humbert as a victim and Dolores as a seductive temptress: a Lolita. Pia Pera's *Lo's Diary* also presents Humbert's version of the story, giving readers a twelve-year-old child who willfully seduces an adult man. Finally, many readers of *Lolita* choose to believe Humbert's version, and in so doing serve to further silence and erase Dolores's story. The rape of Dolores is integral to *Lolita*. So, why all this silence?

We know that Humbert rapes Dolores. He admits it at the end of the novel when he states that he would sentence himself to "at least thirty-five years" in prison for rape (308). But even without his confession the evidence is manifest. First, we know that "No means no." Dolores says "No" to Humbert's advances on two important occasions. When he first picks her up from camp after her mother Charlotte's death, Humbert "kiss[es] her in the neck" (115). This scene is especially disturbing, as it refers to Humbert as a vampire ravishing his victim. He is "a great and insane monster" pursuing his "prey" (124). He writes, "Nothing could have been more childish than her snubbed nose, freckled face or the purplish spot on her naked neck where a fairytale vampire had feasted" (138-39). He is the "vampire" that feasts on the child's blood; she is the "childish" victim, complete with a child's snubbed nose and freckles. Dolores responds to his advances with "unfeigned surprise" and says, "'*Don't do that. . . . Don't drool on me. You dirty man*'" (115, orig. ital.). Her response is so strong that Humbert can only murmur an apology. A short while later, just before Humbert submits a twelve-year-old girl to "strenuous intercourse" (140), he interrupts what *he* would undoubtedly define as foreplay to "nuzzl[e] her a little" (133). Dolores's response is, "Lay

off, will you, ” which she says in a “twangy whine” as she “hastily remov[es] her brown shoulder from [his] lips” (133). Although Humbert desperately tries to explain this away as her juvenile disregard for ““romantic slosh, ”” both her verbal response and her body language say otherwise (133). Dolores clearly says “No”; Humbert, however, refuses to hear her. Instead he pursues her further, even after noticing that Dolores is “not quite prepared for certain discrepancies between a kid’s life and [his]” (134). This excerpt can be interpreted in different ways. Humbert is either referring to the size of his penis, which would obviously be larger than an adolescent boy’s penis, and would thus cause twelve-year-old Dolores to feel pain and bleed during intercourse. Or, Humbert is suggesting that Dolores’s sexual experiences with Charlie at camp did not include intercourse, but rather “petting” or “fooling around” (for lack of better terms), and she is thus a virgin when Humbert rapes her. Regardless of what actually happened at camp, Humbert’s comment is significant because it proves that Dolores is not a Lolita after all and that Humbert is aware of this fact. If Dolores were a “Lolita” she would be knowledgeable about sex, which contradicts Humbert’s statement that there are “certain discrepancies” between what she “knows” and what happens sexually between Dolores and Humbert. There are, however, “certain discrepancies,” which serves as evidence of Humbert’s recognition of her as a sexually inexperienced child.

This brings us to the second point. At the very least, Humbert is guilty of statutory rape. No one can argue with the fact that he is an adult who has sex with a twelve-year-old child, which even Humbert knows is wrong. He says of their relationship that a “girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac” (283). He is the “maniac” depriving the “girl-child” of her childhood innocence, which is a clear admission of guilt. Further, here Humbert calls her Dolores—not Lolita. His reference to her given name

suggests that he ultimately views her as a child, despite his attempts to deceive himself and the jury (the reader) into seeing her as a sexually-knowledgeable temptress. Humbert is clearly obsessed with his desire to possess and dominate Dolores, to rename and redefine her as his Lolita, a sexual object under his control. He even calls her his “reluctant pet” (164). He silences and erases Dolores and the rape of her, turning her into his Lolita, whom he can then have “strenuous intercourse” with even after she resists—because Lolita cannot be raped, because she *wants it*. I am being purposefully crass, here, to illustrate the preposterous nature of Humbert’s claim about nymphets. We must constantly remind ourselves that Humbert defines (and thus creates) the nymphet to justify his own sexual deviance, his monstrosity. According to Humbert, because a nymphet *wants it*, she cannot be raped. However, it is crucial to point out that Humbert uses drugs to create his sexually-submissive nymphet, which brings us to the final point.

Date rape, or acquaintance rape, which refers to a rape perpetrated by a person the victim knows, also works to define Humbert’s violation of Dolores. Date rape often includes the use of “ruffies,” or the “date rape drug,” which renders the victim essentially comatose, unable to fight or even respond. Humbert plans in advance to drug Dolores, so he could molest her while remaining himself undetected and thus unscathed, although he desperately tries to convince the reader that the drug’s purpose is to protect Dolores’s innocence and purity. He claims that he intends to “protect the purity of that twelve-year-old child” (63). His “policy of sparing her purity” is that he will “operat[e] only in the stealth of night, only upon a completely anesthetized little nude” (124), which in his mind relieves him of the burden of guilt, as he convinces himself that if the twelve-year-old child is “completely anesthetized,” and thus unaware she is being molested, then he is doing nothing wrong.

In truth, Humbert knows how Dolores will respond to his advances while clearheaded, which is why he uses drugs to “emprison” her in “crystal sleep” (123). The night before he is allegedly seduced, in fact, Humbert drugs her. Then he sneaks into bed with her and moves closer to the “lovely and maddening glimmer” of “nymphet flesh” that Humbert sees when he looks at Dolores’s sleeping body (129). Note that it is Dolores’s body that is “maddening.” Humbert is once again attempting to shift the blame from himself to Dolores. When Humbert realizes the drug has not taken hold of her, he gets “the odious feeling that little Dolores [is] wide awake and would explode in screams if [he] touched her with any part of [his] wretchedness” (129). It is important to note that here Humbert again refers to her by her given name. She is “little Dolores,” a twelve-year-old girl who “would explode in screams” when touched by Humbert’s “wretchedness.” This is why he must drug her, in effect turning her into an entirely submissive Lolita and relieving himself (at least on the surface) of the guilt of raping a twelve-year-old girl.

Whether or not the drug actually “works” is insignificant. What matters is Humbert’s intentions and actions. Shortly after marrying Charlotte, when his new wife talks about having a baby, it occurs to Humbert that if Charlotte were in the hospital, then he would have “a chance to be alone with [his] Lolita for weeks, perhaps—and gorge the limp nymphet with sleeping pills” (80). Humbert visits the family doctor, procures “various sleeping powders,” and “tr[ies] them out on Charlotte” (94). His intentions are clear. Humbert states that he “had to be sure” that “night after night” he would be able to “[put] two creatures to sleep so thoroughly that neither sound nor touch should rouse them” (94). In preparation for the drugging, Humbert even “carefully rehearse[s] . . . swallowing a (fictitious) pill” in front of a mirror (122). Then, the night before he first rapes her, Humbert tricks Dolores into taking one

of “Papa’s Purple Pills” (“Vitamin X”), pretending to do so himself, with the intention of molesting a drugged, unconscious “girl-child” (122). As he gazes possessively at her sleeping—but not sufficiently unconscious—form, he thinks, “Tomorrow I would stuff her with those earlier pills that had so thoroughly numbed her mummy,” and wonders if he should “wait a solid hour and then creep up again” (129). He holds out hope that the purple pill will work, that Dolores “might gradually be engulfed in a completeness of stupor that would allow [him] to taste more than a glimmer of her” (131-32). Humbert tells us outright that he knows Dolores is under the influence of the drug he gives her, and that he hopes the pill will “engulf” her—a child—in a “completeness of stupor” that will enable him to sexually molest her. He is hoping the pill will turn her into the lifeless object he desires. Humbert “lay[s] in wait,” a hunter stalking his prey (132). The next morning, “by six fifteen” to be exact, twelve-year-old Dolores, who weighs less than ninety pounds, would still be under the influence of the sleeping pill Humbert tricks her into taking, no matter how “mild” he claims the sedative to be (132, 208, 128).³ And yet Humbert claims that she seduces him, an adult man, into having “strenuous intercourse” with her “three times that very morning” (140).

We need to pay attention to Humbert’s drugging of Dolores for two reasons. First, it is rape when a person is taken advantage of sexually while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The offense is even more egregious when the perpetrator drugs the victim with the clear intention of violating her or him, which is how Nabokov writes Humbert’s actions.

³ Humbert states that Dolores, his “little concubine,” “was now sixty inches tall and weighed ninety pounds”—just before they go out on the road the second time when she is fourteen years old (208). As such, the twelve-year-old Dolores weighs less than ninety pounds. My acknowledgments to Susan Bordo for pointing this out in her 2005 graduate seminar on Nabokov’s *Lolita*.

Humbert goes to a doctor, feigns chronic insomnia, and acquires strong sleeping pills with the sole intent of drugging Dolores—to enable him to molest her undetected. He even tries the drugs out on Dolores’s mother to test their effectiveness.

Second, the drugs reveal Humbert’s intent to silence and thus erase Dolores, to turn a child into a nymphet. Dolores is split in two by Humbert, into (one) the “real child Lolita,” and (two) *his* conception of Lolita as his nymphet (125). Humbert explains, “What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own” (62). As such, Humbert erases Dolores’s humanity, leaving only Lolita, who has “no consciousness,” “no life of her own.” The nymphet Lolita represents what Andrea Dworkin, in her book *Intercourse*, calls “social pornography,” referring to “an impersonally possessed female used as female,” who has “no remnant of a human life animating or informing the use of her in sex”; she is “a living corpse, existing for sexual use” (77). Lolita is “an impersonally possessed female,” whose humanity—her identity as Dolores—is silenced and erased, muffled by the drugs that Humbert uses to turn Dolores into his “living corpse.” Nabokov tells us that Humbert drugs Dolores so that “when *his* show began, she would be dead in his arms” (116, orig. ital.). All that remains is her body, an object that exists “for sexual use” alone. In Humbert’s eyes, she is no longer a person; she is now a nymphet.

A nymphet, according to Humbert, is a girl between the ages of nine and fourteen who is “not human,” but is instead “nymphic (that is, demoniac)” (16). That fact that Humbert defines nymphets as “demoniac” is significant because he is creating a division between *normal* angelic little girls and demoniac nymphets. Humbert is quick to point out

that not all girls within these age boundaries are nymphets. If they were, he suggests, then all “nympholepts” like himself “would have long gone insane” (17). There are, then, “two sexes” that are “termed female” for Humbert: nymphets and “ordinary children” (18, 19). Nymphets are characterized by a “fey grace, [an] elusive, shifty, soul-shattering, insidious charm,” while the “ordinary children” are “pure” and “vulnerable” (17, 19). These “ordinary children” are not sexually attractive to Humbert, who would not interfere “with the innocence of a child, if there was the least risk of a row” (19-20). In other words, an “ordinary,” “innocent” little girl—who might just make trouble for Humbert—is not to be interfered with. But a nymphet, by contrast, is a “demon child” who is not sexually innocent (as are “ordinary children”) (20). Nymphets are “shifty,” “insidious” and “soul-shattering.” They are the demons, not him. Dolores is not Dolores; she is Lolita, his nymphet. Humbert thus rationalizes and justifies his “hell furnace of localized lust for every passing nymphet” (18)—who is, after all, a child.

Defining a nymphet as “not human” is beneficial to Humbert. If he does not see the humanity within a nymphet, then he can relieve himself of blame. A nymphet is not an “ordinary” child, whom Humbert feels deserves to have her innocence protected. Because a nymphet is not an “ordinary” child, she is not held to that same standard, and is therefore (at least according to Humbert) open for sexual consideration (as would be an adult woman). In addition, defining nymphets as “nymphic” and “demoniac” serves to further reduce their humanity. Nymphs and demons are not human, and thus do not have to follow the sociocultural norms and regulations set out for “ordinary children,” for instance. For Humbert, labeling a nymphet as “nymphic” and “demoniac” serves to remove the taboos associated with adult men taking young girls as lovers—because as an “inhuman” being, a

nymphet is not protected by the sociocultural taboos that (are supposed to) shield children from sexual predators. As such, in the very act of naming and defining the nymphet, Humbert is creating a “safe” social space to pursue his sexual attraction. He is, in effect, giving himself permission to fulfill his sexual desire for little girls. So, Dolores becomes that “demon child” who “seduces” him into leaving the taboos behind. She becomes Lolita—a less-than-human nymphet who is at fault for causing an upstanding man to lose his way. Her lack of humanity for Humbert enables him to place this burden upon her “demoniac” self, which in turn removes the burden from him. It’s a clever move, intended to manipulate the jury, the reader, into taking his “side.” And, for the most part, Humbert’s ploy has worked.

Consider the day of their first sexual encounter. Humbert tells us that a “queer dullness had replaced her usual cheerfulness” (139). He tells us that he starts to feel “[m]ore and more uncomfortable,” and describes his feeling as “an oppressive, hideous constraint as if [he] were sitting with the small ghost of somebody [he] had just killed” (140). He is, of course, sitting with Dolores, who *is* the “small ghost.” Dolores has been “killed,” has become Lolita in his eyes, a “living corpse, existing for sexual use” (Dworkin 77). But no matter how much he tries to rob Dolores of her humanity, Humbert cannot blind himself entirely. He notices pain flitting across her face as she gets into the car. And after she calls him a “brute” and then sits in utter silence, Humbert tells us that “[c]old spiders of panic crawled down [his] back” (140). He calls her an “orphan,” a “lone child,” an “absolute waif, with whom a heavy-limbed, foul-smelling adult had had strenuous intercourse three times that very morning” (140). Humbert calls himself “careless, stupid, and ignoble,” and experiences a “dark turmoil” (140).

Yet Humbert's "turmoil" is conveniently short-lived. He feels "the writhing of desire again, so monstrous [is his] appetite for that miserable nymphet," and tells us that "mingled" with his "guilt" is the "thought that her mood might prevent [him] from making love to her again" (140). When he suggests as much, her response is a "shrilly" cried "Drive on," which reminds Humbert that he is a "beast" (141). Dolores then calls him a "chump" and a "revolting creature," and tells Humbert that she "was a daisy-fresh girl," and that she should call the police and "tell them [he] raped [her]" (141). Humbert desperately asks, "Was she joking?" but he hears the "ominous hysterical note" ringing "through her silly words" (141). Even Humbert doesn't buy his attempt at deception. The "ominous hysterical note" is not meant to be read as "silly," and Humbert knows it—"sweat roll[s] down [his] neck," he sees Dolores wince in pain, and she tells him he has "torn something inside her" (141). He himself provides the evidence to see through his version of the story, his interpretation of Dolores's reaction to his "brutish" behavior. As Susan Mizruchi explains in "*Lolita* in History," Humbert "does everything anyone could ask of an evildoer: he confesses over and over; he documents his most culpable behavior; he stages Lolita's pain from many different angles" (651). Yet it is still somehow *she* who is "vile-tempered," *she* who seduces him, and somehow *he* who becomes the victim (141).

There are readers who buy Humbert's version of the story, who believe he is a victim seduced by a temptress, and who take that misreading out into the world where it is distorted and metamorphosed. For example, *Merriam-Webster's* dictionary defines "Lolita" as "a precociously seductive girl," and for *American Heritage* she is a "sexually precocious girl." So, instead of a story of kidnap, deception, and rape, we get a story of a twelve-year-old seductress who drives an adult man into despair and ruin by her devilish coquettishness. This

misreading of Nabokov's *Lolita*—both the novel and the fictional character constructed by Humbert within the novel—is shocking, as is the invasion of that misreading into our culture. Why is it that a twelve-year-old little girl gets accused of seducing a “dirty man” (115)? Why is it Humbert's turmoil that gets foregrounded while his rape of a child gets erased? Further, Elizabeth Patnoe asks, “Why didn't the Lolita myth evolve in a way that more accurately reflects Nabokov's *Lolita*? Why isn't the definition of 'Lolita' 'a molested adolescent girl' instead of a 'seductive' one?” (83). In short, why do many readers choose to see Lolita and to blind themselves to Dolores?

The two film versions of *Lolita*, directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1962 and by Adrien Lyne in 1997, can help one understand the ubiquitous nature of this misreading. The two filmmakers present Humbert's version of the story, and thus his reading of Dolores as a Lolita figure. As a result, the viewer receives a biased misreading of Nabokov's work. For example, Nabokov says in an interview with Herbert Gold, “Humbert was fond of 'little girls'—not simply 'young girls.' Nymphets are girl-children, not starlets and 'sex kittens.' Lolita was twelve, not eighteen when Humbert met her. You may remember that by the time she is fourteen, he refers to her as his 'aging mistress'” (qtd. in Gold, 196). His aging mistress, at fourteen. Yet Kubrick and Lyne present Lolita, a brazenly coquettish, sexually aware fourteen-year-old teenager—who does not even meet Humbert's age criteria for nymphets—as opposed to Dolores, a twelve-year-old little girl. Nabokov's Dolores is twelve-to-fourteen years of age during her time with Humbert, fourteen being his cut-off for nymphets. Kubrick and Lyne, however, present their Lolita as fourteen, which means she is sixteen at the end of her two-year captivity, and thus does not fit Humbert's strict age criteria for nymphets. And, as Bordo points out, neither filmmaker includes the fact that Humbert

drugs Dolores to enable him to sexually molest her while she sleeps, or that Humbert drugs Dolores the night before she allegedly “seduces” him.⁴ Nabokov writes Dolores as twelve for a reason, just as he writes the drugging of her into the text for a reason; readers are not supposed to blind themselves to Humbert’s heinous acts. The fact that Humbert purposefully drugs a twelve-year-old child in order to molest her is paramount to the story, as it illustrates his “beastliness” and Dolores’s innocence. I would like to think that Kubrick and Lyne are merely careless readers, or even that they’re too ignorant to see the picture Nabokov is creating. However, I doubt that is the case.

The Kubrick and Lyne films suggest a culturally-wide self-deception. It is far less frightening to think that a young girl seduces a grown man than to see it is the adult man who abuses, molests, kidnaps and relentlessly rapes a little girl. As Kenneth V. Lanning explains, “In the United States, society’s historical attitude about the sexual victimization of children can generally be summed up in one word: denial. Most people do not want to hear about it and would prefer to pretend such victimization just does not occur” (4). Through this denial of sexual victimization, we are left with a scenario in which the victim inevitably shoulders the blame. So, it is not the adult man who is the menace; instead it is his victim—a little girl. It is Dolores’s fault that Humbert is sexually attracted to her, her fault he molests her on the couch, her fault he drugs her in order to take advantage of her, her fault he kidnaps her and takes her away from her community, her fault he rapes her over and over again—because she is a Lolita: a seductive temptress. As such, Humbert the sexual predator conceives of himself as a victim, as do Kubrick, Lyne, and all those who blindly accept “a precociously seductive girl” as the definition of “Lolita” (*Webster’s*).

⁴ See Bordo’s “The Moral Content of Nabokov’s *Lolita*.”

Even Pia Pera's *Lo's Diary*, which was published in 1995 in Italy and translated into English in 1999, and which is touted as a "feminist" version of the story, presents a "precociously seductive" girl, called Lo in the novel. The premise of Pera's novel is that Dolores does not die during childbirth, as is claimed in *Lolita's* "Foreword" by Dr. John Ray. Instead, she survives into adulthood, and brings a copy of the diary kept during her time with Humbert to John Ray, who ultimately pens the "Foreword" to Dolores's published diary. Interestingly, Pera also lets Humbert live. He is living in Paris at the beginning of the novel, and he meets with John Ray to exchange photographs for the opportunity to read Dolores's mangled diary. John Ray calls Humbert his "old friend," and ends his "Foreword" by informing the reader that the now eighty-five-year-old man is living in the Riviera with his new young wife, Annabel (8). These plot changes are surprisingly inconsequential, and serve to create a means through which Dolores's secret diary could come to light. And there are many secrets revealed through Pera's interpretation and presentation of Nabokov's Dolores Haze, whom Pera reimagines as Lo. Because Pera's Lo, like Humbert's Lolita, does not adhere to Nabokov's Dolores, I will use "Lo" to refer to the character Pera creates.

Pera writes Lo as a sexually curious twelve-year-old who enjoys experimenting with sex with both girls and boys. This in and of itself is not problematic, as many young people experiment sexually. The problem is that Pera does not take her cues from Nabokov, and instead presents Humbert's version of Dolores—that is, Lolita. Lo even writes, "I seduced him," in an echo of Humbert's claim (Pera 103). Lo's training in seduction techniques comes from studying a book called *How to Catch a Man: 101 Winning Strategies*, which her mother receives from a close friend, Nora, and hides in the bathroom. The book includes instructions on "how to bend any man to your will," and offers tips such as painting your lips a deep red

and devoting “more attention to your appearance than to anything else” (59-60). Lo references this book in her flirtation with and seduction of Humbert. As such, Lo becomes a seductive temptress who knows very well what she is doing when, for example, she flirts with Humbert during his first visit to the Haze household.

This scene in Nabokov’s novel is relatively short compared to the treatment it receives in Kubrick’s and Lyne’s film versions, and in Pera’s novel. In *Lolita*, Humbert is led to the piazza by Charlotte Haze, who hopes he will agree to rent a room in her house. Upon his first glimpse of Dolores, he is instantly reminded of his childhood love, Annabel, who dies of typhus four months after their “brief session of avid caresses” (Nabokov 13). Humbert explains, “from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses. It was the same child” (39). Dolores thus represents to Humbert a replacement for Annabel. In his mind, they are the “same child.” He continues, “A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not from the gaze of young memory, the juvenile breasts I had fondled one immortal day” (39). Humbert gazes upon Dolores’s breasts, as well as her “lovely indrawn abdomen” and “puerile hips” (39). But he does not see Dolores; he sees a replacement for Annabel. Dolores, then, becomes a literal “object of the gaze,” to borrow from John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing*. Nabokov’s Dolores does not flirt with Humbert in the least. On the contrary, he merely observes her, and only for a moment. Humbert reflects, “In the course of the sun-shot moment that my glance slithered over the kneeling child [. . .], the vacuum of my soul managed to suck in every detail of her bright beauty” (39). Dolores is a “kneeling child,” not a seductress. And Humbert, with his “ape eyes” and glance that “slither[s],” is described in animalistic terms, suggesting a negative assessment of his sexual

desire for a child. Finally, Dolores “peers” at Humbert—as any curious child would—“over dark glasses,” which he describes as “stern dark spectacles” (39). Dolores “peers,” suggesting an inquisitive nature, and her sunglasses are “stern,” suggesting seriousness. Clearly, Nabokov is not presenting Dolores as a seductress.

By contrast, Kubrick’s *Lolita* is sunbathing in a bikini, reclining in a pose that accentuates her curves, and looking seductively at Humbert through her infamous heart-shaped sunglasses. Lyne’s *Lolita* is lying in the grass on her stomach, feet twirling lazily, reading a book under a sprinkler. Her soaking wet, thin sundress clings to her body, leaving little to the imagination. She is not wearing sunglasses, and as she gives Humbert a friendly smile, her dental retainer is clearly visible. In both depictions, *Lolita* is older than Nabokov’s Dolores, and her sex appeal is made apparent. Pera’s depiction of the scene sexualizes Lo even further.

Lo “peek[s] at him” over her magazine, taking care to not show interest (Pera 72). She quickly notices that Humbert is not listening to her mother, Charlotte, but is instead looking at her. She looks back at him, and thinks “he looks really nice” while daydreaming about making her friends jealous because she has “the handsomest dad” (73). Lo writes, “I’m peeking at him through my sunglasses: it works,” and gets excited when Humbert says “‘How lovely, how lovely!’” supposedly in response to Charlotte’s comment about her lilies, because Lo knows, “it’s me he’s looking at, not the garden or the lilies or the porch, just me” (73). At this point, Lo has realized her sexual draw and finds it empowering. Lo notices that Humbert continues to look her over, so she gives him “a big inviting smile,” and then returns to her magazine, pretending to be indifferent to his presence (73). But she keeps watching him through her sunglasses, and her flirtation becomes clear. Lo writes, “My lips are just

slightly parted, because according to the how-to-catch-a-man book a woman should always appear half-open to a man. Then for a second, [. . .] I let my sunglasses slide down my nose and give him the famous deep wink” (73). Pera’s Lo is blatantly flirting with Humbert. As such, she embodies Humbert’s Lolita, not Nabokov’s Dolores.

Further, she takes pride in her seduction techniques, explaining that her mother’s book refers to this tactic as “fluctuating seduction” (74). Lo continues her performance as a temptress. She writes, “I suck in the bubble from my gum and show him the back of my tongue, which is pink, a perfect triangle” (74). Lo then walks past Humbert and purposely brushes against him, blowing “a minty breath up under his nose” in order to “combine two different sensations,” which she calls “multiple-reinforced seduction” (74). She later uses Humbert as a “guinea pig” for practice in “elusive-hypnotic attraction,” another technique (75). Lo explains, “rhythmic sound and movement transfix the male. Possible variants: swing a foot back and forth, flutter your eyelids, fan yourself, snap your fingers to the music, blow a bubble then suck the gum slowly back into your mouth” (75). To her, seduction is game, and she is merely learning how to play. Lo even writes to her deceased father, “Don’t be mad if I entertain myself by trying out on [Humbert] the tricks in Nora’s instruction book—you can read my thoughts, so you know I’m only doing it for practice, and then, if I hadn’t come up with that seduction routine, he obviously wouldn’t have stayed at our house” (74). She tells her father that she seduced Humbert for her mother, in order to help her mother find a husband, so Charlotte will “improve” (74). It is important to point out that, in Lo’s mind, she is “only doing it for practice,” and to help out her mother, which gives us a glimpse of Nabokov’s twelve-year-old Dolores. However, Humbert’s Lolita is far more present in Pera’s protagonist. Even Charlotte, Lo’s mother, calls her a “little whore” and “insolent little beast,”

when she finds out that Lo is “trying to put into practice the advice in her book” (77). These are not the characters Nabokov presents in *Lolita*. And while I appreciate an author’s creative license, Pera’s Lo is a misrepresentation of Dolores. In short, she is misreading the character.

Consider the apple scene. Nabokov presents Humbert as a pedophile who exploits a child while her mother is away. Dolores is wearing a pink dress, suggesting innocence, but she has “painted her lips,” and she is holding a “beautiful, banal, Eden-red apple” (Nabokov 57-58). Humbert is clearly presenting Dolores as Eve, the temptress. Dolores sits next to Humbert on the sofa. A benign game of keep-away with Dolores’s apple and Humbert’s magazine begins, but it quickly disintegrates into obscenity. When Dolores tries to retrieve Humbert’s magazine, he takes advantage of her. However, in Humbert’s attempt to convince the jury (the reader) of his innocence, he again presents the story in his favor. He explains, “in a sham effort to retrieve [the magazine], she was all over me. Caught her by her thin knobby wrist” (58). Humbert explains her action as a “sham,” suggesting that Dolores’s real intention is to be on top of him. He then holds her against her will, dominating her child’s body, which is illustrated through her “thin knobby wrist.” Humbert continues, “She twisted herself free, recoiled, and lay back in the right-hand corner of the davenport” (58). This quotation is important because it sheds light on the truth of the situation. Dolores twists herself free of Humbert’s grasp, recoils, and moves away from Humbert, making it clear that she is uncomfortable. When she then rests her legs across Humbert’s lap, it should be read as a childlike move. The twelve-year-old is returning to the innocent playfulness experienced during their keep-away game. Humbert, however, is not.

Humbert begins to get sexually aroused. He writes, “I was in a state of excitement bordering on insanity; but I also had the cunning of the insane” (58). Humbert blatantly calls

himself “insane,” while celebrating his “cunning.” He skillfully hides his erection by rearranging his pajamas and robe, and proceeds to use a child for sexual pleasure. Humbert, while keeping his “maniac’s inner eye” on his “distant golden goal,” orgasm, increases the “magic friction” caused by the child’s legs across his lap (59). As such, by his own admission, Humbert is not merely “insane,” he is a “maniac” with an “unspeakable passion” (59). He refers to his erection as a “hidden tumor,” and a “gagged, bursting beast” lying in wait for “beauty” in her “innocent cotton frock” (59). And when Dolores moves to throw away her apple, “her shameless innocent shanks and round bottom” shift to Humbert’s lap, increasing his arousal (60). Humbert clearly presents Dolores as “innocent,” as unaware of her impact on him. He writes, “Lolita had been safely solipcized,” implying that the child is lost in her own world, humming and singing to herself (60). As for his erection, Humbert explains that Dolores is “unaware of it, alien to it” (60). As he attempts to stave off his orgasm, Humbert imagines himself as a “radiant and robust Turk, deliberately, in the full consciousness of his freedom, postponing the moment of actually enjoying the youngest and frailest of his slaves” (60). Dolores is, then, Humbert’s young and frail “slave.” She is not a willing sexual partner; she is a child who is being exploited and molested.

Humbert continues to molest Dolores, as his “happy hand crept up her sunny leg as far as the shadow of decency allowed” (60). He begins to massage and envelop a bruise on her thigh. Humbert writes, “because of her very perfunctory underthings, there seemed to be nothing to prevent my muscular thumb from reaching the hot hollow of her groin—just as you might tickle and caress a giggling child—just that” (60-61). Humbert thus attempts to define his behavior as innocuous, normal. But Dolores’s reaction suggests otherwise. Humbert illustrates, ““Oh [the bruise is] nothing at all,’ she cried with a sudden shrill note in

her voice, and she wiggled, and squirmed, and threw her head back, and her teeth rested on her glistening underlip as she half-turned away” (61). Despite Humbert’s attempt to deceive the jury (the reader), Dolores is clearly uncomfortable. She “cries” out in a “shrill” voice. She wiggles and squirms, arguably to remove herself from his lap. She throws back her head, perhaps to gain distance between Humbert’s mouth and her neck. She bites her lip, likely in frustration. And she turns away from him. All the while, Humbert is oblivious to her discomfort, as he “crushe[s] out against her left buttock the last throb of the longest ecstasy man or monster had ever known” (61). Humbert is thus a “monster” who “crushes” a child with his orgasm.

Despite Humbert’s attempt to deceive himself, he knows what he does to her is wrong, and his description of what happens next suggests that he does, indeed, know that Dolores is an unwilling participant. He writes, “Immediately afterward (as if we had been struggling and now my grip had eased) she rolled off the sofa and jumped to her feet” (61). “Immediately” after he releases her, Dolores gets away from Humbert. He uses the phone ringing as an excuse, but Dolores’s flight from him is apparent. In addition, Humbert’s parenthetical phrase deserves notice. Humbert and Dolores “had been struggling”; there is no “if.” She twists herself free, recoils, wiggles, and squirms. And his grip does ease during and after his orgasm. Keep in mind that Humbert holds Dolores by her wrist, and then holds her by her thigh to keep her against him. The twelve-year-old child is no match physically for an adult man. When she can get away, she does—“immediately.” The textual evidence is compelling, which is why Pera’s interpretation of the scene is so problematic.

Pera’s Lo intentionally seduces Humbert. When her mother goes to church and leaves Lo alone with Humbert, she takes the opportunity to put on her mother’s lipstick. Explaining

“how it’s done,” she describes her plan to get Humbert in a state where he is “simply lost in contemplation of the mouth, the blinding-white teeth, the red tongue darting between the teeth, redder than the lipstick” (101). The apple is Lo’s addition to her seduction technique, because “the attack has to come from multiple directions” (101). Lo is thus a temptress who thinks of seduction as an “attack,” illustrating, again, that Pera’s protagonist is more influenced by Humbert’s *Lolita* than Nabokov’s *Dolores*. Lo chooses the apple because of its color and because it represents the “first seduction” (101). She writes, “red plus red, two red spheres in perpetual motion. The principle of hypnosis. Anyway, the apple is essential. [. . .] No man can resist a woman who has an apple in her hand” (101). Now that she is “armed with [her] two red patches, lips and apple,” Lo is ready to begin; she has “armed” herself for the “attack” (101).

Lo begins playfully tossing the apple in order to get Humbert’s attention, and is excited when her ploy works. She “hurl[s]” herself at Humbert, opening her “fire-colored mouth” and blowing her “blood-scented breath on him” (102). When the struggle for the magazine ensues, Lo is very aware of Humbert’s attempts to keep her legs in his lap, and she knows the reason. Lo writes, “It’s obvious with every move of the struggle that he’s trying to position them against him, on his lap. Under the thin silk bathrobe he’s all on edge. [. . .] I feel that trunk of his swelling, bigger and bigger” (102). Lo, as such, not only flirts with Humbert, she actively seduces him, and then takes pleasure in her sexual power. Gone is Nabokov’s “innocent” *Dolores*. And Pera fails to include the fact that Humbert “catches” and holds *Dolores* by her wrist. Further, Pera writes Lo, who is twelve years old, as a willing sexual partner. Lo writes, “I’m all hot inside, I’d like to hug him and kiss him without all these pretenses, but I’m going to wait till the next move; for now I pretend nothing’s

happening, and go on biting my apple” (103). Lo feels sorry for Humbert because he cannot take what he wants, and when she throws away her apple she ends up on his lap, against his erection. They hold hands as he rubs against her, and they both reach orgasm. She writes, “I press against him, until he holds me still, [. . .] and, all trembling, forgets to keep up his pretense. I feel weird, too, I melt [. . .]. I’d like to curl up and wrap myself in his arms” (103). Her seduction techniques worked. When Humbert later “looks confused and satisfied,” she thinks, “maybe he hasn’t yet realized what happened to him: that I seduced him. That now he’s mine” (103). Lo, as such, admits to seducing Humbert, and takes pride in her victory.

A pro-sex feminist reading of this scene would undoubtedly be positive, as Lo initiates a successful sexual encounter, and feels empowered by her actions. However, readers must take care to remember Nabokov’s Dolores, and his presentation of the character. She is a twelve-year-old child, not a seductive temptress. Dolores is unaware of her effect on Humbert, and feels uncomfortable when he physically controls her. Lo, by contrast, is a sexually knowledgeable “nymphet”—she is Lolita, Humbert’s fantasy come to life. This presentation of Dolores is problematic for many reasons. First, Pera is misreading Dolores and thus Nabokov’s work. Second, Pera is adding to the cultural misconception of *Lolita*. She is giving readers Humbert’s version of Lolita, which influenced the misguided dictionary definition. Lo is, then, “a precociously seductive girl.”

Further, a pro-sex feminist reading of the novel would be complicated by the horrors Lo faces. Humbert grows more and more demanding and controlling, and Lo ultimately becomes his sex slave. Her only access to money is through Humbert. He forces her to perform sexual acts for nominal sums, and then steals her money to prevent her from escaping. He physically restrains her on many occasions, and forces her to submit to rough

sex. He even holds her down and rapes her anally. When Lo threatens to report him, Humbert threatens to send her to a reformatory, and informs her that she will be abandoned by all who know her because of her complicity. Lo becomes suicidal, and contemplates slitting her wrists on two occasions, but instead plots with Gerry Sue Filthy, Pera's interpretation of Clare Quilty, to break free from Humbert. She escapes with Filthy from the hospital, and is plunged into a world of pornography and sexual experimentation. Filthy molests her repeatedly, and renders her useless when he tires of her. The novel ends with an unrealistic, fairy tale twist, as Lo goes to live with Nora, her deceased mother's close friend.

Pera's depiction of Lo as Humbert's Lolita, as opposed to Nabokov's Dolores, is thus problematic for another reason. Through the horrors Lo faces, Pera is suggesting that a "precociously seductive girl" will inevitably find herself in a harmful situation, one she is not prepared to handle. While this is, unfortunately, likely to happen, the logical conclusion to this line of thought brings us dangerously close to victim-blaming. For example, one could argue that if Lo had not seduced Humbert, an adult man, she would not have been plunged into an adult world of sex, domestic violence, exploitation, and rape. As such, Lo is at fault, not Humbert. Pera, just like Kubrick and Lyne, is blindly accepting Humbert's presentation of Lolita, as well as his version of the story.

This blind acceptance is troubling. Not only are people misreading Nabokov's novel, film directors and authors are misrepresenting his message, which means a wider audience is being presented with an image of Lolita—not Dolores. And this presentation of Dolores as a Lolita who seduces Humbert is coloring our cultural understanding of rape, including the rapes of children. Take, for example, the 2010 Cleveland, Texas gang rapes of an eleven-year-old girl, who is a year younger than Nabokov's fictional Dolores Haze. This girl, whose

name has not been released because she is a minor, has been cast as another Lolita, a nymphet who willfully seduces men. And like Dolores, she is blamed for this seduction, and the responsibility for her rapes is shifted from the gang of rapists to a child.

Over the course of three months in the autumn of 2010 in Cleveland, Texas, an eleven-year-old girl was repeatedly gang raped on at least six separate occasions, by at least twenty boys and men ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-seven (Horswell “After”; McKinley and Goode). The worst of the assaults happened during the Thanksgiving holiday break, when the child was raped “multiple times” by at least eight suspects, at the home of one of the suspects and at an abandoned trailer home (Horswell “Court Files”). They threatened the young girl with physical assault and abandonment far from home if she did not comply with their demands (Solomon). Eric McGowen, a twenty-year-old suspect who has since been convicted and sentenced to ninety-nine years in prison, admitted that “men took turns having sex with the girl, sometimes two at a time” (*Daily Mail*). She was raped vaginally, anally, and orally, and they even raped the eleven-year-old child with a beer bottle (*Daily Mail*). Several of the rapists recorded the attacks on their cell phones, and the videos were shared widely among the girl’s schoolmates. One of her schoolmates told a teacher, who alerted the authorities. Her rapists include middle and high school students, including two local high school basketball stars, the twenty-one-year-old son of a school board member, and a handful of criminals with charges ranging from assault, to theft, to selling drugs (Horswell “Facebook”). Her tragic story sent the nation reeling, not just for the atrocities committed, but also for the community response and news coverage of the attacks.

In the March 2011 article “Vicious Assault Shakes Texas Town,” journalist James M. McKinley, Jr. provides a disturbing account of the Cleveland, Texas gang rapes, in that his

article presents many tenets of rape culture. Claiming to represent the “unanswered questions” of the community members, McKinley asks, “how could their young men have been drawn into such an act?” (McKinley). Clearly, this question is problematic, as its focus is on the gang of men who repeatedly raped a young girl. Further, McKinley is suggesting that the rapists were “drawn into” the act—presumably by the young girl—which is a clear example of victim blaming. He also quotes community members, none of whom express concern for the young girl. Instead, they are concerned about the men and boys involved, and clearly place the blame on the survivor. For example, Sheila Harrison says, “It’s just destroyed our community [. . .]. These boys have to live with this the rest of their lives” (qtd. in McKinley). Harrison goes on to ask, “Where was her mother? What was her mother thinking?,” and “How can you have an 11-year-old child missing down in the Quarters?” (qtd. in McKinley). Harrison is more concerned about the long-term effects of the gang rapes on the rapists themselves, or more accurately, she is concerned that they have been arrested for their crimes. She also clearly places blame on the girl’s mother, instead of asking where the mothers of the rapists—some of whom are teenagers—are, and why their mothers allowed them to hang out unsupervised in the Quarters, the low-income neighborhood in which the gang rapes took place. That Harrison holds these views is not surprising. What is surprising is that McKinley presents her views without challenge. McKinley also includes statements from residents of the Quarters. He writes, “They said she dressed older than her age, wearing makeup and fashions more appropriate to a woman in her 20s. She would hang out with teenage boys at a playground, some said” (McKinley). Again, these views are not surprising. But why does McKinley fail to present a single quote from a person sympathetic

to the child survivor of the gang rapes? Why does he not call attention to the victim blaming that is occurring?

Shortly after McKinley's piece went to press, many critics expressed concern over his coverage of the story. As a result, subsequent coverage of the gang rapes more often than not includes quotations representing both accusatory and sympathetic responses. Resident Oscar Carter, for instance, states, "She's 11 years old. It shouldn't have happened. That's a child [. . .]. Somebody should have said what we are doing is wrong" (qtd. in AP). Carter, a distant relative of one of the teenaged suspects, expresses genuine concern for the child. However, responses blaming the eleven-year-old girl are far too common to be ignored or explained away. One glaring example involves a Republican state representative from Florida, Kathleen Passidomo. Passidomo references the case in a debate concerning a bill proposing a dress code for Florida students. She states, "There was an article about an 11 year old girl who was gangraped in Texas by 18 young men because she was dressed like a 21-year-old prostitute [sic]. [. . .] And her parents let her attend school like that" (qtd. in Edwards). She goes on to claim that implementing a dress code would prevent "what happened in Texas" from happening in Florida (qtd. in Edwards). First, Passidomo blames the eleven-year-old survivor for dressing like a "prostitute," then she blames the girl's parents for allowing their child to dress provocatively, and then she claims that a dress code will prevent rapes from occurring in Florida. Passidomo could not be more wrong, and her statement is an excellent example of the pervasiveness of rape culture in U.S. society, as the blame is shifted from the rapists to the rape survivor, and in this case her parents, and the assumption is made that girls and women can avoid being raped by dressing modestly, so as to not tempt rapists. Passidomo's comment is a clear example of victim blaming.

Further examples of victim blaming include a statement by a lawyer representing three of the defendants. Despite the video evidence, attorney James D. Evans III claims, ““This is not a case of a child who was enslaved or taken advantage of”” (qtd. in Horswell “Cleveland”). It is difficult to fathom how anyone aware of the facts in this case could argue that the eleven-year-old girl was not “taken advantage of” by this gang of boys and men. According to journalist Pete Kotz, Evans admits “the boys and men who were arrested were ‘absolutely’ aware of the girl’s age” (Kotz). But Evans still shifts the blame from the rapists to the child. Kotz himself falls victim to this line of reasoning, even as he presents a sympathetic view of the rape survivor. He writes, “the girl was supposedly willing,” just before pointing out that under Texas law an eleven-year-old cannot consent to sex (Kotz). How can a child, who cannot legally consent to sex, be “willing” to engage in multiple sex acts with multiple partners? We must keep in mind that this child was gang raped, vaginally, anally, and orally, and with a beer bottle. There is video evidence of the repeated gang rapes, taken by the rapists themselves. And yet still she is blamed, turned into another Lolita, which is made especially clear in the responses of her community.

For example, the mother of a nineteen-year-old suspect says, ““I’m not defending him. I’m not defending her. I’m not defending no child because if it were my child, I would feel the same way. My point is, where was her mother?”” (qtd. in Solomon). Resident Kisha Williams says, ““Where were [the girl’s parents] when this girl was seen wandering at all hours with no supervision and pretending to be much older?”” (qtd. in Lohr). And perhaps most shocking, former resident Angie Woods says, ““She lied about her age. Them boys didn’t rape her. She wanted this to happen. I’m not taking nobody’s side, but if she hadn’t put herself in that predicament, this would have never happened”” (qtd. in AP). All of these

examples shed light on rape culture, as the eleven-year-old survivor of multiple gang rapes is blamed for “want[ing] this to happen,” and her parents are blamed for not preventing the gang rapes. This child becomes yet another Lolita, a “precociously seductive girl,” another one of Humbert’s nymphets, who cannot be raped, per se, because she “put herself in that predicament.” As such, she was “asking for it.” This is the effect of rape culture: the blame is removed from the perpetrators of the crime and placed instead upon the rape survivor, even when that survivor is an eleven-year-old child.

Race also features prominently in the case, as the eleven-year-old girl is Latina and the rapists are all African American. For example, Quanell X, an African American activist from Houston, led a town meeting in March 2011 to discuss the case. According to the Associated Press (AP), Quanell X informed the community members that the purpose of the meeting was not “to jump on an eleven-year-old girl,” but rather to “question the investigation by police” (AP). He suggested that some of the accused were guilty, while others were not, and expressed concern that only African Americans had been arrested. He later asked for donations for the defense funds of two of the accused perpetrators. Many in attendance supported the accused boys and men, and blamed the young girl. As the AP reports, “Supporters didn’t claim that the men and boys did not have sex with the young girl; instead they blamed the girl for the way she dressed or claimed she must have lied about her age” (AP). Further, “many in attendance told reporters that the girl had consented to the sex” (AP). As such, although those in attendance did not deny that the “group sex” occurred, through their victim blaming and sympathy for the perpetrators they effectively question whether or not these incidents constitute “rape.”

How race and socioeconomic class play out in this case deserves notice. The Latina girl comes from a lower-class family that is struggling financially, and the accused African American rapists come from lower and middle class families. However, due to the scope of this essay, an in-depth analysis of race and class will have to wait for a later project. In the meantime, there are two important questions to ponder. First, one has to wonder how the rhetoric surrounding the case would shift had the rape survivor been a Caucasian girl from a wealthy family, as opposed to a Latina girl from a poor family. Arguably, if the eleven-year-old had been a wealthy, White girl, she would not have been subject to the level of victim blaming that occurred. Instead, it is likely that she would have been presented as a true victim of a heinous crime. If she had been poor and White, it is safe to assume that victim blaming would have occurred, but perhaps it would have been less severe.

Second, one has to wonder at the outcome of the case if the rapists had been wealthy, White boys and men, instead of African Americans from lower-to-middle class backgrounds. Arguably, if the perpetrators had been wealthy and White, it would have been more difficult to secure convictions, as previous rape trials have indicated, and it is likely that the sentences would have been less severe. As of September 2012, six adults made plea deals in order to “avoid a trial”; two were sentenced to fifteen years, and four are awaiting sentencing (Horswell “After”). The cases of seven other adults are pending. Six juveniles have pleaded guilty and received probated sentences of seven years. And Eric McGowen, mentioned previously, opted to go to trial and was sentenced to ninety-nine years. McGowen has been identified by the young girl as the person who raped her with a beer bottle, and his voice is also identified on tape, where he is heard “cheering and urging others to assault [the girl], saying ‘Beat that ho!’” (Horswell “After”). In addition, McGowen fled court during a break

in proceedings, and the judge ordered that the trial and sentencing continue without his presence (*Daily Mail*). He was found guilty after a twenty minute deliberation, and his sentence was decided in thirty minutes (*Daily Mail*). McGowen was captured two weeks later and returned to jail (Horswell “After”). His lawyer claims that McGowen objects to the verdict and harsh sentence, calling it ““excessive, cruel and unusual punishment”” (qtd. in Horswell “After”). I tend to disagree. Regardless, race and class are clearly important factors in the case, and further consideration is due. However, we must take care to not shift the focus from the gang rapes of an eleven-year-old girl to a discussion of only race, effectively silencing and erasing her story, just as Dolores Haze’s story has been silenced and erased by those who choose to see not Dolores, but only Lolita.

This eleven-year-old girl is a tragic reminder of our need to reclaim the myth about Lolita. Lolita is not a sexually promiscuous child; she is Dolores Haze, a twelve-year-old girl who is raped by her stepfather. We need, thus, to rethink our cultural response to Nabokov’s *Lolita*, and reread the novel with the full knowledge that Humbert is a child molester, a pedophile, a preferential sex offender, and a skilled manipulator intent on justifying his despicable behavior through his attempt to shift the blame to his victim, a child. We need to reclaim and redefine “Lolita” to mean an exploited, molested, child survivor of rape. And we need to accept Humbert’s criminal sexual behavior for what it is: criminal. If we, as a society, do not take these steps, we will only strengthen the view of those who refuse to hear Dolores’s voice, however fragmented and silenced it may be, effectively erasing her in the process and leaving only Lolita, the dehumanized seductress, in her place.

Chapter 3: “Love all the girls ye e’er might want, / But see ye don’t get caught!”¹:

The Rape of Women with Disabilities in Elmer Harris’s *Johnny Belinda* and Beyond

Over the course of the past few years, the rape and sexual assault of women with disabilities has garnered public attention. Two high profile cases have shed light on what used to be a taboo subject shrouded in secrecy. Now, women and their families are starting to speak up and they are demanding justice. The dialogue that has been started has been effective in raising awareness about the extent of the problem. For example, James McGaughey, with the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, explains, “People with disabilities are much more likely to be sexually assaulted than people who do not have disabilities” (qtd. in Luo). In 2015, the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) estimates that 14.8 percent of U.S. women are rape survivors, and that 68 percent of sexual assaults are never reported to the police (RAINN). As such, we as a community need to start taking a more active role in the prevention—and conviction—of rape and sexual assault against women with disabilities, for whom the percentages are much higher. As Michael R. Rand and Erika Harrell, with the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), point out, “For rape or sexual assault, the age-adjusted rate for persons with disabilities was more than twice the rate for persons without disabilities” (Rand and Harrell 2). This means that according to modest estimates, 30 percent of women with disabilities are survivors of rape or sexual assault. In fact, the BJS reports that over 47,000 cases of rape or sexual assault against people with disabilities occurred in 2007 alone (Rand and Harrell 2). Unfortunately, the real numbers are much higher, because few cases of rape and sexual assault against

¹ From Mavor Moore’s musical version of *Johnny Belinda* (1.1).

women with disabilities are reported. As Ryan Gabrielson points out, “Studies of crimes against the developmentally disabled have found that as many as 80 percent of women in this population are sexually assaulted during their lives. Many victims suffer repeated attacks” (Gabrielson, “Police”). When one takes a moment to absorb this information, the result is a heart-wrenching feeling of inadequacy. If as many as eight in ten women with disabilities have survived rape or sexual assault, then we as a community are failing. We are failing at preventing these rapes and sexual assaults, at reporting these crimes, and at convicting those guilty of raping and sexually assaulting women with disabilities.

One example of this collective failure involves a California facility that treats patients who have developmental disabilities. The patients accused state caretakers and employees of “molestation and rape” 36 times from 2009 to 2012 (Gabrielson, “Police”). However, the facility’s internal police force “failed to order a single hospital-supervised rape examination for any of these alleged victims,” even when a woman with “severe intellectual disabilities” became pregnant (Gabrielson, “Police”). Another example involves the Connecticut Supreme Court, which in 2012 upheld a decision to overturn the conviction of Richard Fournier Jr., who was found guilty of sexual assault in 2008. Fournier sexually assaulted a 25-year-old woman who has “cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and hydrocephalus, and cannot talk or walk” (Luo). In 2009, the Appellate Court acquitted Fournier, and issued the opinion that “no reasonable jury could have concluded that she was physically helpless at the time of the assault” (Luo). In effect, the Appellate Court found that the woman was not raped because her attorney did not adequately prove that she was incapable of communicating her lack of consent—despite the fact that she cannot communicate verbally and she is physically incapable of defending herself. In this chapter, I discuss the rape of women with disabilities,

explaining that the politics surrounding rape culture become mired when the body in question is one that is marginalized by society, which impacts women with disabilities, who as a result become vulnerable to abuse by both sexual predators and the criminal justice system. My analysis of the rape of women with disabilities is drawn from these cases and from Elmer Harris's *Johnny Belinda*, a 1940 play treating the rape of Belinda, a Deaf woman labeled "Dummy" by the townspeople.

Johnny Belinda is set in 1900, in an isolated village on an island off the coast of Nova Scotia (Harris, "Foreword"). The play is based on the story of Lydia Dingwell, a Deaf woman who lived on Prince Edward Island, the location of Harris's summer home (IMDB). The story focuses on Belinda, who survives a rape and becomes pregnant with her rapist's child. Belinda is described by her father, Black McDonald, as "deaf and dumb" (1.2). She lost her hearing due to a fever when she was one year old, and at the play's start cannot read, write, or communicate except through crude symbols. As a result, the townspeople refer to Belinda as "Dummy." This pejorative represents their view of Belinda as a sociocultural Other, who is thus unworthy of a name. The story takes a turn when Dr. Jack Davidson, a young doctor who studied and practiced in Montreal, moves to the village and takes an interest in Belinda and her education, and begins teaching her sign language. It is Dr. Davidson who inquires about her real name, and who ultimately convinces Black McDonald that Belinda is intelligent. As a result, her father stops referring to her as "Dummy," and begins calling Belinda by her given name. Dr. Davidson eventually falls in love with Belinda and asks for her hand in marriage, but he returns to Montreal to make money before starting their life together. After her son is born, Belinda's father is killed by lightning. With Dr. Davidson in Montreal, Belinda is left to fend for herself and infant son, who is named Johnny

Belinda. Locky McCormick, the man who raped her, attempts to take custody of her son, and Belinda fatally shoots him. The play ends with her trial, and Belinda is found not guilty of murder because the court finds that she was protecting her child, as is her right as a mother.

Johnny Belinda opened on Broadway in 1940 and despite the controversial storyline—featuring both a Deaf woman and rape—the play had a successful nine month run (IBDB). Harris’s play opened at the Belasco Theatre in New York City and continued at the Longacre Theatre, closing after 321 New York performances, with plans to tour the following autumn (“*Johnny Belinda* Closes Saturday”). One 1941 article in *The New York Times* (NYT) claims that *Johnny Belinda* received “a lukewarm reception from most of the critics” (“Two Plays”). However, the length of the play’s run belies the criticism. For example, in a 1940 review by Brooks Atkinson in the NYT, the play is criticized for being “dramatic,” and yet he states, “There has seldom been such a complete play on any stage” (Atkinson). Further, in a 1941 review in the NYT, “In Re *Johnny Belinda*: The Case of *Johnny Belinda*,” the author interviews Harry Wagstaff Gribble, the play’s producer and director, who calls the play a “success” because it did earn a profit, however modest, and it regularly received six or seven curtain calls from the audience (“In Re *Johnny Belinda*”). While the author points out that “trade paper observers commented sourly,” and “critics did not praise it,” he also states, “only a cad or a critic would begrudge *Johnny Belinda* a golden day to come,” and “*Johnny Belinda* was by way of being an institution even before it finally reached a stage” (“In Re *Johnny Belinda*”). He goes on to discuss Gribble’s dedication to the play, including the fact that Gribble declined his salary as director when the play was struggling. Gribble passionately defended the play, and believed that “Broadway critics liked the play better than they realized that they did” (“In Re *Johnny Belinda*”). Gribble also

denounced the critics “for belittling as melodrama a story which to [him] is ‘an honest little play about a struggle to emerge’” (qtd. in “In Re *Johnny Belinda*”). Gribble, it seems, was correct in defending Harris’s play, as *Johnny Belinda* went on to become a successful Hollywood film.

According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), a film version was released in 1948 starring Jane Wyman, who won an Oscar for Best Actress for her role as Belinda. The film was nominated for a total of twelve Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, and Best Actor. Additionally, the film version of *Johnny Belinda* won the 1949 Golden Globes Award for Best Picture: Drama, and Best Motion Picture Actress. The film also won the 1948 National Board of Review Award for Top Ten Films. Finally, *Johnny Belinda* was named one of the “10 Best Films” of 1948 by the *NYT* and *Film Daily*, and was designated a Critics’ Pick by the *NYT* (“*Johnny Belinda* (1948)”).

A 1947 review of the film in *Variety* is a testament to its success. The critic writes, “It has its theatrics but they spring from a rather earnest development of story fundamentals, tastefully handled. Jean Negulesco’s direction never overplays the heart-strings, yet keeps them constantly twanging, and evidences a sympathetic instinct that is reflected in the performance” (“Review: *Johnny Belinda*”). Indeed, Negulesco’s direction calls on viewers to be sympathetic to Belinda’s plight, as does Wyman’s portrayal of the protagonist. Further, in a 1948 review in the *NYT*, the reviewer, Bosley Crowther, states, “Miss Wyman, all the way through, plays her role in a manner which commands compassion and respect” (Crowther). He calls *Johnny Belinda* a “quite moving,” “good film,” with a “novel and genuine theme” (Crowther). It is important to note that both critics, while championing Wyman’s portrayal of Belinda as “sympathetic” and as commanding “compassion and respect,” reveal a bias

against Deaf persons. Belinda is called a “mute slattern” in the *Variety* review (“Review: *Johnny Belinda*”). And in the *NYT* review she is a “drab and indeed repulsive deaf-mute” who is “pathetic” (Crowther). It is unfortunately not surprising that both critics show bias against Deaf persons. In Harris’s play, after all, Belinda is referred to as “Dummy” by the townspeople and her own family. This bias is a reflection of the times, as the Deaf community was, and arguably still is, portrayed as socioculturally Other, which helps to explain the mixed reaction of the Deaf community to the film version of *Johnny Belinda*.

As John S. Schuchman explains in the entry for *Johnny Belinda* in the *Encyclopedia of American Disability History*, “From the perspective of the early 21st century, major aspects of the film seem dated or inappropriate in terms of its depiction of deafness, such as the use of a hearing actress to play the role of a deaf character and the film’s emphasis on silence when Belinda is raped and during the delivery of her child” (515). In the late 1940s, when the film version was released, many people did not understand that Deaf persons are not helpless “Dummies.” Locky and the majority of the townspeople, for example, do not think twice about attempting to take Belinda’s baby away from her, because they make the assumption that she is incapable of caring for a child. When Mrs. McKee and Mrs. Lutz visit Belinda’s farm with Reverend Tidmarsh in an effort to convince him of Belinda’s inadequacy as a mother, Mrs. McKee calls Belinda an “immoral creature” (3.1). Further, Mrs. Lutz remarks, “Aye—and see how she neglects him. Off gaddin’ about an’ leaving the brat here to burn up if the place took afire” (3.1). They assume, once again, that Belinda is incapable of being a good mother, despite the fact that she merely goes upstairs to get a blanket for the child, and is thus not neglecting him. Mrs. McKee and Mrs. Lutz represent

society's view of Deaf persons, illustrating the "dated" and "inappropriate" belief that Deaf persons are, like Belinda, "Dummies."

In addition, in 2012 the television channel Turner Classic Movies (TCM) aired "The Projected Image: A History of Disability in Film," a series of films featuring characters with disabilities. *Johnny Belinda* was included as a part of the series. In Lawrence Carter-Long's trailer for the series focusing on *Johnny Belinda*, posted in October 2012 on YouTube, renowned actors Marlee Matlin and Linda Bove discuss criticisms of the film stemming from the Deaf community. Matlin states, "that portrayal bothered me so much. And we're talking about—this is something that happened back in the 40s before people were aware of, of, how Deaf people lived their lives, and how you could portray a Deaf character. I mean, she made a Deaf character look so victimized" (qtd. in Carter-Long). Matlin's statement illustrates the bias against Deaf persons that was prevalent in the 1940s, which stems largely from ignorance about the Deaf community. She also points out the victimized nature of Belinda's character, which has the effect of relegating Belinda to a position of abject vulnerability. She is what Julia Kristeva, in her book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, calls a "non-subject" (25)—in that Belinda does not act, but is instead acted upon. Her non-status as a "non-subject" reveals her abjection, as does the silencing of her voice. Further, Bove criticizes the fact that Belinda does not scream when Locky and Stella try to take away her baby, saying "it's not natural to what deaf people do" (qtd. in Carter-Long). Bove adds, "Deaf children make noise. Deaf children can cry. Deaf children can scream. It's normal. It's what we do. And in this film, in *Johnny Belinda*, you know, it's like her mouth was sewn shut" (qtd. in Carter-Long). This "unnatural," "abnormal" depiction of a Deaf character is obviously problematic to the Deaf community. Bove's comment evidences the abject

Otherness of Belinda's character. Belinda is a "non-subject" with no voice, no agency; her mouth is "sewn shut." Finally, Matlin further explains the unrealistic portrayal of a silent Belinda: "What bothered me is that she portrayed a Deaf person that wasn't allowed to make a sound while she's being raped. Who would not make a sound? Who does not have a voice?" (qtd. in Carter-Long). Of course, the answer to Matlin's final question is that those who are cast as abject Others by society are without a voice because they lack the agency afforded to subjects. Belinda's silence, then, signifies her Otherness.

Although *Johnny Belinda* has received much criticism from the Deaf community, the film is still celebrated because it was an award-winning, mainstream movie in the 1940s featuring a Deaf protagonist. As Schuchman notes, "*Johnny Belinda* is the first major motion picture to depict sign language in a positive light," while earlier films "denigrated the use of signs as abnormal" (515). As such, the film was a step in the right direction. Further, the success of the film spurred producers to continue featuring Deaf characters. Schuchman writes, "The fact that the movie earned a profit and received numerous awards made it clear that the topic of deafness and the use of sign language could be substantively depicted in future films. Thereafter, both film and television producers created hundreds of films, TV movies, and television episodes that made use of deafness and deaf characters" (515). The impact of the film version of *Johnny Belinda* was substantial, in that the film influenced future depictions of Deaf characters both in Hollywood and on television. According to Schuchman, "*Johnny Belinda* thus represents an important film and disability breakthrough in the 1940s as well as a marker of the evolving media depictions of deaf people and sign language" (515). *Johnny Belinda* is, as such, important to the Deaf community, and to the

history of portrayals of disability in film. Despite the criticisms of the film, it should be deemed a success.

The success of the film version undoubtedly led to the multiple television adaptations that followed. Television adaptations aired in the U.S. in 1955, 1958, 1967, and 1982, starring Katherine Bard, Julie Harris, Mia Farrow, and Rosanna Arquette as Belinda (IMDB). Reviews of the television adaptations are relatively positive. The 1955 version, reviewed by J. P. Shanley for the *NYT*, is touted as containing “elements of great emotional force,” but is criticized for attempting to condense the story into a one-hour timeframe, resulting in sequences “like blackout skits in a Broadway revue” (Shanley, J. P.). Katherine Bard, as Belinda, is praised for “perform[ing] impressively in a taxing role” (Shanley, J. P.). Jack Gould, also writing for the *NYT*, offers a preview of the 1958 version, which appeared live as part of the Hallmark Hall of Fame series. Gould writes that the director, Theodore Apstein, “wisely pruned some of the excessive melodramatics of the original Elmer Harris play,” in order to highlight the romance between Belinda and the doctor (Gould). He finds Julie Harris’s performance as Belinda to be “extremely touching” (Gould). The 1967 version, starring Mia Farrow, was not as favorably reviewed. In the article, “Mia Farrow Appears in *Johnny Belinda*,” published in the *NYT*, the reviewer criticizes Farrow for lacking “the diversity of emotional expression to impart the deeper beauty and illumination that the assignment calls for” (“Mia Farrow Appears”). Yet the reviewer comments on the “enduring magic” of *Johnny Belinda*, and commends Ian Bannen, who portrays Dr. Davidson, for “captur[ing] the more tender moments of the play and carr[ying] Miss Farrow” (“Mia Farrow Appears”). In the 1982 version starring Rosanna Arquette as Belinda, director Anthony Page moves the story to “some unspecified ‘poverty-stricken rural area,’” and changes the doctor’s

character to an “idealistic” social worker named Bill Richmond, as John O’Connor explains in his article for the *NYT* (O’Connor). Belinda is a “raggedy girl whom everyone assumes to be retarded,” until Bill’s character discovers that she is Deaf and begins teaching her sign language (O’Connor). O’Connor states that Arquette’s performance is “prettily sympathetic,” and explains that this updated version is more sexually explicit than its predecessors (O’Connor). Indeed, as C. Gerald Fraser points out in a short column in the *NYT*, director Anthony Page calls Arquette ““much more sexual and earthy than maybe it was possible to be in 1948”” (qtd. in Fraser).

Johnny Belinda also enjoyed international success. A number of television adaptations aired in foreign countries, including the United Kingdom (1958), Australia (1959), East Germany (1960), West Germany (1961), and Italy (1969) (IMDB). In addition, a musical version of the play was written by Canada’s Mavor Moore, with musical scores by John Fenwick. According to the Orpheus Musical Theatre Society (MTS), the musical version of the play was presented at the Charlottetown Festival on Prince Edward Island in 1968, 1969, 1974, 1975, 1997, and 1998 (Orpheus MTS). As *The Canadian Encyclopedia* points out, Moore’s version was also performed almost annually in Toronto, and in Montreal and Ottawa in 1969, and in Hamilton and Kitchener in 1983 (“*Johnny Belinda*”). Writing for the *Toronto Daily Star* in 1969, reviewer Nathan Cohen states, ““what gives the musical its dynamic is its grass roots quality, conveyed first of all in John Fenwick’s score, which draws liberally and pertinently on the bountiful folktune heritage of the Maritimes”” (qtd. in “*Johnny Belinda*”). Further, reviewer Bruce Deachman, writing for *The Ottawa Citizen’s* “Theatre Review” in 2004, offers his assessment of the musical production: “Actress Minna Koch does a wonderful job, chiefly through sign and dance, of expressing Belinda’s joys and

fear. Terry Duncan is wholly likable and convincing as the miracle-working doctor, while Lawrence Evenchick ably provides the villainous foil, Locky, with nary a drop of remorse or doubt” (qtd. in Orpheus MTS). As is suggested by the reviews and the extended run of Moore’s *Johnny Belinda*, the musical version of the play has been favorably received.

Moore’s version of *Johnny Belinda* is not widely available. His papers are held by the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections at York University in Toronto. The screenplay follows Harris’s text closely, with few minor revisions. For instance, Black MacDonald is not killed by lightning, but rather as a result of an intense physical altercation with Locky. In addition, the lyrics of the musical numbers add to the storyline, enriching the audience’s perceptions of the characters. For example, in an early song, “The Girls,” performed by Locky, Fergus, and Floyd, Locky relays a lesson taught to him by his father. Locky sings, “Love all the girls ye e’er might want, / But see ye don’t get caught!” (Moore 1.1). This line illustrates Locky’s lack of respect for women, as well as his insatiable sexual appetite. It also evidences Locky’s belief that Belinda is a vulnerable target, because he assumes that she will be unable to report the crime. In addition, Maggie, Belinda’s aunt, performs a song called “What Have They Done to Ye?” Maggie sings, “Who’d do such a thing / To a creature who can’t even call! / Men have no thought for / The harm they do us. / It’s only themselves they / Can think of when they think at all!” (Moore 2.2). She continues, “For the sake of a thrill they’ll ruin a girl / As a badge of success!” (Moore 2.2). Maggie is clearly portraying her concern for Belinda, as well as condemnation for Locky and men who would take advantage of young women. Finally, at the end of a song performed by the town priest and several pious townspeople, “Psalm 127,” Mrs. McKee, who regularly criticizes Belinda, says, “After all, she’s more to be pitied than condemned” (Moore 2.7). This line is

important to consider because Mrs. McKee represents the moral authority of the town. As such, her changing view of Belinda suggests a lack of blame, which instead becomes pity for her situation.

Victim blaming is almost ubiquitous in rape cases, which makes Mrs. McKee's realization that Belinda should not be "condemned" all the more critical. In fact, victim blaming is noticeably absent in texts treating *Johnny Belinda*. This is likely due to the fact that Belinda is Deaf, and thus falls into the category of the disabled. As such, she is cast as someone who is "more to be pitied than condemned." In addition, while early reviews of Harris's play refrain from mentioning rape, later reviews do not. Both of these points are significant because they illustrate that not only is Belinda undeserving of blame for being raped, no one questions the fact that she was, in fact, raped by Locky, and that he is guilty of committing a crime. For example, in 1940 Atkinson writes, "a neighborhood scoundrel foully seduces [Belinda]" (Atkinson). And in the 1941 review "In Re *Johnny Belinda*," another critic mentions that the play includes "a seduction, murder by shotgun, death by lightning and the threat of a foreclosed mortgage" ("In Re *Johnny Belinda*"). Both of the reviewers refer to the rape as a "seduction," but neither cast blame on Belinda for the rape she endures. The 1947 review in *Variety* takes a more blatant approach. The critic states, "A village romeo rapes her," leaving no doubt in the audience's minds ("Review: *Johnny Belinda*"). Crowther's 1948 review continues in the earlier vein. He suggests that the film contains "certain strands of romance which are not considered suited to the screen" and "lurid" scenes, arguably referencing the rape scene (Crowther). And he adds that the actor who portrays Locky McCormick is "forcibly brutish as the town sport who secretly violates the girl" (Crowther). As such, Belinda is violated by a "forcibly brutish" Locky in a "lurid"

scene. She is, again, not to be blamed. Further, although the 1955 review by Shanley never mentions rape, there is mention of the “anger, lust, hatred” in the program, and Belinda is described as suffering “humiliation and disgrace,” while Locky is described as “a lustful farmer” (Shanley, J. P.). There is no hint of blame for a humiliated and disgraced Belinda, who is instead a victim of “anger, lust, hatred.”

In later reviews, the critics are more direct in treating the rape, echoing the straightforward nature of the 1947 *Variety* review. In a review of the 1958 version, John P. Shanley writes that Locky McCormick is a “sadistic farmer who rapes Belinda” (Shanley, John P.). And in Gould’s 1958 preview of the live television performance of the play, he describes Locky McCormick as “the town sport who rapes the mute” (Gould). Further, in the 1967 review of *Johnny Belinda*, the critic mentions the “horrors of rape,” and describes Locky McCormick as “the alcoholic fisherman who fathered the child” (“Mia Farrow Appears”). And in O’Connor’s 1982 review, he explains that Locky’s character has been renamed Kyle, who is “the brutish villain who winds up raping Belinda, confident that she will be unable to tell anybody the truth” (O’Connor). Finally, in Deachman’s 2004 review of the musical version, which does not mention rape, Locky is a “villainous foil,” who has “nary a drop of remorse or doubt” (qtd. in Orpheus MTS). Locky is, then, a remorseless “villain” who is confident that he will not be punished for raping a Deaf woman because she will not be able to “tell anybody the truth.”

Locky’s lack of remorse for raping Belinda, as well as his belief that he will not “get caught,” stems from the fact that Belinda is Deaf. As a Deaf woman in an isolated village in 1900, Belinda is treated as an abject Other by her community. To them, she is nothing more than a “Dummy.” For example, when Dr. Davidson asks Belinda’s father if she had been to

school, Black McDonald responds, “There’s no larnin’ her nothin’. All she knows is what I bate into her” (1.2). He goes on to describe her as, “A desprite, strange, crayture altogither. More like an animile thin human” (1.2). Belinda’s own father assumes that she is incapable of learning, and resorts to physical violence to teach her, much like training a dog. He sees her as a “strange creature,” who is more animal than human, which serves to place Belinda in the category of the abject Other, because as the human/animal dichotomy dictates, the category of “animal” is always already Other and thus signifies the abject. As such, Black McDonald’s treatment of Belinda as an animal casts her as an abject Other—which has the effect of making her vulnerable to abuse by her father and the townspeople. This view of Belinda as Other is echoed by her aunt and the townspeople, including Locky.

Locky is a womanizer who frequently has sex with women in the village. When he becomes engaged to be married to Stella, she is warned by Jimmy Dingwell, who says, “as Locky’s wife—ye’ll have a lot o’ competition. Ye’ll have to be in bed early to hold him” (1.1). But Stella is undeterred. The night of the rape, Stella notices Locky ogling Belinda. She says to him, “You kape away from that Dummy! [. . .] I saw ye takin’ in her legs, and sizin’ her up like you was undressin’ her!” (1.3). Locky, of course, denies his interest in Belinda, and chastises Stella for being “jealous” of a “dummy” (1.3). Stella, however, is no fool. She warns him, “One thing—she couldn’t tell on ye, but kape away from her if you want to marry me” (1.3). The fact that Belinda cannot “tell on” Locky is enough of a reason for him to pursue her. He does not see Belinda as a subject with a voice, with agency, but rather as a “Dummy”—a life-size doll that exists for his pleasure. She is an object to him, a “jettisoned object” that is “radically excluded” (Kristeva 2). As an excluded object, as

opposed to an included subject, Belinda becomes a thing to desire and to take as one's own. When Stella leaves, Locky is left alone with Belinda and he does just that.

In the closing scene of Act One, Locky rapes Belinda. Under the guise of playing a fiddle for her to dance, he tricks her into coming close to him. As the stage directions dictate, "He grabs for her hand. She retreats" (1.3). Belinda is clearly not interested in being touched by Locky, but she is unaccustomed to attention from men—aside from her father and the doctor—and is uncertain of how to deal with Locky's behavior. When he makes a gesture toward his mouth, a confused Belinda thinks he is trying to talk to her using sign language. She begins signing to him, and when she extends her arms to make the sign for "bird," he again takes advantage of her. Harris writes, "He grabs her around the waist and draws her to him kissing her violently on the mouth" (1.3). Belinda "pushes herself free and backs away from him" in a clear attempt to signify "no" (1.3). Locky, however, continues his pursuit, and is excited by her refusal, and her fear. He says, "Oh, ye're scared! . . . Well, I'm thinkin' that was yer first kiss! I caught a seagull oncet, and it had the same scared look" (1.3). Here, Locky compares Belinda to a seagull, an animal, illustrating his view of her as an abject Other. In addition, Locky is excited by the fear he instills in her. He takes pleasure in having power over the powerless. He lunges for her and Belinda again moves away, desperately pointing to the fiddle on the floor in an attempt to divert his attention. When Locky pretends to play and starts to dance, Belinda naively drops her defenses. Harris writes, "This is Locky's chance and he seizes her around the waist, drops bow and violin and catches her in his arms. He attempts to kiss her. She tries her best to avoid it, struggling to be free of him, but he forces her back on the pile of [grain] sacks and rips open her dress. She reaches desperately for the bell on the old chair near the door, but Locky holds her powerless" (1.3).

Locky “seizes” Belinda as one would seize prey. She is nothing but a conquest to him, and he enjoys the hunt. Belinda consistently attempts to avoid his advances and struggles against his strength, but she is “powerless.” As the stage lights fade and the curtain closes, Belinda is raped.

When it becomes clear that Belinda is pregnant, her father is enraged. He says to his sister, “What kind of father do you think I am? Who’s been at her?” (2.2). He asks Belinda who hurt her, but she remains silent, arguably to keep her father from killing the man. However, it ultimately becomes apparent that Locky is the father of Belinda’s baby. When Black McDonald finds out he grabs his shotgun and says, “Why, the son of a bitch! I’ll blow his guts out! [. . .] The bastard! I’ll see daylight through him!” (2.4). It is Dr. Davidson who calms him down, saying, “there’s nothing to be gained by violence—nor scandal either. It would be horrible for Belinda” (2.4). The doctor then tells Black McDonald that he wants to marry Belinda and be a father to her baby, so Belinda’s father relents and agrees to let the matter rest. Black McDonald’s anger is understandable, as is his reaction to the news. He is Belinda’s father. It is his duty, his responsibility, to protect his daughter from men like Locky. When he is unable to fulfill that duty, he loses sleep and is mired in guilt, as would be any parents who learn that their daughter has been raped, especially if their daughter’s disabilities put her at a disadvantage in defending herself.

For instance, the mother of Jennifer, a former resident at a California facility who became pregnant as a result of being raped by a staff member, says, ““Every time, I just imagine her being raped and screaming and crying for me [. . .]. It just kills me”” (qtd. in Gabrielson, “Police”). Jennifer’s mother feels intense guilt because she was not able to protect her daughter, who has developmental disabilities. According to Ryan Gabrielson, in

the 2012 article “Police Ignored, Mishandled Sex Assaults Reported by Disabled” for the organization California Watch, the offense was worsened by the fact that Jennifer’s mother had previously reported signs of sexual abuse on her daughter’s body, including bite marks that broke the skin, and severe bruises on her breasts and upper body. California Watch created a short, animated film illustrating Jennifer’s story called *In Jennifer’s Room*, which was posted on their web site in November 2012. The film, by Carrie Ching and Ryan Gabrielson, is a transcription of an interview with Jennifer’s mother. As *In Jennifer’s Room* shows, when her mother reported the abuse, Jennifer was moved to a room with a lock on the door and an alarm. However, another door, which led to a bathroom, was unlocked and not alarmed. It is apparent that her rapist gained access through that door. Jennifer’s situation was complicated by the fact that no one at the facility noticed her pregnancy, even after a routine cervical exam and Pap smear. It was her mother who noticed Jennifer’s swelling stomach, when she was in the second trimester of her pregnancy. The Sonoma Developmental Center, where Jennifer was housed, continually denied that Jennifer was raped on the premises. The facility even went as far as to claim that Jennifer was raped during one of her visits home, despite the fact that it was impossible, considering the time of conception. An anonymous whistle blower at the facility later reported that Jennifer was raped by a janitor, who “fled the country” after the pregnancy was discovered, but there is no evidence to back up that claim (Gabrielson, “Police”). Jennifer has since been moved out of the facility, but an untold number of rape survivors remain.

It is unclear how many women were raped at the facility, because many of the women are uncommunicative, and most of the women are kept on birth control pills as a matter of course (Ching and Gabrielson). However, as Gabrielson points out, an external audit of the

facility's records indicates that at least 36 cases should have received attention, and "the center's internal records show that patients have continued to allege sex abuse in the unit where Jennifer lived" (Gabrielson, "Police"). These patients have "suffered molestation, forced oral sex and vaginal lacerations" (Gabrielson, "Police"). The situation is dire, because as stated previously, the center's internal police force failed to investigate a single claim, even after Jennifer became pregnant. The lack of criminal evidence is especially problematic in cases in which women with developmental disabilities are raped, because, as Gabrielson states, "DNA and other physical evidence are even more important because statements from alleged victims often are treated as unreliable" (Gabrielson, "Police"). The testimony of women with disabilities is often deemed "unreliable," in part, due to ignorance regarding the intelligence and capabilities of persons with disabilities. Keep in mind that Belinda's own father assumes she is an incapable "Dummy." But regardless of the perceived unreliability of testimony from persons with disabilities, the state has a responsibility to protect its residents and to pursue criminal charges when appropriate.

The state of California has attempted to remedy the problem of institutions ignoring or covering up allegations of sexual abuse by enacting legislation that requires centers to report claims of rape and sexual assault to external law enforcement agencies—as opposed to dealing with charges internally. Gabrielson explains, "The new law, SB 1522, 'will ensure developmental center investigators and outside law enforcement agencies work collaboratively to investigate unexplained injuries or allegations of abuse'" (Gabrielson, "Police"). Presumably, the law will prevent the mishandling of claims of rape and sexual assault, and ensure that victims receive proper medical care as well as counseling. Additionally, because testimony and evidence will be collected by "outside law enforcement

agencies,” the state should be able to secure convictions for people who prey on women with disabilities. SB 1522 was signed in September of 2012, so the law’s efficacy is currently unknown (Gabrielson, “Brown”).

Another case that deserves attention involves the overturned conviction of Richard Fourtin, Jr., who was convicted in Connecticut in 2008 of raping a woman with profound disabilities. The woman, known as L.K., has ““severe cerebral palsy, has the intellectual functional equivalent of a 3-year-old and cannot verbally communicate”” (qtd. in Beauchamp). L.K. is also “nearly immobile with very little body movement” (Colagiovanni). In fact, she can move only her right index finger (Tepfer). Her condition made her vulnerable to Fourtin, who had access to L.K. because he was the boyfriend of her mother and L.K.’s “occasional caregiver,” as Cindy Luo points out (Luo). The rape occurred in 2005 at a home for people with disabilities called Success Village (Colagiovanni). L.K. testified at the trial by moving her finger over the words “yes” and “no,” which were printed along with the alphabet on a board that was set in front of her (Tepfer). She also spelled out words letter by letter. According to Daniel Tepfer, “It was an exhausting process that lasted four days” (Tepfer). Fourtin was originally convicted and sentenced to six years in prison, but he appealed the ruling on the grounds that the prosecution did not sufficiently prove that L.K. “could not communicate her refusal to have sex with the defendant” (Tepfer). An Appellate Court agreed with the defense, and overturned Fourtin’s conviction. That decision was appealed by the state, which took the case to the state Supreme Court.

The Connecticut Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Appellate Court, setting Fourtin free. The court found that:

Given the uncontradicted evidence in the record that the complainant could communicate using various nonverbal methods, including screeching, biting,

kicking and scratching, and the failure of the state to present any evidence probative of whether the complainant was unable to use these forms of communication at the time of the alleged assault, no reasonable jury could have concluded that she was physically helpless as defined [in law]. (qtd. in McGaughey, “P&A News”)

In other words, because a woman who is unable to communicate verbally, and who is unable to move more than one finger, did not actively deny consent, her previously convicted rapist was declared not guilty of rape. In effect, the court ruled that L.K. gave consent because she did not fight back or scream.

As Susan Ehrlich explains in the article “Communities of Practice, Gender, and the Representation of Sexual Assault,” the burden of proving lack of consent falls on the victim of rape or sexual assault. In a 1994 case involving a disciplinary tribunal on a college campus, she finds that the female students’ “so-called lack of resistance was tantamount to consent” (241). Although both of the female students expressed fear of their attacker, they were repeatedly questioned about their “signals of resistance,” which had the effect of undermining their testimonies (241)—even though “they were quite clear and insistent that he stop, but their demands were ignored” (243). As such, saying “no” was not enough to convince the tribunal—or the rapist, for that matter—that they were denying consent. Apparently, they should have fought back, even though they were afraid of being hurt by their attacker. According to Ehrlich, “the requirement of utmost resistance was a necessary criterion for the crime of rape” in Canada and the U.S. up to the 1950s and 1960s (245). While that is no longer true, “a similar concept is often operative in the adjudication of rape and sexual harassment cases” (245). If a victim is unable to prove “utmost resistance,” then, a rape can be construed as consensual sex. This is what happened in L.K.’s case. Because her

lawyer did not adequately prove that she was unable to deny consent, the Connecticut Supreme Court found that a rape did not occur.

As one would imagine, many organizations fighting for the rights of people with disabilities have been critical of the Connecticut Supreme Court's decision, and have taken steps to prevent something like this from happening again. In October of 2013, HB 6641 went into effect. As explained in Connecticut Public Act 13-47, regarding HB 6641, the law "expands the definition of 'physically helpless' for these purposes to include someone who is physically unable to resist an act of sexual intercourse or sexual contact" (Connecticut). As a result, women with disabilities should not have to prove "utmost resistance" to secure a rape conviction. HB 6641 is certainly a step in the right direction, but it does not resolve every complication that arises in cases involving the rape and sexual assault of women with disabilities.

Joan R. Petersilia's article, "Crime Victims with Developmental Disabilities: A Review Essay," offers an in-depth analysis of factors impacting women with disabilities who are survivors of rape and sexual assault, as well as other crimes. Petersilia states that there are "particularly high rates of sexual assault against females with developmental disabilities," but all women with disabilities face a higher risk of being raped or sexually assaulted than women without disabilities (662). She notes that national statistics regarding crimes against persons with disabilities were largely unavailable until the late 1990s, explaining that "very little research exists on victims with disabilities, so that the current state of knowledge is seriously inadequate" (689). Part of the problem is that the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) did not "provide recognition of domestic violence against women with disabilities," as Petersilia notes (665-66). The Crime Victims with Disabilities Awareness

Act of 1998, “the first piece of national legislation in U.S. history to address the issue,” is an attempt to remedy the situation (658). The Act mandates the collection of information regarding the victimization of those with disabilities, which has helped researchers to determine the scope of the problem. In addition, the Act urged the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences to hold a workshop in order to “discuss the state of knowledge in this area and highlight gaps in the research” (658). The findings were published in 2001 and are summarized, in part, in Petersilia’s review essay.

Petersilia discusses the fact that a much lower percentage of persons with disabilities report crimes to law enforcement. There are a number of reasons for this. First, as she explains, “The communication limitations of many people with developmental disabilities may interfere with their ability to report” (661). For example, victims such as L.K. are unable to communicate verbally. Second, “Some of these victims are in dependent relationships with people who provide care to them, and they may fear grave personal harm if they make a report” (661). Jennifer, for instance, was raped and sexually assaulted by an employee of the facility in which she lived. And many women with disabilities are raped and sexually assaulted by personal caregivers, which means that reporting the abuse might put them at risk of further harm, as they would be filing criminal complaints against the very people responsible for their daily personal care. Third, there are “additional strong disincentives to report” for many persons with disabilities, “such as a fear of being sent back to a more restrictive setting” (661). Restricting a person’s freedom can be seen as a form of punishment for reporting a crime, and threatening to do so could prevent many people from reporting. Finally, “Conflicts of interest, whether between a service provider and a victim or between a family perpetrator and a victim, may also interfere with proper reporting by another party”

(661). Some persons with disabilities rely solely on others for their care, including reporting a crime to law enforcement. A friend of a service provider may hesitate to report a crime implicating their friend, or a family member may hesitate to report a crime if another family member is implicated. All of these reasons contribute to the lower number of reports of crimes against persons with disabilities. An additional problem is that when they are reported, crimes against persons with disabilities are oftentimes defined as “incidents” rather than as “crimes,” as Petersilia notes. As a result, “offenses are handled through administrative channels within a group home or institution,” which has the effect of making the crimes “truly invisible” (661). This is what happened in Jennifer’s case. If it were not for Jennifer’s pregnancy, which is impossible to ignore, it is likely that her case would have remained “invisible,” like so many others.

It is arguable that the “invisible” nature of these crimes serves to further isolate survivors of rape and sexual assault who have disabilities, so much so that they may not see an avenue for escape. Petersilia explains that women with disabilities often stay in abusive relationships for many of the same reasons that keep women without disabilities in abusive relationships, including “fear of further violence, belief the batterer will change, love of the abuser, religious beliefs, and many other concerns” (667). This is to be expected. Many women who stay in abusive relationships stay, first, because they are trying to make the relationship work for a host of reasons, especially if children are involved, and second, because many women—who oftentimes bear an unequal responsibility when it comes to childcare and home maintenance, and who more times than not earn less than their male counterparts—are understandably apprehensive about the financial insecurity that comes with living on one’s own, especially if children are involved. And there are additional

reasons unique to women in this community that help explain why many women with disabilities find it difficult to leave abusive relationships. Petersilia explains:

But, for women with disabilities, there are additional factors that can limit their ability to leave, such as physically not being able to exit the house, not knowing if the local shelter is physically accessible (i.e., has a wheelchair ramp, workers who know sign language), fear of losing caregiver service if they report the abuse, fear they will be institutionalized if they leave their partner, and lack of resources. The latter is particularly important because many women with disabilities either do not work or are not employed full-time. (667)

As Petersilia notes, women with physical disabilities oftentimes face severe barriers to leaving an abusive relationship. Women's shelters already lack the resources to serve the number of survivors who need help. For women with disabilities, the problem extends beyond the number of available beds. If there is no local shelter with wheelchair ramps and accessible restrooms, women with physical disabilities have nowhere to turn for help. They may also face transportation barriers if they are unable to drive or if public transportation is not accessible. The fear of losing caregiver services is yet another hurdle. Some women with disabilities rely on caregivers for daily personal care. Reporting abuse caused by a caregiver would ultimately lead to the replacement of that caregiver, which can be an arduous undertaking. If the caregiver is a romantic partner or family member who is abusive, then reporting the abuse could leave a woman with disabilities without care, and could thus lead to a placement in an institutional setting, which is less than ideal for many women with disabilities. Finally, a lack of financial resources impacts many women with disabilities, many of whom do not work, or do not earn a salary that will support them. As such, while all women face the same obstacles in leaving abusive relationships, women with disabilities face a greater burden, which helps to explain the lower numbers of reports of abuse among this community.

In addition to facing greater obstacles in escaping abuse, women with disabilities are disproportionately victimized for a host of reasons. For example, as Petersilia states, persons with disabilities may “misinterpret social cues and believe everyone is their friend” (672). This, along with a “desire for acceptance,” can cause them to “acquiesce to behavior they do not like or do not want for fear of losing social contact” (672). Humans are social beings, and the fear of isolation is a powerful one, especially when one is dependent upon others for care. Further, many persons with disabilities “have little access to resources,” “do not receive sex education,” and “may lack the vocabulary to report the abuse,” all of which add to the hindrances they face when dealing with abusive situations (672). Another factor is that persons with disabilities “are often the least able to recognize danger, the least able to protect themselves, and the least able to obtain assistance within the criminal justice system” (672). The recognition of danger is most applicable to women with developmental disabilities, while the lack of ability to protect oneself is faced by almost all women, especially women with physical disabilities. The fact that women with disabilities face greater burdens in receiving assistance from the criminal justice system is a multifaceted problem.

For instance, many women with disabilities have an understandable “fear of not being believed or taken seriously” by law enforcement (682). This is because, as Petersilia explains, “Police believe victims with disabilities lack credibility and, in addition, the police themselves lack standardized protocols for handling complaints by victims with disabilities” (683). Ignorance and lack of training are to be blamed. Law enforcement officers need to be educated about the unique circumstances impacting persons with disabilities. And social services need to be more available to assist persons with disabilities in traversing what is ultimately a confusing and stressful ordeal. Another factor to be considered is the conviction

rate for perpetrators of crimes against persons with disabilities. As Petersilia notes, “although the offender was known in 95% of the cases, only 22% of the alleged offenders were charged with committing a crime. Of those charged, 38% were convicted” (683). This is obviously problematic. One would expect a greater conviction rate for crimes in which 95% of the offenders are known. To make matters worse, criminals convicted of crimes against persons with disabilities often receive lighter sentences. Petersilia states, “When criminal convictions do occur, sentences for crimes committed against people with disabilities are often lighter, particularly for sexual assault” (686). It is difficult for a reasonable person to understand why crimes against persons with disabilities often receive lighter sentences, especially in cases of rape and sexual assault—because victim blaming is less prevalent when the survivor is a woman with a disability. However, the fact remains that persons with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse by both criminals and the criminal justice system, which brings us to the final point explaining why women with disabilities are victimized at a higher rate than women without disabilities: the perceived vulnerability of women with disabilities.

Although Petersilia points out that “not all people with disabilities are vulnerable,” their perceived vulnerability leads many sexual predators to see women with disabilities as “attractive victims” (674, 676). She explains, “In many instances, offenders target people with developmental disabilities because of their perception of them as vulnerable,” which also applies to women with physical disabilities (677). Women with disabilities are perceived to be vulnerable for a number of reasons. One of which is that some women with disabilities are less able to defend themselves against sexual predators. For example, women with cognitive disabilities may not recognize predatory behavior, while women with physical disabilities may lack the physical strength to defend themselves against rape and sexual

assault—which also applies to all women, who are more times than not less strong than their male counterparts. Also, while it is unpleasant to discuss, many sexual predators enjoy controlling their victims, and see women with disabilities, who are sometimes dependent upon others, as vulnerable targets. Petersilia explains, “Sexual offenses against people with disabilities appear to be common. In some cases, offenders have a special sexual attraction to people with specific disabilities. Others may have a need to direct sexual aggression toward individuals they consider to be vulnerable” (676). Harris’s Locky, for example, sees Belinda as a vulnerable target for sexual abuse. This is evidenced by Stella’s warning to Locky when she says, “she couldn’t tell on ye, but kape away from her if you want to marry me” (1.3). As stated previously, Belinda’s perceived inability to “tell on” Locky—i.e., file a criminal complaint—gives Locky, who is a sexual predator, an incentive to prey on Belinda in that he assumes that he can rape Belinda without fear of punishment.

Further, as Petersilia explains, “An offender may choose an individual with a disability as a victim out of a belief that apprehension is less likely and that punishment will be less severe if apprehension occurs” (673). This explains why Locky chooses Belinda as a victim. He does not think that he will be apprehended for the crime of rape, and as such he expects little to no punishment. As O’Connor points out in his review of the 1982 television adaptation of *Johnny Belinda*, Locky’s character is a “brutish villain who winds up raping Belinda, confident that she will be unable to tell anybody the truth” (O’Connor). Locky rapes Belinda because of her silence. He assumes that her lack of voice equates to a lack of agency, thus making Belinda vulnerable to abuse. As the research suggests, Locky’s view of Belinda and women with disabilities as vulnerable targets is not unique to him. Sexual predators learn to see women with disabilities as vulnerable from a number of sources, including family. For

example, in Moore's musical version of *Johnny Belinda*, Locky's choice of Belinda as a victim is influenced by a lesson he learned from his father. Locky states that his father taught him, "Love all the girls ye e'er might want, / But see ye don't get caught!" (Moore 1.1). Locky has been taught that women are objects of conquest and that they exist for his sexual pleasure. His father teaches him to take all the women he wants as long as he does not "get caught." And of course Belinda, who is Deaf, is thought to be unable to report the rape, and is thus a perfect target in her perceived vulnerability. Unfortunately, the lesson handed down from Locky's father to Locky persists to this day, which becomes clear upon considering the staggering number of rapes and sexual assaults against women with disabilities.

Another factor contributing to the perceived vulnerability of women with disabilities stems from sociocultural depictions of women with disabilities, including film representations. Petersilia notes, "an attractive victim is one who appears vulnerable to the offender. Media portrayals of people with disabilities may add to this perception of vulnerability. Some movies portray persons with a vision, hearing, or other disability as helpless victims of predators" (677). The film version of *Johnny Belinda*, for example, portrays Belinda as a "helpless victim" who is unable to defend herself against Locky's aggression, and who is unwilling to reveal Locky as her rapist, which is one reason Matlin and Bove take issue with the film. As Matlin explains, "that portrayal bothered me so much. [. . .] I mean, she made a Deaf character look so victimized" (qtd. in Carter-Long). The victimized portrayal of Belinda is problematic because it serves to undermine her agency. It also serves to represent all Deaf women as "helpless victims," which is not only inaccurate, it is also offensive to the Deaf community, and potentially dangerous in that it reinforces the notion that women with disabilities are vulnerable targets for sexual predators.

Women with disabilities clearly face greater burdens when dealing with rape and sexual assault than women without disabilities. As discussed, the perceived vulnerability of women with disabilities makes them a target for sexual predators. The criminal justice system fails to meet the unique needs of women with disabilities and oftentimes the validity of their testimony is questioned. Many domestic violence shelters are not accessible to women with disabilities. And, as Petersilia explains, persons with disabilities often live in low-income households. She reports that one third of persons with disabilities live in “households with a total income of \$15,000 or less” (657). This impacts their abilities to leave abusive situations and to pursue criminal charges. Women with disabilities, then, face multiple binds of oppression, to borrow from Marilyn Frye. Frye, in her essay “Oppression,” uses a birdcage analogy to explain that women face “a network of systematically related barriers” that serves to restrict women’s “motion and mobility” within society (12). Alone, each barrier or bind of oppression can be theoretically overcome. But when there are multiple barriers or binds, a person’s sociocultural mobility is unquestionably hindered. Women with disabilities, for example, face oppression on multiple levels—as women, as persons with disabilities, and as low-income persons—which together work to systematically oppress women with disabilities. And women with disabilities who are survivors of rape or sexual assault face an additional bind. As Petersilia states, “The multiple oppressions of being female, disabled, and battered leave this community extremely vulnerable to intimate partners and to caregivers” (666). In addition, women with disabilities are vulnerable to the inadequacy of the criminal justice system, adding yet another bind of oppression.

As such, women with disabilities face what the Combahee River Collective, in their essay “A Black Feminist Statement,” calls interlocking “systems of oppression” (232).

Although the Combahee River Collective is speaking specifically of Black women, their message is applicable to women with disabilities, who are, indeed, faced with interlocking “systems of oppression,” in that each oppression that binds them is strengthened by the others. The Combahee River Collective states, “The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives” (232). For women with disabilities, the synthesis of oppressions related to sex, disability, and class creates a “birdcage” that hinders their sociocultural status and places them in a vulnerable position. When women with disabilities are Black, Latina, Asian, Native American, or multiracial, their race adds yet another wire to the cage, as does a homosexual, bisexual, or transgender identity. Eradicating these “systems of oppression” is not practical, in that women with disabilities cannot wait for centuries of prejudice to magically disappear.

Instead, we need to work toward “greater awareness, victim advocacy and education, special accommodations in court, and data collection and research,” as Petersilia notes (690). Only then will we as a society be able to serve the unique needs of women with disabilities who are survivors of rape or sexual assault. And, with “wide support and excellent funding,” as Petersilia explains, “the experience of individuals with disabilities who become crime victims will change radically” (689). Harris’s *Belinda* provides a modicum of hope, as her story illustrates that women with disabilities can recover after surviving rape or sexual assault—if they are treated with respect, given access to education and essential services, and protected by the criminal justice system. Consider that *Belinda* is never blamed for the rape, even by critics of the play, film, and television adaptations. She is never accused of “asking for it” or “leading on” Locky. For a survivor of rape or sexual assault, that act in and of itself is a sign of respect. Consider also that *Belinda* had access to education and medical care

through her relationship with the doctor. When she gained access to education through learning sign language, she became better able to communicate with others and thus gained agency. As such, while on her own, with no men to protect her, Belinda is able to protect her son and herself by fatally shooting Locky when he comes to take Johnny Belinda away from her. Then consider that Dr. Davidson acts as Belinda's advocate during the trial, providing translation and clarification. And that Stella, Locky's wife, provides the evidence vindicating Belinda and condemning Locky when she testifies that Locky is the father of Belinda's baby, thus implicating him for rape. If it were not for the support Belinda received, the outcome of the trial would have been arguably different, and Belinda would have likely lost custody of her son. But because Belinda was able to communicate the facts of the case, and because she received the support she needed, she was ultimately successful in securing justice. Harris's *Johnny Belinda*, then, illustrates that a positive outcome is possible. But, of course, how positive can any outcome that begins with the rape or sexual assault of women with disabilities be? It is an abhorrent crime. The only answer is to actively work toward preventing the rape and sexual assault of women with disabilities, toward greater reporting of these crimes, and toward greater conviction rates for those guilty of raping and sexually assaulting women with disabilities.

Chapter 4: “To be seen, is to be doomed”:¹

Lynn Nottage’s *Ruined* and Rape as a Weapon of War

in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Sophie, a main character in Lynn Nottage’s 2009 play, *Ruined*, sings a song about a rare forest bird with a sweet call. She sings, “To be seen, is to be doomed / It must evade, evade capture, / And yet the bird / Still cries out to be heard” (1.4). Through this song, Sophie, a rape survivor, speaks for the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). If the women are “seen,” they are “doomed.” For example, a Congolese woman relayed to a reporter: ““If we go to the river for water, we get raped. If we go to the fields for food, we get raped. If we go to the market to sell our goods, we get raped. Our lives are filled with danger [. . .]. There is no peace”” (qtd. in Faul, “Justice” par. 16-17). Because the women of the DRC live with the constant “danger” of being raped, they must always try to “evade capture.” And yet, these survivors still long “to be heard.” Their voices are “crying out” to anyone who will listen. Nottage, an African-American playwright, heard their cry and traveled to Africa to interview rape survivors in order to provide a platform for their voices. The result is *Ruined*, which is informed by the experiences of the women she met. In this chapter, I explore the use of rape as a weapon of war, specifically in the DRC, drawing from Nottage’s *Ruined*. I argue that rape is an effective weapon of war for the following reasons: the survivors experience often extreme physical violence, which is exacerbated by the lack of access to medical care; the victim blaming and public shaming that occur serve to disrupt the survivors’ communities; the rape survivors are ultimately deemed abject and are thus cast out

¹ From Lynn Nottage’s *Ruined* (1.4).

of their communities, destroying families; and the children born as a result of rape are stigmatized and often abandoned, as are their mothers, which damages both the family and the community. With the DRC reporting “70% of the world’s rape,” it is time to shed more light on this atrocity (Push par. 1).

Ruined was published in 2009 to much acclaim. The play received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2009, among other prestigious awards, including the Audelco Award, Drama Desk Award, Lucille Lortel Award, the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award, the OBIE Award, and the Outer Critics Circle Award (“About”). According to the Goodman Theatre, which commissioned the play, *Ruined* was first performed in 2007 and 2008 at their theatre in Chicago. As the Manhattan Theatre Club points out, the play moved to their theatre in New York in 2009. Nottage wrote the play to draw attention to the plight of women in the DRC, and she has been successful. In June 2009, United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-moon attended the play accompanied by Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. In “*Ruined: Ban Attends Theatre Play*,” a UN sponsored webcast published on YouTube, Nottage is featured speaking about her experience writing the play and her desire to help the Congolese women she interviewed find an audience for their stories. Nottage says she is pleased to have reached the ear of the UN only four years after recording the women’s stories during her trip to Uganda. Nottage went to Uganda, as opposed to the DRC, because Uganda, which borders the DRC, is a “safe haven to one of the largest refugee populations on the continent,” as Nottage explains in her article “Out of East Africa” (par. 2). While there, Nottage interviewed fifteen refugee women from the DRC and Sudan, whose stories informed her play. Nottage writes, “I ask how they find the strength to go on. ‘We must live our lives’ is their refrain. I’m awed by their resilience. Their words have a

catalyzing effect, and we leave feeling like warriors ready to act” (par. 25). Nottage’s desire to act is manifested in her play *Ruined*, which presents women living their lives through tragedy, and grasping onto hope despite the hardships endured.

The play is set in a brothel in the war-torn DRC. Mama Nadi, the proprietor, offers food, alcohol, cigarettes, billiards, and women to the soldiers who frequent her establishment, Mama Nadi’s Place. Sophie, Salima, and Josephine are women who work for Mama. In the beginning of the play, Sophie and Salima are sold to Mama by Christian, Sophie’s uncle, who is trying to secure a safe place for the women. Interestingly, they are “safer” in a brothel than in their villages, as both Sophie and Salima are survivors of brutal gang rapes, as is Josephine, the daughter of a village Chief. The lives of these women are intertwined throughout the play, representing the lives of rape survivors in the DRC. The violence that plagues their daily lives literally takes center stage, as the characters portray the physical and emotional toll of rape in the DRC.

Rape has long been considered a spoil of war, with women’s bodies perceived as merely pieces of property to plunder. But that view shifted in the early 1990s, when details concerning the mass rapes of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the former Yugoslavia came to light. According to “Sexual Violence: A Tool of War,” a 2013 report published by the UN, in 1992 the UN Security Council declared these systematic, mass rapes “an international crime” (par. 8). Further, in 1993 and 1994, the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda declared rape a “crime against humanity” and a “war crime” (par. 9-10). Since these groundbreaking declarations, the UN has been working to raise awareness concerning the use of rape as a weapon of war. The numbers alone are enough to shock most people. The table below illustrates UN estimates as of April 2013:

Location	Number of Women Raped	Dates
Liberia	More than 40,000	1989 to 2003
Sierra Leone	More than 60,000	1991 to 2002
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Up to 60,000	1992 to 1995
Rwanda	Up to 250,000	1994 (3 month period)
Democratic Republic of the Congo	More than 200,000	1998 to present

Source: UN, “Sexual Violence” (par. 3-4).

Unfortunately, these numbers are estimates, and experts suggest that the actual numbers are far greater, because many rape survivors do not report the sexual assaults out of fear of reprisal. For example, in the 2011 article “Estimates and Determinants of Sexual Violence against Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” by Amber Peterman, Tia Palermo, and Caryn Bredenkamp, the authors suggest that the number of women raped in the DRC far exceeds the UN’s estimate. Although the authors’ research concerns sexual violence against women in general—as opposed to rape perpetrated as a weapon of war—their findings are telling. Peterman, Palermo, and Bredenkamp estimate that 1150 Congolese women are raped or experience sexual violence on a daily basis, which equates to 48 women every hour, and their study included only women from 15 to 49 years of age (1064-1065). The authors state that previous estimates were “based on reports from police departments and hospitals where victims seek medical care,” and explain that relatively few women report rape and other instances of sexual violence, which skews the numbers (1065). They estimate that nearly 2 million Congolese women are rape survivors. Regardless of the number of rape survivors in the DRC, the nation is clearly facing an epidemic of rape, which is fueled by a culture of violence.

The DRC has a violent past, and since 2002 the nation has unfortunately not seen an end to violence. This is due in large part to the nation’s vast mineral wealth. Minerals used to make cell phones and electronics are mined in the war-torn DRC, where the greed of manufacturers, and rebel and militia groups alike, fuel violence, creating a state of near-

constant warfare. M. J. Morgan states in a 2009 article that the DRC's mineral wealth is estimated to be \$24 trillion, and that the "latest violence is an expression of the greed to exploit DR Congo's extraordinary wealth" (par. 4). For example, cassiterite, cobalt, copper, diamonds, gold, oil, tin, uranium, and zinc are all found in the DRC, which also holds an estimated 80 percent of the world's coltan reserves (par. 4). Coltan is one of the minerals used in the manufacturing of cell phones. As such, Morgan writes, "The rewards for whoever ultimately controls the [coltan] reserves are unimaginably vast" (par. 4).

Coltan is not the only mineral used in the production of cell phones and other small electronics. As The Push Institute states, there are four minerals actively mined in the DRC that are used in small electronics. These "conflict minerals"—similar to the "conflict diamonds" featured in the popular 2006 film *Blood Diamond*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio—are used to fund the armies of warring factions, which "take control of the lucrative mines and extract bribes from transporters, local and international buyers, and border control" (Push par. 1). The conflict minerals include: tin, produced from cassiterite and used in soldering circuit boards; tantalum, produced from coltan and used to store electricity; tungsten, used in making cell phones vibrate; and gold, used as an electronics component (Push par. 2). The DRC, as such, is invaluable to manufacturers of cell phones and small electronics, and to those who control the mines and thus reap the financial "rewards." This is why the DRC has not seen an end to conflict. As Jason Stearns explains in a 2011 article, "Armed groups, including members of the Congolese army itself, control the trade in Congo's rich mineral resources, allowing them to keep themselves fed and armed. As a result, the West's insatiable desire for natural resources, helps to keep Congo's conflict brewing" (par. 1). In other words,

Western consumerism is quite literally funding the Congolese conflict—which, in turn, is responsible for the epidemic of rape in the DRC.

In 2009 alone, more than 8000 Congolese women were raped, and over 200,000 women have been raped in the DRC in the past fifteen years (Harwood par. 1). One shocking incident happened in August 2010 in Luvungi, which is near cassiterite, coltan, and gold mines, and which is only ten miles from a U.N. military camp. Will F. Cragin, a representative of the International Medical Corps, explains: ““Many women said they were raped in their homes in front of their children and husbands, and many said they were raped repeatedly by three to six men. [. . .] We keep going back and identifying more and more cases [. . .]. Many of the women are returning from the forest naked, with no clothes”” (qtd. in Faul, “Some 200 Women” par. 9-11). This tragic case sheds light on the vast problem of rape in the DRC. The women are raped “in front of their children and husbands,” which serves to further humiliate the women, while undermining the husbands’ authority and terrorizing the children. As “more and more” women came forward, it was discovered that over the course of those four nightmarish August days “nearly 200 women and some baby boys” were repeatedly gang raped (Faul, “Some 200 Women” par. 1). The infant boys ranged in age from 1 to 18 months. Shockingly, “one-third of Congo’s rapes involve children, and 13 percent are against children under 10 [years old],” as John Heilprin states (par. 8). A five-year-old survivor named Antoinetta relates in whispers: ““They dragged two of us into the bush [. . .]. He lay on top of me. It hurt”” (qtd. in Pisik par. 3). Raping women and children is horrifically effective in demoralizing communities. Husbands and parents experience shame in not being able to protect their wives and children, and many see rape survivors, even children, as “tainted” or “ruined,” which impacts a woman’s ability to marry and start a

family of her own—if, that is, her body has not been irreparably damaged. In addition, children conceived as a result of rape are often unwanted and thus abandoned, sometimes in the care of charity organizations, which further demoralizes the community (Pisik par. 13).

Another result of this ongoing conflict is the displacement of people, which, as Betsy Pisik explains in a 2009 article, makes them “more vulnerable to rape and other violence” (par. 10). In Kivu alone, 1.7 million civilians were displaced. Inevitably, “many” end up in refugee camps “where the rapes continue” (par. 21), perpetrated by rebel and militia groups, and government soldiers alike. The Mayi-Mayis, for example, are “said to believe that raping a woman will make them stronger in battle,” and the CNDP and FDLR, two other militias, “have been waging a turf war between Congo and Rwanda and see rape as a powerful way to undermine Congolese communities” (par. 37-38). The Congolese army, known as the FARDC, is just as bad. Instances of rape have “doubled and sometimes even tripled” after military operations commence in a region (par. 42). And sadly, “demobilized soldiers and civilian men” are increasingly committing rape (par. 7). As such, women and girls are not safe in the camps or in their own villages.

Systematic rape is being used in the DRC as a weapon of war, and the violence inflicted on the survivors is extensive. For example, fistulas, which are a “rough tearing of the vagina, bladder, anus and nearby muscles,” typically occur when small, malnourished women attempt to give birth (par. 30). However, fistulas are now becoming most common among survivors of gang rape. Pisik explains, “The damage to delicate tissue and organs is often extensive and complicated. Women and children—and sometimes, men—have endured penetration with tree branches, sticks, bottles, rifle barrels, hot coals and anything else at hand. In some cases, women have been shot in the vagina after gang rapes” (par. 31-32). The

extensive physical violence these women suffer is exacerbated by the lack of access to medical care, and the damage inflicted is more broad-ranging than that of a bullet.

As Pisik states, rape has become the “chosen weapon of social terror because it is more effective in destroying families, villages and tribes” (par. 7). There is a resoundingly negative social stigma associated with rape in the DRC. Many wives are “shunned” by their husbands, who say they are “obliged to send them away because the women have been ‘unfaithful’” (par. 24). Further, many survivors are “afraid to return to their villages for fear of being shunned or expelled” (par. 24). As such, the psychological trauma inflicted by rape demoralizes the survivor, the family, and the community. This means that rape, as Charlotte Harwood explains in a 2011 article, is “used as a cheap and effective weapon [. . .] to control the civilian population” (par. 2). Rape is cheaper than purchasing guns and ammunition, and it is “effective” because rape “provides the means to keep civilians compliant and scared, prevents them from joining rival groups, and allows gangs to control the mineral trade around the Congo” (par. 2). In short, the systematic use of rape ensures obedience through fear, thus inhibiting resistance, which enables these groups to amass wealth and power through controlling the DRC’s minerals.

As illustrated through Nottage’s *Ruined*, rape is effective as a weapon of war, in part because of the physical violence inflicted on survivors and the lack of access to medical care. Women are often beaten, strangled, and savagely raped, oftentimes causing irreparable damage. As a result of the constant threat of violence, women in war torn regions live in fear. As Nottage’s Sophie says to Salima, “There is a war going on, and it isn’t safe for a woman alone. You know that!” (1.3). No woman is safe, which Sophie knows better than most. As Christian explains to Mama, “Look, militia did ungodly things to the child, took her with . . .

a bayonet and then left her for dead” (1.1). Sophie was raped with a bayonet, and is thus “damaged,” as a woman’s ability to have intercourse is intrinsically tied to her sociocultural value as a woman in her community. Christian illustrates, “Sophie is . . . / . . . is . . . ruined” (1.1). This enrages Mama, who feels she was sold damaged goods. Gesturing “toward her own genitals,” Mama asks, “damaged, am I right?” (1.1). When Christian answers in the affirmative, Mama tells him that a “damaged” woman is “bad luck,” adding, “I don’t have room for another broken girl” (1.1). But she eventually softens after seeing Sophie tear up from pain. Mama asks, “Did they hurt you badly?,” and says “I bet they did” when Sophie whispers “yes” (1.1). Sophie’s injuries are extensive, and the lack of access to medical care becomes apparent when Mama says, “I know it hurts, because it smells like the rot of meat. So wash good” (1.1).

Sophie carries the pain of the brutal rapes with her. And it is more than just physical pain. The psychological trauma she experiences is palpable. Sophie explains, “While I’m singing, I’m praying the pain will be gone, but what those men did to me lives inside of my body. Every step I take I feel them in me. Punishing me. And it will be that way for the rest of my life” (1.3). The violence inflicted against her “lives inside” Sophie, as she can still feel her rapists violating her body. She is being “punished” by them, as they exhibit their power over her. Sophie is also being “punished” by society, as she has been deemed “ruined,” “damaged,” “broken.” As a result, she is cast out and relegated to a life of abjection. Sophie’s only hope is to receive a surgery to repair the extensive damage, but the lack of access to medical care stands in her way.

Sophie, like many rape survivors in the DRC, does not live in a city and thus does not have easy access to a hospital or surgeons. The ongoing battles and roadblocks, along with

the threat of rape, deter many women from traveling. An additional factor is money. Travel is expensive. The surgery is expensive. And there is the dilemma of lodging during the recovery period. Finally, the availability of facilities, doctors, and medicine does not meet the need. The number of rape survivors is staggering. These hindrances, however, do not stop Sophie from trying.

Sophie reveals to Salima that she has been taking money from Mama. She plans to use the money to help Salima and herself get to Bunia, and to secure an operation for herself (1.3). When Mama finds out, she takes the money, but she has a soft spot for Sophie. Mama later gives Mr. Harari a rough diamond—her “insurance policy”—to take Sophie to Bunia for the operation (2.6). The diamond will provide “Enough for a life,” but Mr. Harari disappears with it in the chaos caused by a battle at their doorstep (2.6). As such, Mama’s “insurance policy” is gone, along with Sophie’s hope for a future free from pain. Her story represents the all-too-common fate of rape survivors in the DRC. Sophie does not get the chance to heal, physically or emotionally, as she will continue to be “punished” by a society that will see her as “ruined” for “the rest of [her] life” (1.3). Sophie is thus forced to shoulder part of the blame for what her rapists did to her, as is Salima.

Salima’s story is just as tragic. She was working in the fields, with her infant daughter resting under a nearby tree, when she was first gang raped by a group of rebel soldiers. She recalls, “I felt a shadow cut across my back, and when I stood four men were there over me, smiling, wicked schoolboy smiles” (2.2). One of the men knocked Salima to the ground with a vicious blow to her face, and another held her down with his boot on her chest. Salima continues, “His foot was so heavy, and it was all I could see as the others . . . ‘took’ me” (2.2). When her baby, Beatrice, started to cry, Salima tried to quiet her from afar, but a

soldier walked over to the tree and “stomped on her head with his boot” (2.2). The memory of this assault is too much to bear, and Salima “releases,” yelling, “Where was everybody? WHERE WAS EVERYBODY?!” (2.2). Sophie tries to calm her, but Salima continues, “I fought them! [. . .] I did! [. . .] But they still took me from my home” (2.2). During her captivity, Salima was tied to a tree and forced to perform labor for the soldiers, who repeatedly raped her. She says, “I make fires, I cook food, I listen to their stupid songs, I carry bullets, I clean wounds, I wash blood from their clothing, and, and, and . . . I lay there as they tore me to pieces, until I was raw . . . five months. Five months. [. . .] Still I close my eyes and I see such terrible things. Things I cannot stand to have in my head” (2.2).

These “terrible things” are made worse by the victim blaming that occurs. Her cry, “I fought them!,” is representative of this blame, which is felt by most rape survivors, even those like Salima who are “[torn] to pieces” by their “wicked” assailants. Salima says, “What did I do, Sophie? I must have done something. How did I get in the middle of their fight?” (2.2). She feels that she “must have done something” to bring the rapes upon herself, which illustrates the internalization of victim blaming. Although Sophie tells her “You didn’t do anything wrong,” Salima has experienced the scorn of her community, including that of her husband, Fortune (2.2).

Salima explains, “[Fortune] called me a filthy dog, and said I tempted them. Why else would it happen? Five months in the bush, passed between the soldiers like a wash rag. Used. I was made poison by their fingers, that is what he said. He had no choice but to turn away from me, because I dishonored him” (2.2). Fortune’s response is unfortunately common among husbands of rape survivors in the DRC. He accuses his wife of “tempting” her rapists, which is akin to saying a woman “deserved” to be raped because of her attire. She has

“dishonored him,” has become “a filthy dog”—because Salima had sexual intercourse with other men. It does not matter that Salima was raped and kidnapped. All that matters is that she is no longer “pure.” She is now “poison,” to her husband and her community.

When Salima returned to her community after the ordeal, she was shunned and driven off, cast out, which further explains why she feels that she is to blame. Salima illustrates, “I walked into the family compound expecting wide open arms. An embrace. Five months, suffering. I suffered every single second of it. And my family gave me the back of their heads. And he, the man I loved since I was fourteen, chased me away with a green switch. He beat my ankles raw” (2.2). Salima’s family shunned her by turning their backs on her. And her husband, Fortune, cast her out of the community by literally chasing her with a stick as if she were a dog, beating her ankles along the way. The blame Salima feels shifts from herself to her husband, who failed to protect her and thus failed in his responsibilities as a husband. She continues, “And I dishonored him? I dishonored him?! Where was he? Buying a pot? He was too proud to bear my shame . . . but not proud enough to protect me from it” (2.2). Here, in a moment of self-preservation, Salima is questioning Fortune’s belief that she dishonored him, implying that it was Fortune who dishonored her—by being too “proud” to defend her honor by bearing the weight of her shame. This shame is a powerful sociocultural tool used to create and maintain order in a community, and it is something that Josephine knows all too well.

Josephine is the daughter of a village chief, which she mentions throughout the play in an effort to maintain her status among the women working in the brothel. Josephine shouts, “I was firstborn child! My father was chief!” (1.5). However, her status in the village does not protect Josephine from the brutality of rape. On the contrary, her high status makes

her an ideal victim to her attackers, who seek to destroy the morale of the community. Publicly raping the chief's daughter is an effective means of demoralizing the villagers. In addition, the lesser status of women in the village serves to create a hierarchy among them. As such, women in lower sociocultural positions stand to gain from the fall of those higher in status. Villagers are thus forced into a grotesque competition for survival, further destroying the community. For example, Josephine states, "My father was chief! The most important man in my village, and when the soldiers raided us, who was kind to me? Huh? Not his second wife: 'There! She is the chief's daughter!' Or the cowards who pretended not to know me. And did any of them bring a blanket to cover me, did anyone move to help me? NO!" (1.3). Josephine is identified by her father's second wife, and is effectively abandoned by her community as the public raping commences, which is illustrated through their refusal to acknowledge her or to cover her with a blanket. No one comes to Josephine's aid—likely because if they did, they would suffer the same fate, just as Josephine suffers the same fate of other women survivors of rape. Josephine, a chief's daughter, is again unprotected by her sociocultural status after surviving rape, in that she is relegated to a life of prostitution, selling a body that has been deemed "damaged." Her only hope of escaping the brothel is to find a benefactor in Mr. Harari, a diamond merchant who makes an empty promise to take Josephine to the city, presumably as a sort of concubine. The shame of being publicly raped is thus exacerbated by the shame of a chief's daughter living the life of a prostitute. The chief's daughter has been made abject through the actions of her rapists, and has been outcast from society as a result, just as Salima, Mama, and Sophie have been outcast.

The abjection of rape survivors is unfortunately common in the DRC, and elsewhere. This is because a "pure"—and thus "good"—woman is chaste. That is, she is a virgin until

marriage, and engages in sexual intercourse with her husband alone. Women and girls who are not virgins are considered “ruined,” as Nottage’s title suggests, and are thus not fit for marriage. In the agrarian DRC, a woman unable to marry does not fare well in terms of access to shelter, food, and the security of family. Married women who engage in extramarital intercourse—whether by choice or by force—are relegated to the same category. They bring shame to their husbands and families, and become “unfit.” Because of their (non)status as sociocultural Others, unchaste women are outcast from their communities, metaphorically and literally. They are abandoned by their families, and are sometimes kicked out of their villages.

For example, Salima is ostracized by her family and community after surviving months of brutal gang rapes. Christian explains, “Salima is from a tiny village. No place really. She was, captured by rebel soldiers, *Mayi-mayi*, the poor thing spent nearly five months in the bush as their concubine” (1.1). Salima is married to a farmer, but “her village won’t have her back. Because . . .” (1.1). Of course the thought Christian will not finish is that Salima’s village will no longer accept her because of what her captors did to her. She is no longer welcome in her home. Salima has been deemed abject and has been cast out of her community. Salima is left with very few options for survival. She can go to a refugee camp, where she will continue to face the threat of rape on a daily basis. She can go to a convent and perform labor, if she can find a means of transportation and if the nuns will accept her. Or she can work in a brothel as a prostitute. Because of her dire financial circumstances, Salima, of course, ends up in a brothel. But she does not callously accept her fate.

An emotionally broken Salima cries as she remembers her family, her village, her infant daughter, and expresses a desire to return home. Sophie, however, knows that Salima’s

desire is a foolish one. Sophie exclaims, “Look here, if you leave, where will you go? Huh? Sleep in the bush? Scrounge for food in a stinking refugee camp. [. . .] Where will you go? Huh? Your husband? Your village? How much goodness did they show you?” (1.3).

Although Sophie’s words may seem cruel, she is speaking the truth. Sophie knows that Salima stands a better chance of survival in the brothel. But when Fortune, Salima’s husband, comes to the brothel to see her, Sophie tries nonetheless to convince Salima to speak with him. Mama, however, overhears their conversation and offers her own advice.

Mama, who is more worldly than the young women, says, “Both of you are so stupid. He’ll see you, love will flood into his eyes, he’ll tell you everything you want to hear, and then one morning, I know how it happens, he will begin to ask ugly questions, but he won’t be able to hear the answers. And no matter what you say, he won’t be satisfied. I know”

(2.2). The “ugly questions” she refers to are questions about the rapes Salima endured.

Fortune may love Salima, but as Mama knows, the answers will be too much for him to bear.

Salima is his wife. He is supposed to protect her, and his inability to do so brings great shame to him. In addition, Salima’s chastity has been compromised. In short, she has had

intercourse with many other men. The fact that she was raped does not matter. She is no longer his and his alone. Salima has become impure, abject. She is not even the same person.

As Mama states, “The woman he loved is dead” (2.2). This statement deserves notice

because it evidences Salima’s abjection. While she was once a subject, she is now a

(non)subject—cast out, thrown away, left for dead.

If Salima were to return to Fortune and her village, she would continue to be ostracized, as Mama knows. She explains to Salima:

He left [you] for dead. See. This is your home now. Mama takes care of you. But if you want to go back out there, go. But they, your village, your people,

they won't understand. Oh, they'll say they will, but they won't. Because you know, underneath everything, they will be thinking she's damaged. She's been had by too many men. She let them, those dirty men, touch her. She's a whore. And Salima, are you strong enough to stomach their hate? It will be worse than anything you've felt yet. (2.2)

This quotation is significant for a number of reasons. First, Mama reiterates that Salima has been abandoned, left for dead, with no home other than a brothel, where she will be among her own kind. Second, Mama illustrates the community's reaction to a rape survivor—someone who is “damaged,” “had by too many men.” Third, Mama knows the reality of victim blaming all too well. She knows that Salima's fellow villagers will blame her for “letting” her rapists “touch her.” She knows they will think Salima is a “whore.” Finally, Mama questions Salima's ability to “stomach their hate,” telling her that the hatred of her community will be “worse” than the months of torture she endured. While Mama's advice seems harsh, she is only trying to prepare Salima for the inevitable. Mama continues, “I'm not being cruel, but your simple life, the one you remember, [. . .] it's vapor, chérie. It's gone” (2.2).

It is not until the end of the play that the audience learns why Mama speaks from a position of wisdom. She herself is a rape survivor. She herself is “ruined.” As such, Mama has firsthand knowledge of the horrors Salima faces. In the final scene of the play, Christian and Mama banter back and forth as he attempts to woo her yet again. When Mama rejects him, Christian says, “If you don't know what I'm talking about, then I'll go. But, please, I'd like to have the truth . . . why not us?” (2.7). Mama, in a rare moment of vulnerability, answers, “I'm ruined. I'm ruined” (2.7). Mama is, as such, no different from the women who work for her. Once the daughter of a successful farmer, Mama was relegated to a life in the

brothel after she was raped. She knows her place of abjection—outside the boundaries of community.

However, Christian's feelings for Mama are strong. He replies, "God, I don't know what those men did to you, but I'm sorry for it. I may be an idiot for saying so, but I think we, and I speak as a man, can do better" (2.7). He moves to embrace Mama, but she resists, saying, "No! Don't touch me! No!" (2.7). Mama's reaction is a defense mechanism designed to protect herself from further harm at the hands of men, which gives "ruined" an additional meaning. Mama is not only "ruined" as an unchaste woman, she is "ruined" as a person, in that she is no longer capable of forming loving physical relationships. There is hope for her yet, as Mama ultimately breaks down in Christian's arms, and he kisses her. The play comes to a close with Christian asking Mama for a dance, saying, "this is the last time I'll ask" (2.7). Mama finally agrees, and the two dance as Sophie and Josephine look on. While there is a modicum of hope for Mama, her earlier warning to Salima about the lasting impacts on Fortune and their marriage cannot be ignored. In addition, the other women of the brothel look on, evidencing the lack of resolution regarding their plights—especially for Sophie, who is physically "ruined" and who will likely never heal.

Sophie's character is the best example of the abjection experienced by rape survivors in the DRC. As explained earlier, Sophie is brutally gang raped with a bayonet, which leaves her body scarred and thus leaves her incapable of having intercourse. As such, she is deemed "ruined"—because a woman's body is classified by her ability to have intercourse, and to conceive and bear children, none of which Sophie can do. That a woman's value within society is placed upon her physical body is nothing new. That has been the case since the beginning of recorded civilization (and presumably earlier). In fact, Sophie's physical beauty

is what ultimately saves her by securing her a position at the brothel, and thus food and shelter. When Christian is attempting to convince Mama Nadi to take in a “ruined” girl, he says of Sophie: “she’s pretty pretty. She’ll keep the miners eyes happy [sic]” (1.1). Sophie is, quite literally, a commodity to be bought and sold. As she also “sings like an angel,” Mama can make money off Sophie, who will keep the clientele “happy” with her beauty and her singing (1.1). However, while Sophie is able to secure food and shelter due to her beauty and talent, she is classified as “ruined” and thus occupies a state of abjection within the brothel, and without.

When Christian, her uncle, brings Sophie to the brothel, he explains to Mama Nadi that Sophie is unwelcome in her village. He says, “as you know the village isn’t a place for a girl who has been . . . ruined. It brings shame, dishonor to the family” (1.1). Sophie is, as such, relegated to a state of abjection. She is no longer a part of the community. They have cast her out, have associated her with “shame” and “dishonor”—because she is “ruined” in their eyes. Even Christian, who goes to great lengths to find security for his niece, disparages her. For example, when Sophie smiles because Christian is denied a chocolate by Mama, he remarks, “Why are you smiling? You’re a lucky girl. You’re lucky you have such a good uncle. A lot of men would’ve left you for dead” (1.1). Christian’s harsh retort is a cruel reminder of Sophie’s (non)status within society. Many would have “left [her] for dead,” as a “ruined” woman becomes essentially a (non)woman, who is thus metaphorically “dead.” This (non)woman is considered worthless in the literal sense of the word: a “ruined” (non)woman is worth less in society. She becomes the abject Other.

Because Sophie is “ruined,” she is also worth less in the brothel. For instance, after a spat between the women, Sophie tells Josephine to not speak to her. Josephine replies, “Who

put you on the top shelf? [. . .] What you seem to forget is that this is a whorehouse, chérie” (1.3). Sophie, undaunted, counters, “Yeah, but, I’m not a whore,” implying of course that Josephine is a “whore” (1.3). Josephine retorts, “A mere trick of fate. I’m sorry, but let me say what we all know, you are something worse than a whore. So many men have had you that you’re worthless. Am I wrong?” (1.3). An injured Sophie murmurs “Yes,” as she “limps away silently” (1.3). This conversation is integral to understanding how sociocultural status operates within the brothel. Although Sophie does not have sexual intercourse with men for money, Josephine makes it clear that Sophie is not of a higher status than the other women, who are literally “whores.” In fact, Sophie is “something worse than a whore”—she is “worthless” because she has been “had” by “so many men.” Josephine says what “[they] all know”; Sophie’s (non)status within society is not erased by her position in the brothel. And because Sophie is incapable of having sexual intercourse, her (non)status as a (non)woman is actually lower than that of the “whores” in the brothel. She is an outcast among outcasts. In addition, although Sophie tells Josephine that she is wrong about her, her body language suggests otherwise. She “limps away silently” in defeat, suggesting that Sophie does, indeed, recognize that she has been relegated to a position of (non)being, abjection.

Further, Josephine, who is jealous of Sophie’s beauty and the attention she gets from Mr. Harari, goes to great lengths to degrade and debase Sophie. Josephine says to Mr. Harari, “She’s broken. All of the girls think she’s bad luck” (1.2). And when Salima and Sophie tease Josephine about Mr. Harari, Josephine becomes enraged and says to Sophie, “we all know a man wants a woman who’s complete. [. . .] He wants her to open up and allow him to release himself, he wants to pour the whole world into her. [. . .] Can you be that woman?” (1.5). Of course Sophie cannot “be that woman”—because she is “broken,” “bad luck,”

incomplete. She cannot “open up” herself to accept a man’s penis, and men cannot “release” and “pour” their ejaculations into her body. As such, Sophie becomes a (non)woman because she is no longer capable of having sexual intercourse, because, ironically, she has had intercourse with “so many men” that she is now “ruined.”

By the end of the play, Sophie accepts being relegated to a state of abjection, which is illustrated through a confrontation with Commander Osembenga, a violent, unstable man. Osembenga pulls a struggling Sophie onto his lap, shoving his hand under her skirt while Sophie gasps and tries to free herself. Osembenga asks, “Am I ugly? Is that what you’re trying to tell me?” (2.4). Sophie tells him to let go of her and pushes away from him, enraging Osembenga, who “lunges for her” and demands, “Bring this girl around back, my men will teach her a lesson. She needs proper schooling” (2.4)—of course implying that Sophie will again be gang raped. But the defiant Sophie spits on his boots, further angering Osembenga. Mama kneels to wipe the spit from his boots as Osembenga stares down Sophie. Undaunted, “as if possessed,” Sophie shouts, “I am dead. [. . .] I am dead! Fuck a corpse! What would that make you?” (2.4).

Sophie’s declaration that she is “dead,” a “corpse,” evidences her decline into abjection, and serves as a representation of the fates of rape survivors in the DRC. Sophie has been physically assaulted. Her vagina has been so brutally injured that she is never without pain. She will likely never have a positive sexual relationship. She will likely never have children. She has been cast out of her village and community, and relegated to a life in a brothel, where she is an outcast among outcasts. Sophie’s story thus illustrates the plights of the women her character represents. And her story can be read as a warning, suggesting that rape survivors in the DRC need better care to avoid falling into a life of abjection. Consider

that early in the play, Christian says to Sophie, “A lot of men would’ve left you for dead,” meaning that Sophie was injured, near death. But by the play’s end, Sophie says, “I am dead! Fuck a corpse!,” meaning that Sophie—at least the Sophie who was—is no longer. This “new” Sophie is a person with no choice but to work in a brothel to survive, and with no choice but to perform fellatio on Osembenga, the man who threatened to have his men gang rape her to “teach her a lesson,” because Mama tells her, “Now you go in there, and you make sure that his cock is clean” (2.4). Sophie has, then, been stripped of dignity, as well as agency. She is beyond “ruined;” she is now “dead.” But at least Sophie’s “death” is metaphorical. Salima does not fare as well.

In the first act of the play, the audience learns that Salima has become pregnant and Fortune, her husband, is not the father. Salima has, then, become pregnant by either one of the men who raped her, or by one of the men at the brothel who paid to have sexual intercourse with her. Pregnancy poses a real hindrance to Salima, who is terrified to tell Mama because Mama will “turn [her] out” (1.3), because a pregnant “whore” cannot work and thus cannot contribute to the brothel. While life at the brothel is certainly not ideal, it provides Salima with shelter, food, and a modicum of safety. As such, Salima’s pregnancy is a threat to her very survival. In addition, although Fortune is attempting to reconcile with Salima, as discussed earlier, now she is carrying another man’s child, a child Fortune will never accept. If they were to reconcile, this child would be a constant reminder to Fortune of the men who had sexual intercourse with Salima, his wife. For example, Salima says to Sophie, “He doesn’t know that I’m pregnant. When he sees me, he’ll hate me all over again” (2.2). And like Salima, the child would bring Fortune shame and dishonor in their village.

Further, Salima is not only unsure about Fortune's response to her pregnancy, she is unsure about her feelings for the unborn child. She says, "It isn't [Fortune's] baby. It's the child of a monster, and there's no telling what it will be. Now, he's willing to forgive me, and is it that simple, Sophie? But what happens when the baby is born, will he be able to forgive the child, will I? And, and . . . and even if I do, I don't think I'll be able to forgive [Fortune]" (2.2). This quotation deserves notice for a number of reasons. First, Salima questions Fortune's ability to truly "forgive" her for the gang rapes and her time spent working as a prostitute, as well as his ability to "forgive" the child. Second, Salima questions her ability to "forgive" Fortune for abandoning her and turning his back on her, ultimately questioning the stability of a future relationship with him. Third, Salima states that her unborn child is "the child of a monster," and she expresses fear that this child will also be a "monster." Finally, Salima questions her ability to "forgive" the child, effectively casting doubt on her capacity to serve as a mother to this "monster's" child. Salima's story serves to represent the fates of rape survivors in the DRC who become pregnant by their rapists. She has nowhere to go, and she sees no solution, which sheds light on Salima's final action.

Late in the play, during another violent altercation with the Commander, Osembenga tells one of his soldiers to "Take that one," indicating Josephine (2.6). The soldier "is ready to sexually violate her" and "tears away at her clothing" (2.6). Josephine struggles and screams, while Osembenga turns his attention to Mama. But they are interrupted by Salima, who enters the room "as if in a trance," with a "pool of blood" forming over her stomach and blood running down her legs (2.6). Salima screams, "STOP! Stop it! [. . .] For the love of God, stop this! Haven't you done enough to us. Enough! Enough!" (2.6). The soldiers freeze in shock, except for Fortune, Salima's estranged husband, who rushes to her side. Mama

quickly takes charge, calling for hot water. She pleads with Salima, “You have to look at me, keep your eyes on me. Don’t think of anything else,” but it is too late (2.6). Salima “smiles triumphantly” and “takes Fortune’s hand,” saying to Osembenga and the soldiers, “You will not fight your battles on my body anymore,” just before she collapses and dies (2.6).

Salima’s suicide is unfortunately not unexpected. She does not see the possibility of a successful life as the mother of a “monster’s” child. She has already been abandoned by her husband, her family, and her community. And a pregnancy means she will likely be abandoned by Mama and the relative security of the brothel. Further, she is surrounded by violence, and the constant threat of sexual violence, which the women of the brothel face on a daily basis. In short, Salima has lost all hope for a life free from pain and suffering. It is important to note that Salima takes her life by inflicting a wound just above her pregnant stomach, as the blood pools over her stomach and runs down her legs. This unborn child represents her death sentence, in that it represents a loss of shelter, food, and security. Salima merely enacts this death sentence by taking the matter into her own hands. For once, she has control over her body. It is a morbid end, but for Salima, this control empowers her. As she dies, Salima “smiles triumphantly,” and denies the soldiers further use of her body as a battleground. Sadly, it is the only way she could be truly free.

The stories of Salima, Sophie, Josephine, and Mama serve to represent the women interviewed by Nottage, whose lives inform the play *Ruined*. Nottage wrote her play to draw attention to the plights of rape survivors in the DRC, as a call to action. Her play is situated among a number of efforts by various organizations to bring an end to violence against women in war torn regions, including the use of rape as a weapon of war.

For example, in 2009, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton visited the DRC, where she met with survivors, and delivered the message to President Kabila that there should be “no impunity for sexual and gender-based violence” (qtd. in Salbi par. 1). During her visit to the DRC, Clinton also announced a \$17 million investment for Congolese women and children, and told reporters: “the United States condemns these attacks and all those who commit them and abet them. And we state to the world that those who attack civilian populations using systematic rape are guilty of crimes against humanity” (par. 3). Clinton’s visit to the DRC and her strong message was integral in not only showing U.S. support for the Congolese people, but also in raising awareness of the issue. In a 2009 interview with PBS’s Jim Lehrer, Zainab Salbi, the founder of Women for Women International, which provides financial and emotional support to women survivors of war, discussed the impact of Clinton’s visit. She said: “It’s very important. [. . .] It’s significant for Congo, and it’s the first time that Congo gets this level of attention from the U.S. It’s also significant to neighboring countries, in terms of sending the message that this is important and we have the attention that we want to have a peace and stability in the region” (par. 26-27).

While Clinton’s visit and U.S. aid are certainly important, a lot more has been accomplished. For instance, in 2001, a group of European NGOs and religious communities launched the “No Blood On My Cell Phone” campaign, which calls for an embargo on “blood tantalum” (Vesperini par. 7). In 2002, the International Peace Information Service (IPIS), a Belgian research institute, produced a document titled “Supporting the War Economy in the DRC: European Companies and the Coltan Trade,” which addresses the “leading role played by the companies in promoting the war through their cooperation with the military” (War Resisters par. 5). In 2003, Heal Africa partnered with UNICEF to provide

healthcare and perform community development work in the nation (UNICEF). In 2004, War Child International, a charity that focuses on children impacted by war, started operations in the DRC (War Child). That same year, Women for Women International began its assistance and education program in the DRC (Women for Women). In 2006, Lisa Shannon founded Run for Congo Women, which has since “raised more than \$600,000” through run/walks throughout the United States (Run). Shannon also wrote a book, *A Thousand Sisters*, about her experiences meeting and working with Congolese women (Run). In 2007, the Enough Project, which works “to end genocide and crimes against humanity,” was founded and became active in the nation with their Raise Hope for Congo campaign (Enough, “About”). In 2008, filmmaker Lisa F. Jackson produced a documentary, *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo*, which is a “graphic and grueling” depiction of the sexual violence that is rampant in Congo (Pisik par. 25). The documentary was hosted by actress Andie MacDowell and has received much attention (Enough, “Actress”). In 2009, the same year Nottage published *Ruined*, the Enough Project and YouTube collaborated in the “Come Clean 4 Congo” campaign to raise awareness of how the purchase of small electronics, like cell phones, “could be fueling one of the deadliest wars in the Congo” (Push par. 1). Finally, a great number of charitable and activist groups, such as Amnesty International, CARE International, and the Christian Relief Network are at work in the DRC.

Although much has been accomplished, U.S. legislators failed to act on an important bill that could have provided aid to rape survivors in the DRC. In 2009, Representative James McDermott introduced H.R.4128, the Conflict Minerals Trade Act, which would “improve transparency and reduce trade in conflict minerals,” but the bill died and was referred to multiple committees (OpenCongress). According to the Library of Congress, as of 2015 the

bill is still in committee (Library of Congress, “H.R.4128”). While that is disappointing, in August 2012 the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) “adopted a rule mandated by the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act to require companies to publicly disclose their use of conflict minerals that originated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or an adjoining country” (SEC). This is a step in the right direction, but disclosure falls short of reducing and preventing the trade of conflict minerals. An additional bill, H.R.1340, The International Violence against Women Act (IVAWA) of 2015, could aid rape survivors in the DRC. The bill was introduced by Representative Janice D. Schakowsky in March 2015, and was quickly referred to the House Foreign Affairs committee, and subsequently to the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations, where it remains as of October 2015 (Library of Congress, “H.R.1340”).

Despite the failure of U.S. legislators to pass the Conflict Minerals Trade Act, activists’ efforts are paying off. In February 2011, a Congolese court “sentenced a high-ranking commander and several other army personnel for rape and other crimes in Fizi,” marking the first time that a “senior official and members of the army were arrested, tried and sentenced for conflict-related sexual violence” in Congo (UN, “Justice” par. 10). The mobile court overseeing the case was funded by the Open Society Initiative, and aided by the American Bar Association, Lawyers Without Borders, and the UN Mission to Congo (Faul, “Congo Colonel” par. 10). Each of the 49 women who testified will receive \$10,000 in compensation, which is double the amount awarded to prior survivors (par. 20). Sixty-two women were treated by doctors for rape after the attacks, but the true number of survivors will never be known because of the social stigma associated with rape in the DRC, and out of

fear of reprisal (Faul, “Justice” par. 6). Also, in March 2011 there were groundbreaking convictions of perpetrators of rape in Congo. In a United Nations press release, the UN Envoy on Sexual Violence in Conflict “welcomed the guilty verdicts handed down by a military court [in the DRC] against 11 army officers for crimes committed last year” (UN, “Justice” par. 1). The systematic rapes of 24 women, which occurred over a three day period, were committed by 11 FARDC soldiers—members of the DRC’s own army—who were all found guilty, including the commander and second-in-command.

Undoubtedly, these convictions have had an impact in the DRC—however minor. But it is not time to give up the fight. In 2011, new reports emerged of women being attacked by Rwandan Hutu rebels in Fizi (Faul, “Congo Colonel” par. 12). In January and February of that year, as IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis states, “More than 200 women, men and children have been treated for rape” (par. 1). The perpetrators are members of the FDLR, the group responsible for Rwanda’s 1994 genocide (par. 4). The FDLR is also responsible, along with the Mai Mai, for the systematic rape of “more than 300 women” over the course of three days in Walikale in the summer of 2010 (par. 12). The rapes have continued despite the arrests and convictions. It will take more than the court to reign in this terror. Fortunately, the United Nations has recently taken further steps to raise awareness and to condemn rape as a weapon of war.

In 2007, the UN created an umbrella group called UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, which is an effort to “improve coordination and accountability, amplify programming and advocacy, and support national efforts to prevent sexual violence and respond effectively to the needs of survivors” (UN, “Sexual Violence” par. 20). And in 2008, the UN passed Resolution 1820, which “called for an end to the use of acts of sexual violence

against women and girls as a tactic of war and an end to impunity of the perpetrators” (par. 16). Of course, the UN is largely ceremonial, with little power to enact real change, but the global awareness being raised is invaluable to the women of the DRC and other war torn regions. For instance, in 2010 the UN appointed Margot Wallstrom as its first Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Wallstrom was replaced in 2012 by Zainab Hawa Bangura. Both women have been instrumental in providing leadership, and promoting “cooperation and coordination through UN Action” (par. 24). Bangura, for her part, has pledged to work towards “ending impunity for perpetrators and seeking justice for victims,” and towards “increasing recognition of rape as a tactic of war,” among other goals (par. 25). The efforts of the UN have been aided by celebrity turned activist Angelina Jolie, who was recently appointed as a Special Envoy for Refugees. Speaking before the UN Security Council in June 2013, Jolie stated, ““If the council sets rape and sexual violence in conflict as a priority it will become one and progress will be made. If you do not, this horror will continue”” (qtd. in Lederer par. 4). Shortly thereafter, the Security Council adopted a Resolution that demands “the complete and immediate cessation of all acts of sexual violence by all parties to armed conflict”—which is yet another step in the right direction (Lederer par. 6). However, the world is slow to change, and our women continue to suffer at the hands of rapists who remain largely anonymous. It will take an ongoing concerted effort to end the use of rape as a weapon of war.

Lynn Nottage wrote the play *Ruined* because, as she explains, ““Silence is complicity,”” and she is correct (qtd. in Enough, “On Intl. Women’s Day” par. 1). Our silence in the face of this horror is a crime. As Dr. Denis Mukwege Mukengere, a hospital director in the DRC, states, ““Beyond laws, we have to get social sanction on the side of the

woman. We need to get to a point where the victim receives the support of the community, and the man who rapes is the one who is stigmatized and excluded and penalized by the whole community” (qtd. in UN, “Sexual Violence” par. 13). If we are unsuccessful in the effort to destigmatize survivors of rape, and to instead stigmatize the act of rape and penalize the rapists, the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war will continue, despite legislation and the work of activists. The number of rape survivors in the DRC is already staggering, and the number is growing. As Nottage’s Christian states, “we [. . .] can do better” (2.7). We must.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Ongoing Trials of Rape and Rape Culture

in Literature and Beyond

As the literature illustrates, when rape functions as an instrument of power and control certain similarities arise, such as victim blaming, consent, and the use of rape to demoralize and subjugate women. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Elmer Harris's *Johnny Belinda*, and Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* offer a lens through which to analyze central features of rape culture. Rape is a complex subject, and building an understanding of rape cannot be accomplished without a multifaceted approach. Victim blaming, for instance, differs according to individual cases of rape, as does consent. And rape is used to demoralize and subjugate women in many different ways. Women do not form a unified category of people, and the impacts of rape are as varied as women themselves. As Ann J. Cahill explains in *Rethinking Rape*, "Every rape experience is unique, but each is bodily; therefore, we are capable of locating the various axes of bodily meanings that rape affects" (9). In other words, women's races, socioeconomic classes, sexualities, ethnicities, religions, and so on, all affect individual women in profoundly different ways. And while all rape survivors are sexually violated against their will, each individual violation has a unique impact on each individual survivor. Literature thus offers an invaluable means of analyzing the myriad impacts of rape on individual women, as the narratives illustrate intimate details of their lives and how the rapes affected them. But building an understanding of rape and rape culture necessitates more than the study of only literature—or feminist theory, or history, or sociology, and so on. As such, I will also discuss topics for future consideration, which are illustrated through popular

films that have had significant sociocultural impacts, and which will ultimately add to the theoretical conception of rape culture by broadening the scope of analysis through the addition of the experiences of multiple survivors and the individual circumstances of their rapes.

For example, victim blaming is a ubiquitous feature of rape culture, and yet the practice differs according to the survivor and her experience of rape. In Nabokov's *Lolita*, twelve-year-old Dolores Haze is repeatedly raped by her stepfather, Humbert, who casts blame on the child, claiming that she seduced him. That blame is internalized by Dolores, who believes Humbert when he tells her that her family and community will reject her when they learn that she had a sexual relationship with an adult man. Although Humbert's warning is cruel and obviously misguided, it is not without veracity. It is likely that Dolores's family and community would reject her upon learning that she—a child—was not a virgin. This is because Dolores is a girl and thus future woman, whose sociocultural worth lies in the purity of her body. To be blunt, no one (i.e., man) wants “damaged goods,” which means that she is no longer desirable for marriage. The fact that the penis of a man not her husband has been inside her body relegates her to the status of social pariah. And because it is her body, the presumption is that she had control over the encounter. Whether it was consensual or not becomes a moot point. She is to blame for engaging in sexual intercourse, regardless of the circumstances of that intercourse, including violence and coercion.

As Susan Brownmiller explains in *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, “Psychoanalytic literature on child molestation points a wagging finger at the victim. In fact, the thrust of the psychoanalytic approach has been to pinpoint the child victim's ‘seductive’ behavior” (275). Brownmiller's assessment of the psychoanalytic approach to child

molestation is a strikingly accurate description of the treatment of Dolores Haze in Nabokov's novel. She goes on to discuss an additional study that found "it was highly probable that the child had used his [sic] charm in the role of seducer rather than that he [sic] had been the innocent one who had been seduced" (qtd. in Brownmiller 276). Keep in mind that Humbert claims, "it was she who seduced me," and thus shifts the blame to the child, who becomes a charming seductress (Nabokov 132). The victim blaming of Dolores Haze has been so effective that the dictionary definition of "Lolita" does not refer to an abused child victim of rape, but instead refers to a sexually precocious child. As such, the repeated rape and victim blaming of Dolores Haze is invaluable to building an understanding of rape and rape culture.

The victim blaming of Dolores Haze is similar to the victim blaming of Nottage's characters in *Ruined*, who are survivors of rape as a weapon of war. Like Nabokov's twelve-year-old child, one would think that women who are violently raped by soldiers attempting to conquer their villages and communities would escape blame. Sadly, that is not the case. Each of Nottage's protagonists is blamed for their rapes by a society that refuses to accept that women do not bring rape upon themselves. It is presumed that each of Nottage's protagonists did something to cause their rapes. Either they were in the wrong place, meaning that they were not under the protection of their husbands or fathers, or they were somehow provoking the rapists—by making eye contact, smiling, or otherwise acting "provocatively." Regardless, the blame for the rapes falls on the shoulders of survivors, who become responsible for carrying that burden. As a result, Nottage's protagonists, and the women they represent, are relegated to a position of abject otherness, and are thus cast out of their communities. Each protagonist experiences both physical and psychological trauma as a

result of their rape, including debilitating depression. Rape is, then, “a bodily, sexual assault on a woman’s underlying conditions of being,” as Cahill suggests (132). Rape is more than a violation of a person’s bodily integrity and agency, it is a violation of a person’s sense of self. This explains why victim blaming is so detrimental. Nottage’s protagonists internalize the blame from their communities and families, which adds to their trauma. Further, because they are blamed for their rapes they are no longer welcome in their homes or communities. As outcasts they face a very real threat to their survival, as securing shelter, food, water, and protection in a warzone becomes difficult. The impacts of victim blaming, then, do more than affect the psyche of the survivor; they affect her survival itself.

The victim blaming of rape survivors is so common that women have internalized the message and thus blame themselves for having been raped. In fact, very few survivors, including children, escape blame, with the exception of rape survivors with disabilities. Harris’s Belinda is notably the only protagonist in this study who escapes blame for being raped, likely due to her deafness. Her disability, which relegates her to the status of sociocultural other, places her in a position of perceived vulnerability. Because she is perceived to be vulnerable, Belinda is more deserving of pity than blame, which is evidenced by her community’s response to the rape, as well as by the responses of drama, film, and television critics to *Johnny Belinda*. For example, In Mavor Moore’s musical version of the play, Mrs. McKee, who represents the moral authority of the town, says, “After all, she’s more to be pitied than condemned” (2.7). Not once is Belinda condemned for the rape. Not once is she accused of “asking for it.” Not once does anyone doubt that she was raped, or that a crime occurred. Instead, Belinda is presented as a “true” victim of rape—vulnerable, helpless, overcome by force. As such, she escapes victim blaming.

This raises an important question about why Dolores Haze and the other protagonists are not afforded the same consideration. The answer lies in the presentation of Dolores Haze as a seductress, which extends beyond the pages of the novel. As a seductress, she is presumed to have brought the rape upon herself. Nottage's protagonists, however, are not presented as seductresses. Instead, they are presented as capable women, and it is thus presumed that they should have done something to prevent their rapes. Belinda, by contrast, is presented as innocent, sexually naïve, the very opposite of a seductress. She is also presented as incapable—despite the evidence to the contrary, considering that she ultimately shot dead her rapist to protect her son. Regardless, as an incapable, helpless person, she becomes deserving of men's protection, and not just the protection of her husband and father, but of all men. As such, the rape of Belinda becomes the fault of her father, who was not there to protect her. The rape also becomes the fault of her rapist, whose violation of a pure and vulnerable Deaf woman is a betrayal of manhood as socioculturally defined. In other words, raping a woman with disabilities is not a triumph of manhood, meaning that the rapist does not gain status as a man for conquering a woman, but rather loses status because the rape of a defenseless, pure, naïve, vulnerable, and incapable woman is a deplorable act. This is because it challenges the narrative of rape culture, which ensures that only women (and girls) who deserve to be raped are raped. The rape of Belinda, then, is not blamed on her, but on the men who allowed the violation to occur, including and especially the rapist.

Harris's Belinda is also notably the only protagonist in this study for whom consent is not an issue. Not once does anyone question whether she consented to sexual intercourse, either in the play, or in criticism of *Johnny Belinda*. As such, the sexual encounter in question is undeniably classified as rape, relieving Belinda of the burden of defending her

innocence. The other protagonists do not fare as well. Dolores Haze, as a seductress, is presumed to have not only consented to sexual intercourse, but to have initiated the encounters through seduction. By contrast, Nottage's protagonists are not presumed to have consented to being raped. But they are presumed to have put themselves in a position to be raped, which is somehow akin to a type of consent. Mama Nadi, for instance, explains how Salima's fellow villagers would react to her return, saying, "underneath everything, they will be thinking she's damaged. She's been had by too many men. She let them, those dirty men, touch her. She's a whore" (2.2). As such, Salima is to blame for the rapes whether or not she consented, and further, she is presumed to have "let them [. . .] touch her," which implies consent. In addition, Salima is alone when she is attacked, on the outskirts of the village, and thus without the protection of her husband and family, which is akin to a city woman walking by herself down a dark alley at night. Both are engaging in behavior deemed dangerous for women, who need the constant protection of (good) men, and are thus presumed to have consented to a sexual encounter through their behavior—similar to the way survivors who are drinking alcohol or dressing "provocatively" are presumed to have consented because they were "asking for it." After all, if they did not want to be raped, they should not have participated in behavior that allegedly leads to rape.

The issue of consent has also entered the public consciousness. As discussed in chapter two, the 2012 decision by the Connecticut Supreme Court, which effectively decided that the rape of a woman with severe disabilities did not occur because her lawyers failed to prove in court that she was incapable of denying consent, drew national attention, and resulted in legislation that redefined consent for persons with disabilities. The 2013 law, HB 6641, "expands the definition of 'physically helpless' for these purposes to include someone

who is physically unable to resist an act of sexual intercourse or sexual contact”

(Connecticut). While this revised legislation is a step in the right direction, there is more work to be done on this front. In addition, the “No means no” and subsequent “Yes means yes” public awareness campaigns have raised the issue of consent within popular culture, with celebrities endorsing the campaigns through photographs that have become common on social media and other internet platforms. The recent move from “No means no” to “Yes means yes” is an important shift to consider, as it evidences a redefinition of consent in regards to rape.

The “Yes means yes” approach to consent acknowledges that some rape victims are unable to say “No” for a variety of reasons, including disability and being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. The “No means no” approach, by contrast, enables rapists to argue—in a legal court and in the court of public opinion—that the victim never said “No,” so she must have wanted the sexual encounter to occur. Instead, “Yes means yes” encourages the active participation of all partners in a sexual act. In the 2014 article “California Adopts ‘Yes Means Yes’ Law,” by William M. Welch, he explains that the state of California adopted a measure redefining consent on college campuses. He writes, “the definition of consent under the bill requires ‘an affirmative, unambiguous and conscious decision’ by each party to engage in sexual activity” (Welch). Further, the measure prohibits “silence or lack of resistance,” and drunkenness as valid defenses (Welch). It is an approach that sex positive feminists will support, because “Yes means yes” presumes the subjecthood of all partners involved. No one is cast as object, as other, devoid of power. By contrast, each partner is a subject, and as a subject, each partner actively participates in the sexual encounter.

The effectiveness of “Yes means yes” remains to be seen, because the California law that adopted the measure was passed in the fall of 2014. Regardless, the “Yes means yes” approach to consent effectively changes the national dialogue about consent, and rape. As activist Sofie Karasek points out regarding California’s new measure, “It does change the cultural perception of what rape is [. . .]. There’s this pervasive idea that if it’s not super violent then it doesn’t really count” (qtd. in Welch). “Yes means yes,” then, expands the definition of rape through a redefinition of consent. As Senator Kevin de Leon, who supported the bill, explains, “It’s very difficult to say no when you’re inebriated or someone slips something into your drink” (qtd. in Welch). Although the law is limited to issues of consent on college campuses, it will have a sociocultural and legislative impact beyond the campus setting. Senator de Leon expects the bill to “lead the entire country, the nation” in terms of legislative reform (qtd. in Welch). The “Yes means yes” approach to consent thus has great potential to influence both legislation and cultural perceptions of consent and rape. Finally, because of its emphasis on equality in sexual relationships, “Yes means yes” has the potential to ultimately reduce the use of rape as a means to demoralize and subjugate women.

The use of rape to demoralize and subjugate women takes many forms because rape affects women in different ways, depending upon the embodied subject of the survivor and the circumstances of the rape. As Cahill explains, embodiment “accounts for the multiplicity of experiences of rape by acknowledging that rape occurs only to individual bodies, and that individual bodies are marked and constructed by larger discourses” (9). In other words, individual women are affected by rape in different ways, which explains the “multiplicity of experiences of rape.” In addition, each individual rape is marked by a unique construction of sociocultural discourses, including those pertaining to the rapist. For example, Nabokov’s

Humbert uses the violence of rape, along with coercion, to demoralize Dolores Haze in the effort to control her. Once Humbert the sexual predator has subjugated his prey, he is rewarded with unchallenged access to his sexual conquest, which has the effect of empowering him. Humbert thus gains power through disempowering Dolores Haze. His physical and psychological control over his victim serves to champion his sociocultural status as a man. The rapes have the opposite effect on Dolores Haze, whose childhood innocence was stolen by a pedophile. Her story illustrates how rape can affect the embodied being of the survivor, in that the experience of being raped and held captive by her rapist had a profound impact on the personhood of the child, who adapted by learning to manipulate others to survive.

Harris's Locky has a similar intent for raping Belinda. He uses rape to gain sociocultural status as a man. Although his ploy fails in terms of the community's reaction to the rape, on a personal level he was successful—in that his perception of his manhood was reinforced by the power he gained through demoralizing and subjugating a woman. The rape scene in Harris's play illustrates Locky's intent to gain power through raping Belinda. Harris writes, "[Locky] attempts to kiss her. She tries her best to avoid it, struggling to be free of him, but he forces her back on the pile of [grain] sacks and rips open her dress. She reaches desperately for the bell on the old chair near the door, but Locky holds her powerless" (1.3). Belinda struggles and "reaches desperately" for help. And Locky forces her down and "holds her powerless." As such, raping Belinda becomes a symbol of manhood in that Locky exhibits and thus reinforces his male dominance and thus power in a patriarchal society. Locky never shows remorse for raping Belinda, and instead takes pride in his conquest,

especially when he learns that he fathered a male child, which serves to further increase his status as a man.

Harris noticeably omits the impact of the rape on Belinda in the play, except for the violence of the rape scene itself. As a result, Belinda seems to escape common aftereffects of rape. She does not blame herself for the violence, she does not experience depression or anxiety, and she does not feel wary about romantic relationships with men. In short, she survives the rape with minimal psychological damage. Belinda, as previously noted, is the only protagonist in this study who escapes blame for being raped. A logical conclusion is that victim blaming plays an active role in inhibiting the recovery of rape survivors, in that a survivor who is relieved of the burden of guilt has less to recover from. Belinda's story, then, illustrates that while the intent to demoralize and subjugate remains constant, improving the treatment of rape survivors, including and especially increasing public awareness about the psychological trauma caused by victim blaming, can reduce the psychological impacts of rape.

The rapes of Nottage's protagonists also adhere to what becomes a common narrative concerning the use of rape as a tool to demoralize and subjugate women. It is through conquering women that men gain power and thus status in a patriarchal society. The rapists in Nottage's play are all soldiers and militia members. Rape, then, becomes a literal weapon of war, used to dominate a population through physical and psychological violence. In Andrea Dworkin's *Intercourse*, she discusses the use of rape as a weapon of war, including the impacts of the rapes on the entire community. She writes, "Atrocity—and rape recognized as atrocity—is committed against a whole people, men too, unmanning the men, hurting them. Otherwise, rape does not count: not as torture; not as intolerable and

unconscionable violation” (178). Rape, then, is a particularly effective weapon of war because rape is not only a physical violation of a woman, it is also a psychological assault on the rape survivor and her family, especially her husband, father, and other males, who are responsible for protecting her. Their failure to do so results in their disempowerment as men.

Rape, as such, demoralizes the rape survivors, their families, and their communities, which are disrupted by the violence of the rapes, and the collective shame. It is because of this shame that rape survivors are often cast out of their communities, turning primarily to refugee camps, convents, and brothels to survive. The psychological trauma of the rape can thus be exacerbated by being outcast and being forced to work as a prostitute. All of Nottage’s protagonists are forced through life circumstances to work in a brothel, and they all experience severe depression and live in a state of constant anxiety and fear. Salima even commits suicide, taking her life and the life of her unborn child, because she refuses for her body to remain a battleground for soldiers. She screams at them: “For the love of God, stop this! Haven’t you done enough to us. Enough! Enough!,” with blood pouring from a cut above her pregnant stomach (2.6). As she dies, she “smiles triumphantly” and says, “You will not fight your battles on my body anymore” (2.6). It is a tragic end, despite Salima’s “triumph,” because her only escape from a life of violent, repeated rapes is through death. The rapes of Nottage’s protagonists had the most severe impacts on the embodied beings of the survivors, arguably because the mass rapes demoralized and subjugated entire communities, destroying families and turning survivors into abject pariahs.

Although the works of Nabokov, Harris, and Nottage have much to contribute to the study of rape and rape culture, there is more work to be done, which can only be accomplished through a more inclusive study of rape and rape culture in American literature

and society. Rape culture pervades American culture; they are one in the same. As such, the ongoing work of feminist theorists on rape and rape culture is a necessity for women, who bear the greatest burden of rape, and for a patriarchal society that is continually adjusting to the gradually increasing sociocultural equality of women. Women's equality is a threat to men's superiority and thus status in society. Rape functions as a means to combat the upward climb of women by keeping women "in their place" through sexual violence, fear, and ultimately domination. In short, rape serves to reinforce the subordinate status of women. There are many essential topics to consider, all of which will contribute to building a greater understanding of rape and rape culture, including acquaintance rape, the use of rape as a tool of racial dominance, the rape of women in the military, the corrective rape of homosexual women and Trans persons, the rape of men, the rape scandal involving the Catholic church, and finally, rape and rape culture on college campuses.

For example, Tennessee Williams's 1947 *A Streetcar Named Desire* provides a lens through which to examine the characteristics and consequences of acquaintance rape, including blaming the victim and doubting the victim, through an analysis of the rape of Blanche by Stanley. Williams portrays Blanche as being flirtatious and promiscuous, dressing provocatively, consuming alcohol to excess, and "putting herself" in a situation where she is alone with a man, all of which are associated with misperceptions about survivors of acquaintance rape, who are presumed to have contributed to their own victimization. Further, no one believes Blanche's story, which causes her to suffer a mental breakdown resulting in placement in an asylum. Blanche's experience of rape is important to consider because her narrative illustrates the physical and psychological trauma associated with acquaintance rape. Both Williams's play and the 1951 film starring Vivien Leigh,

Marlon Brando, and Kim Hunter, are critical contributions to this discussion, as is the 2012 Steubenville, Ohio case involving the rape of a teenage girl by members of the high school football team, which garnered national attention.

In addition, the use of rape as a tool of racial dominance in the U.S. is important to consider, because as Catharine A. MacKinnon points out in *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Black women “are raped four times as often” as White women (82). The systematic rape of both African American and Native American women by White men in the U.S. evidences an undeniable link between rape and racism. Because rape functions to reinforce the subordinate status of women, and racism functions to reinforce the subordinate status of people of color, the violence of rape and racism are intertwined. For instance, Angela Y. Davis, in “Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist,” explains that the systematic rape of Vietnamese women by U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam War illustrates how racism can serve to provoke rape. She writes, “Because it was drummed into the heads of US soldiers that they were fighting an inferior race, they could be taught that raping Vietnamese women was a necessary military duty” (51). Vietnamese women, then, were classified as inferior and were thus cast as objects. As objects, they existed to reinforce the subjecthood of their rapists, meaning that the rapists gained sociocultural status through the act of disempowering Vietnamese women through stripping them of their bodily integrity and freedom of self-determination.

Solomon Northup’s 1853 memoir, *Twelve Years a Slave*, in which Patsey, a slave, is repeatedly raped by Epps, her slave master, is an important contribution to this discussion, as is the 2013 film starring Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michael Kenneth Williams, and Michael Fassbender. Louise Erdrich’s 2012 *The Round House*, in which Geraldine is raped by a

White man intent on controlling Native Americans through fear and violence, is also important to consider. In Erdrich's afterward, she discusses the rape of Native Americans and the difficulty of prosecuting non-Native men for crimes committed on reservation land. The systematic rape of Native American women, then, has both a personal and political significance, in that the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was blocked in 2012 by Republicans who opposed amendments that would allow Tribal Courts to try and prosecute non-Native men accused of raping Native women (Bendery). The ongoing systematic rape of Native American women thus serves as evidence that the link between rape and racism is as evident now as it was during times of slavery. Rape is ultimately a tool of dominance. That dominance can manifest in the form of sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, and so on. Regardless, the intent is the same—to gain power and thus sociocultural status through domination.

The rape of women in the military is a perfect example of how rape functions as a tool of dominance. The military is a historically masculine culture. As such, women in the military challenge the stability of the status quo, which is male dominance. Establishing dominance through rape is unfortunately common within all ranks of the military. The 1997 film *G.I. Jane*, starring Demi Moore, Viggo Mortensen, and Anne Bancroft, is an important contribution to this discussion, as is the 1999 film *The General's Daughter*, starring John Travolta, Madeleine Stowe, and James Cromwell. In addition, the corrective rape of homosexual women and Trans men and women deserves notice. Corrective rape is predicated on the belief that homosexual women and Trans persons need to be “fixed”—i.e., forced to adhere to sociocultural prescriptions for women and men. Obviously this logic is flawed, because there is nothing “wrong” with homosexual women and Trans persons, but it

is important to consider as a tenet of rape culture. The 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*, which is based on a true story, and which stars Hilary Swank, Chloe Sevigny, and Peter Sarsgaard, is a necessary contribution to this discussion.

Further, it is imperative to include the rape of men in an inclusive study of rape and rape culture. As Cahill points out, “99.6 percent of rape offenders are male and 94.5 percent of rape victims are female” (125). This means that over 5 percent of rape survivors are male, and the numbers are likely higher, as many men are reluctant to report rape because of sociocultural stigmas surrounding male rape victims, who are presumed to have been “too weak” to defend themselves. Admitting rape, then, means admitting weakness, which effectively undermines the survivor’s masculinity and thus sociocultural power in a patriarchal society. A male rape survivor is thus relegated to a position of subordination and, in turn, shares—if only temporarily—the denigrated status of women. Men are, as such, raped for many of the same reasons as women, including and especially to establish the power of the rapist through the disempowerment of the survivor. Prison rape, for instance, adheres to the criteria of using rape as a tool of demoralization and subjugation. The 1998 film *American History X*, starring Edward Norton, Edward Furlong, and Beverly D’Angelo is an important contribution to this discussion. In addition, an analysis of the 1972 film *Deliverance*, starring Jon Voight, Burt Reynolds, and Ned Beatty, has much to contribute to the discussion concerning the use of rape to establish male dominance through sexual, and thus physical, and psychological domination, as does the 1994 film *Pulp Fiction*, starring John Travolta, Uma Thurman, and Samuel L. Jackson.

The rape of children, especially boys, by Catholic priests also deserves study, because it represents a unique power differential between the rapist and his victims. Catholic priests

hold positions of authority and power in their communities, which extend beyond the church itself. For example, many boys were molested and raped outside the church environment, including schools, religious retreats, and private meetings behind closed doors. In addition, Catholic priests are more than priests; they become family members to many of their parishioners, which results in extended contact with children, who learn to obey priests as they would their parents. As such, Catholic priests are in a unique position of authority, granted by both the church and the family structure. This overarching authority almost guarantees the blind obedience of the children in their charge, who become the victims of pedophiles in positions of power. The analysis of the rape of children by Catholic priests is also significant because of the victim blaming and secrecy involved. The shame of the violations was so great that the church not only denied that the rapes occurred, but also actively hid the evidence by transferring accused priests to different parishes. The shame of the rapes thus extended beyond the survivors themselves, affecting the rape survivors, their families, and their religious communities. A number of rape survivors have come forward to share their stories and to hold the Catholic church accountable for both the sexual abuse of children and the calculated cover-up of the evidence. The narratives of rape survivors, as well as the 2015 film *Spotlight*, starring Mark Ruffalo, Michael Keaton, and Rachel McAdams are necessary contributions to this discussion.

Finally, an analysis of rape and rape culture on college campuses is essential to an inclusive study of rape. As discussed in the Introduction, the 2014 “It’s On Us” national initiative is working to raise awareness of sexual assault on college campuses. The initiative asks bystanders to intervene in situations that are likely to lead to rape, especially the manipulation of an intoxicated or otherwise incapacitated person. And as discussed

previously, the 2014 “Yes means yes” California bill that redefined consent on college campuses and thus redefined rape itself has been largely influential in terms of changing the “cultural perception” of rape, as activist Sofie Karasek points out (qtd. in Welch). In addition, the issue of rape on college campuses has entered the public consciousness through a number of recent high-profile cases that have drawn extensive media coverage, especially the now infamous 2014 *Rolling Stone* article by Sabrina Erdely, “A Rape on Campus.” Erdely allegedly failed to verify the testimony of her source, whose account was challenged and ultimately discredited. As a result, Erdely and *Rolling Stone* were accused of contributing to an alleged exaggeration of the problem of rape on college campuses, a claim supported by Katie Roiphe in her 1994 book *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus*, which drew notoriety in the feminist community because Roiphe effectively accuses feminist theorists of inventing a crisis of rape on college campuses. Further, pop superstar Lady Gaga’s emotional performance of her song “Til It Happens to You” as part of the 2016 Oscar celebration has drawn national attention to campus rape (Cox). Lady Gaga’s song is affiliated with the 2015 documentary *The Hunting Ground*, which is a critical contribution to the discussion of rape and rape culture on college campuses, as are the “It’s On Us” initiative, the “Yes means yes” approach to consent, the *Rolling Stone* fiasco, and Roiphe’s *The Morning After*, all of which have had a significant influence on the perception of rape and rape culture on college campuses.

Establishing a cohesive theoretical approach to rape and rape culture thus requires the contributions of countless scholars who have myriad approaches to the issue. It is not enough to focus on one type of rape, or one type of rapist, or one type of survivor. Instead, in building a theoretical understanding of rape and rape culture, it is essential to incorporate as

many individual experiences of rape as possible, because each survivor's experience contributes to the body of knowledge pertaining to rape and rape culture. The narratives of rape in literature and film, as well as the narratives provided through journalistic interviews, memoirs, and documentaries, are all crucial components in the effort to understand rape, and how a culture of rape informs U.S. society.

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