

Chapter 5— When Things Go Too Far: Sexual Aggression, Harassment, and Assault

“This is the essence of the commercial, male, heterosexual, pornographic imagination: thinking of women as being defined only through their sexuality and that sexuality to be at the service of men’s desires.” Sut Jhally, *Dreamworlds 3*

Tits, ass, and “legs in high heels.”¹ Women are often reduced to these particular body parts in the media adolescent boys see. Comic books and graphic novels, music videos, magazine covers, and commercials for cars, Internet services, beer, and fast food routinely feature barely-dressed women posed to appeal to the male, heterosexual, pornographic imagination described by Sut Jhally. Women are also getting in on the act. The term “self-objectification” is taking on more currency, being used increasingly to describe female celebrities who willingly expose their bodies and overtly sexualize themselves in music videos and Instagram selfies, on stage, and on the red carpet.

This brand of female sexual objectification goes beyond mere titillation. In each objectifying image, women are not only put on display, but also shown to enjoy this treatment, feel flattered by it, and respond to it by preening for more male attention. For these women, sexuality is not about their own wants and desires, but men’s: they dress, twerk, grind, pout, and touch themselves primarily to fulfill men’s fantasies. In this way, objectification is also tied to the male-as-dominant script I have described in previous chapters: objectified women are reduced to a sexual role and evaluated primarily in terms of how well they can, in Jhally’s words, service men’s desires.

You may be asking what any of this has to do with sexual aggression. Quite a lot, as we will see. Regular exposure to objectifying imagery can affect the attitudes and actions of boys and men. This is not to say that popular culture will turn boys into rapists, but that stereotyped depictions of male and female sexuality—combined with the lack of strong messages about consent— may instill in boys a distorted view of male and female sexual roles, ultimately influencing their perceptions of how they should act in a sexual relationship, what they should expect from the girls they know, and how hard they should push to get what they want. As communications scholar Stacy Hust said in 2014, “We learn a lot about how to act in a relationship by what we see and read in the media...Bad information can lead to bad decisions.”²

¹ Jhally, Sut. *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video* Transcript. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2007.

² Washington State University. “Men’s magazine reading, unwanted sexual behaviors linked.” *WSU News* May 27, 2014.

<https://news.wsu.edu/2014/05/27/study-links-mens-magazine-readers-unwanted-sexual-behaviors/#.VVI-Co5Vikp> Accessed May 12, 2015.

It must also be said that girls are not the only victims in this environment. Although talked about far less, boys also suffer harassment, sexual assault, and the very serious consequences they bring, often because they do not subscribe to the tenets of the male, heterosexual, pornographic imagination.

The Connection Between Sexualized Media and Aggression

The strong presence of female sexual objectification and male sexual dominance in our media is not surprising when you consider that men are largely in control of the images we see. They are the directors and editors behind most of the sexual imagery in media and they frequently pose women to fulfill stereotypical male fantasies and satisfy the male gaze.³ Consider a common aesthetic in men's magazine layouts: female models who are wet, barely dressed, and lounging seductively on beds or beaches with full lips partially open and breasts or bottom displayed prominently. Such poses demonstrate the "ritualization of subordination" described by Erving Goffman, showing women as sexually available and often submissive and vulnerable.

Consider also some of the other media aimed at adolescent boys:

- Video games and many graphic novels are notorious for drawing female characters in a highly sexualized manner, like *Fire Emblem: Awakening*, a 2013 game whose website features several female characters in lingerie⁴, and anime-inspired artwork showing doe-eyed girls in short skirts and tiny tops.
- In the superhero world, female heroes—when present at all—have all aspects of their femininity and sexuality exaggerated, from their bright red lips to their long, flowing hair and buxom figures.
- Professional sports contribute to the problem as well, with jiggling cheerleaders on NFL sidelines and nearly naked models posing seductively in the swimsuit issues of major sports magazines.

Sexual objectification is also common in the films aimed at teen boys. Because the makers of these films do not want to risk a rating higher than PG-13 they keep actual portrayals of sex to a minimum,⁵ but there are often implicit messages in these films about gender and the nature of sexual relationships between men and women. For examples we can look to a few popular action films from recent years.

In *Iron Man 3*, a PG-13 film that was just being released as I began writing this book, Iron Man's alter ego Tony Stark talks about "going to town on a woman" and says that she will need a cardio doctor after they are done. There is no reference to her role, other than being the recipient of his prowess. His sidekick Happy talks about a "blonde with a big rack" and leers at the nurse tending to him in hospital. There are references to chicks and bimbos, and criminal mastermind

³ Jhally.

⁴ Nintendo. "Fire Emblem:Awakening" <http://fireemblem.nintendo.com/characters/index.html> Accessed March 10, 2013.

⁵ Markovitz, Adam. "Where's the love? The sudden death of the Hollywood sex scene" *Entertainment Weekly* March 14, 2013.

Mandarin talks about having two “birds” in his bed, who are later shown playing ping-pong in bikinis for his amusement.⁶

In the film *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, the female lead is regularly shown in revealing clothing with camera angles emphasizing her bottom and legs. An adult male character also refers to this character—a teenage girl—as “hot.”⁷

Non-human characters can also objectify women. Common Sense Media reviewed the 2014 film *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and noted that there were several references to the “sexy body” of female lead April, played by Megan Fox. One of the turtles calls her “hot,” says his shell tightens when he sees her (that is, he is aroused), and notes that he has “dibs” on her.⁸

Lad magazines also make female sexual objectification their central focus. Timorous young men may not have the courage to purchase hard copies of these magazines but all of the titles in this genre have robust websites, laden with barely-dressed women, both celebrities and “real girls” who post “sexy selfies” for all the world to see. One of the most egregious sites in recent years was the UK-based *Nuts*. The website included a feature called “Assess My Breasts” that invited young women to upload pictures of their breasts and have them graded by readers,⁹ an over-the-top example of women striving to satisfy the male gaze. *Nuts* shut down in 2014, followed by its near-twin *Zoo* in 2015, which had a *Real Girls*¹⁰ photo gallery that allowed readers to rate the images of “regular girls.”¹¹ There are still popular titles in the lad magazine category, including *FHM* and *Maxim*. Also making an appearance in this category is the “new” *Playboy* which seems to have borrowed liberally from the lad magazine model. Like *FHM* and *Maxim*, the new *Playboy* website has a “Girls” menu with access to such edifying articles as “Disney Star Bella Thorne and Her Hot Sisters Lounged Around in Bikinis All Weekend” and “Take Your Top Off Tuesday.”¹²

Communications professor Laramie Taylor studied lad magazines and found, unsurprisingly, that all articles were accompanied by sexualized images of women. (A look at the *Maxim* website shows that this trend also extends to the online world.) Taylor believes these images reinforce the

⁶ *Iron Man 3*. Directed by Shane Black. Manhattan Beach, CA: Marvel Studios, 2013.

⁷ *Transformers: Age of Extinction*. Directed by Michael Bay. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2014.

⁸ Common Sense Media “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles” *Common Sense Media* August 8, 2014 <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews/teenage-mutant-ninja-turtles> Accessed October 30, 2014.

⁹ Nuts Magazine. “Assess My Breasts” *Nuts* <http://www.nuts.co.uk/69084/assess-my-breasts> Accessed December 9, 2012 and February 5, 2014.

¹⁰ Zoo Magazine. “How to get the most from ZOO Real Girls: Booking shows, chatting, and more.” <http://www.zootoday.com/girls/real-girls/how-to-get-the-most-from-zoo-real-girls--booking-shows--chatti-ng--more> Accessed August, 2014.

¹¹ Zoo Magazine. “Great British Babe Search 2014: Final 3! It’s time to pick your winner!” <http://www.zootoday.com/girls/news/great-british-babe-search-2014--final-3-its-time-to-pick-your-winner> Accessed November, 2014.

¹² *Playboy* “Girls” <http://www.playboy.com/girls> Accessed November 24, 2015.

idea presented in the text that women are, first and foremost, sexual objects.¹³ His point was echoed by political scientist Nicole Krassas and colleagues who noted that the women in lad magazines were routinely objectified and posed as sexually available. The men, on the other hand, had identities outside of the sexual role and were posed in more natural and less sexualized ways.¹⁴

A similar contrast between men's and women's roles is seen in music videos that show half-dressed women writhing around or simply providing ornamentation for fully-clothed male artists. One of the most egregious examples from recent years was the 2013 hit *Blurred Lines* by Robin Thicke which featured men ogling younger, topless women. More recently, Flo Rida's video for his 2015 song *My House* opened with the singer sitting on a throne while two women in tight, midriff-baring outfits fawned over him. Women's bodies were used routinely as background decoration, employed as lampposts and even for serving food: a woman was shown drinking liquor poured on another woman's body, while in another scene a woman was laid out on a table and used as a sushi platter.¹⁵ The *Billboard* Top 5 song *679* by Fetty Wap showed two women in bikinis soaping up in a bathtub behind a man dressed in jeans and a shirt,¹⁶ while women dressed in lingerie danced in cages in Travis Scott's *Antidote*.¹⁷ Even the video for Drake's hit song *Hotline Bling*, while tame compared to the others described here, included scenes of women in tight lycra clothes and high heels preening seductively while he grooved inside a cubicle in, variously, a parka, hoodie, and oversized sweater.

Female artists follow suit, putting themselves on display in highly sexualized scenes that would, by our cultural standards, look ridiculous if a man were to perform them. Consider if Robin Thicke acted as Miley Cyrus did in her infamous 2013 video for *Wrecking Ball*,¹⁸ seductively licking a mallet or riding naked on a wrecking ball. Place Jay-Z in the Beyoncé role in their video for *Drunk in Love*¹⁹—he wet and clad in a skimpy bathing suit, crawling all over a fully-clothed Beyoncé who pays him no heed. Or imagine Drake on his hands and knees inside his little box, wiggling his hips as Ariana Grande does in *Focus*, or Fetty Wap writhing on a chair in nothing but a wet t-shirt like Selena Gomez in *Good for You*.²⁰ These reverse images are

¹³ Taylor, Laramie D. "All for Him: Articles About Sex in American Lad Magazines" *Sex Roles* 52, no. 3-4, (2005), p. 153-163.

¹⁴ Krassas, Nicole et al. "'Master Your Johnson': Sexual Rhetoric in *Maxim* and *Stuff* Magazines" *Sexuality & Culture* 7, no. 3. (2003), p. 115.

¹⁵ Flo Rida. "My House" *You Tube* September 24, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo35R9zQsAI> Accessed December 9, 2015.

¹⁶ Fetty Wap. "679" *You Tube* May 14, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELNgQFPdgrA> Accessed December 8, 2015.

¹⁷ Travis Scott. "Antidote" *You Tube* September 18, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnZ8h3MRuYg> Accessed December 9, 2015.

¹⁸ Cyrus, Miley. "Wrecking Ball" *You Tube* September 9, 2013.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My2FRPA3Gf8> Accessed February 3, 2014.

¹⁹ Knowles, Beyoncé. "Drunk in Love" *You Tube* December 16, 2013

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1JPKLa-Ofc> Accessed December 17, 2013.

²⁰ Gomez, Selena. "Good for You" *You Tube* August 18, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXXKHCgNFk1I> Accessed December 9, 2015.

shocking to contemplate, but worth considering to realize the position of women in relation to men in much of our sexualized media.

Research into music videos highlights just how common sex role stereotypes and traditional sexual scripts are. In a 2011 paper, psychologist Kathryn Ryan talked about the male stereotypes implicit in many videos and song lyrics: sex defines masculinity, heterosexual men are sexually preoccupied, and men routinely objectify women.²¹

Music can take things much further than basic stereotypes, often veering into degradation and misogyny in both its lyrical and video content.

On two different occasions over a year apart, I consulted the most-watched videos on MTV and the top ten singles lists on the *Billboard* charts and found several songs that included both objectification and degradation. While I do not want to demonize hip-hop and rap, songs in that genre often place at the top of “most watched” video lists and frequently depict sexually insatiable males and objectified females, while also adding a strong undercurrent of misogyny.

The song *Love Me* by Lil Wayne is one example. On March 15, 2013, the song had reached number 9 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and number 6 on the MTV Most Viewed list. A guest rap about bitches from fellow musician Drake opens the song, but further degradation (and explicitness) arrives via Lil Wayne himself who raps: “All she eat is dick/She’s on a strict diet/... She say I never wanna make you mad/I just wanna make you proud/I say baby just make me cum, then don’t make a sound.”²² Not to be outdone, A\$AP Rocky wrote a song called “F**kin Problems” that reached number 8 on the *Billboard* charts in 2013. The song talked about fucking “bitches and broads”²³ and included guest appearances from major artists Drake, Kendrick Lamar, and 2 Chainz. In 2014, 50 Cent noted in his song *Animal Ambition* that that women are gold diggers and he will not give them love or affection since he “just wants some head.”²⁴ In the utterly awful *No Mediocre*, T.I. sinks to new depths with these lyrics:

All I fuck is bad bitches/I don’t want no mediocre/... I never fuck a bitch if she don’t do her hair/No more, you won’t get no dick if there’s a bush down there/Girl I should see nothing but pussy when I look down there/I’m kicked back with four pieces like a Kit Kat/ Me fucking, if you ain’t a dime, just forget that.²⁵

²¹ Ryan, Kathryn. “The Relationship between Rape Myths and Sexual Scripts: The Social Construction of Rape” *Sex Roles* 65, no. 11-12 (2011), p. 779.

²² Lil Wayne “Love Me Featuring Drake” YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY44zvhWhp4> February 14, 2013. Accessed March 15, 2013.

²³ A\$AP Rocky. *F**kin Problems* Rapgenius website.

<http://rapgenius.com/Asap-rocky-fuckin-problems-lyrics> Accessed March 20, 2013.

²⁴ 50 Cent. *Animal Ambition*. Vevo <http://www.vevo.com/watch/50-cent/animal-ambition/USV6R1490005> Accessed June 25, 2014.

²⁵ T.I. *No Mediocre* Rapgenius website <http://rapgenius.com/Ti-no-mediocre-lyrics> Accessed June 25, 2014.

Researchers have expressed considerable concern over degrading lyrics. Professor of Medicine Brian A. Primack worries that repeated exposure to such lyrics might desensitize individuals to both real-life violence and power differentials related to sex.²⁶ For their part, psychologist Steven Martino and colleagues believe that degrading lyrics reinforce the male-dominant sexual script depicted in many videos,²⁷ including those mentioned above which all include the familiar and standard narrative of fully-clothed man surrounded by barely dressed women.

Many of these videos are tagged as explicit but are easily accessible online through sites teens use to find new music, including Vevo and YouTube. A March 2013 article from *CNN Money* indicates that YouTube's most watched video clips are music videos and the viewers are predominantly teens.²⁸ Nielsen research backs up this claim, showing that teens "listen" to music through YouTube more than any other source: 64% compared to 56% for radio and 53% for iTunes.²⁹ Research from YouTube subsidiary Vevo claims that 71% of its users discover new music by browsing and watching music videos online.³⁰ And the images in videos matter. Unlike music listening, which may be a background activity that does not attract a teen's full attention, watching videos tends to be a primary activity. As a result, the messages may come across more clearly, especially since the visual images are often sexier than the music.³¹ Videos can also reinforce the messages in lyrics and clarify ambiguous wording.

Images of male dominance and aggression, female objectification, and degradation are not limited to music videos. Consider a video game being promoted on the main *Hustler* site when I visited it in December of 2012 and still available in 2015. The tagline reads: "Unlike Other Games, in Hustler 3D you don't SAVE the girl...you FUCK her!" The game involves the creation of customized avatars that can be placed in sexual scenes designed by the player. The game must be purchased, which rules it out for most teens, but there are some very graphic images and video clips available for free on the game's website. Screen shots show everything from "basic" sex to bondage (of the woman), a woman being penetrated by a "fucking machine," and several images of a woman with semen on her face and body. In March, 2013, the "What's New" page trumpeted the addition of a "golden shower" option for men that allowed players to

²⁶ Primack, Brian A. et al. "Exposure to Sexual Lyrics and Sexual Experience Among Urban Adolescents" *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 36, no. 4 (2009), p. 322.

²⁷ Martino, Steven et al. "Exposure to Degrading Versus Nondegrading Music Lyrics and Sexual Behavior Among Youth. *Pediatrics* 118, no. 2 (2006), p. 437.

²⁸ Bradley, Ryan and Jessi Hempl. "YouTube to launch music streaming service, take on Spotify." *CNN Money* website, March 5, 2013 <http://tech.fortune.cnn.com/2013/03/05/youtube-streaming/> Accessed March 17, 2013.

²⁹ Nielsen Holdings. "Music Discovery Still Dominated by Radio, Says Nielsen Music 360 Report." August 14, 2012. <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-room/2012/music-discovery-still-dominated-by-radio--says-nielsen-music-360.html> Accessed March 17, 2013.

³⁰ Vevo. *Vevo U.S. Music Video Viewership*, August 2012. <https://sparkpr.box.com/s/vmyqedphfb6xnev0pj9> Accessed March 17, 2013.

³¹ Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. "The Sounds of Sex: Sex in Teens' Music and Music Videos" *Sexual Teens, Sexual Media: Investigating Media's Influence on Adolescent Sexuality*. Jane D. Brown et al, eds. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002, p. 256-7.

“empty the males bladder in arousing or humiliating fashion” (sic) and a rectangular option for the (sex) Toy Editor,³² so players can “spank those that really deserve it” or “fuck” someone with a brick if they prefer.

The game is designed for men and gives them the chance to create and live out their own sexual fantasies, including many options for humiliating or rough sex. The impact of such imaginary sexual activity is still being studied, but regardless of long-term effects, this type of material is not a healthy introduction to sex for boys who might stumble upon the site: it is violent and greatly exaggerates the traits of the heterosexual script, positioning men as extremely aggressive and even hostile, and women as exceedingly submissive and compliant.

I talked about the imagery in lad magazines earlier, but objectifying and aggressive undertones are also present in the text. I refer to another trend from *FHM*'s 100 stories referenced in the previous chapter. This trend speaks to objectification in a very explicit form and echoes that seen in pornography. Five of the stories featured narratives of the male ejaculating onto the woman, while a further nine stories described the woman gladly and greedily swallowing a man's ejaculate: “...he came in my mouth. I gulped it down.” Among these, five stories referenced the “huge loads” ejaculated by the man.³³ As Jackson Katz said in reference to the Steubenville case, such scenes centre on the “complete objectification” of women: “The man—or men—are doing something to her; they are ejaculating into or onto an object rather than having a sexual relationship with another human being.”³⁴

The fact that these explicit stories are present on the site of a lad magazine troubles some researchers, including psychologists Miranda Horvath and Maddy Coy of the Child & Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University. In a 2010 article, they refer to lad magazines as “manifestations of the mainstreaming of pornography into the mass media” that promote a “powerful-aggressive” male sexuality.”³⁵

Because the content of lad magazines is mostly pretty juvenile, many people wonder whether there is any real issue with them. There are two schools of thought: one says these magazines promote a dangerous and misogynistic view of male sexuality and offer a distorted source of sexual information for boys, while the other says they are “ironic” and intended to be humorous.

As a layperson looking at the content of lad magazines and their associated websites, it was difficult for me to find the humour in them. I am not alone in that regard. Researchers have

³² Hustler 3D Game. <http://www.hustler3dgame.com/> Accessed December 6, 2012 and again October 3, 2014.

³³ FHM. “FHM’s best ever Ladies’ confessions: the top 100” *FHM.com*

<http://www.fhm.com/girls/true-confessions> April, 2009. Accessed November 29, 2012.

³⁴ Earp, Jeremy. “Lessons from Steubenville: Part 2 of an Interview with Jackson Katz” *Media Education Foundation* website. <http://www.mediaed.org/blog/?p=1696> March 21, 2013. Accessed March 21, 2013.

³⁵ Coy, Maddy and Miranda A.H. Horvath. “Lads’ Mags’, Young Men’s Attitudes towards Women and Acceptance of Myths about Sexual Aggression.” *Feminism & Psychology*. 20, no. 2 (2010), p. 4.

analyzed the content of lad magazines and found that they promote some very negative ideas about sexuality and gender roles.

Beyond the objectification mentioned earlier, one study found some very degrading and disturbing content. In 2012, Horvath and colleagues showed college-aged participants a selection of quotations from lad magazines and convicted rapists. In some cases the source was identified and in others it was not. Participants who were not told the source were asked to guess. Another section of the study asked participants to rate the quotes in terms of their level of degradation.

Overall, men identified more with the quotes when they were attributed to lad magazines, implying that lad magazines may lend a degree of legitimacy to sexist or misogynistic attitudes. The quotes from lad magazines were also rated as more degrading to women than those from the convicted rapists. Finally, participants guessed the source correctly only about 55% of the time, suggesting a strong overlap between rapists' comments and lad magazine content. This ratio came about even though some of the quotes from the lad magazines sounded like advice and could have, theoretically, been more easily identified as coming from a magazine.

Horvath and colleagues note that while many young people might assume there is a boundary between lad magazine content and the statements of rapists—with the former being considered normal and the latter extreme—in reality the distinction is not so clear. The report included a quote from a participant that illustrated how lad magazines could help legitimize negative attitudes toward women. He said that the quotes were “sort of degrading in a way that can be seen to be acceptable if they put it in a glossy magazine.”³⁶

In case you would like to try the test, here are two sample quotes. See if you can identify which came from a magazine and which from a rapist:

- “You do not want to be caught red-handed...go and smash her on a park bench. That used to be my trick.”
- “Some women are domineering, but I think it’s more or less the man who should put his foot down. The man is supposed to be the man. If he acts the man, the woman won’t be domineering.”³⁷

As an extreme example of male sexual dominance and aggression in media, I will again mention gonzo porn. In this genre women are blatantly objectified and abused verbally and physically, often by multiple men. These women are also called derogatory names during sex, like cunts, whores, cumdumpsters, and fucktubes.³⁸ A site called gonzoxxxmovies.com provides many examples of this demeaning and violent sex, including categories like: brutal sex, angry, choking play, “cum in her eyes,” and “cum swapping.” The category called “triple penetration” included

³⁶ Horvath, Miranda H. et al. “‘Lights on at the end of the party’: Are lads’ mags mainstreaming dangerous sexism?” *British Journal of Psychology*. 103, no. 4 (2012): p. 454-471.

³⁷ The first quote is from the lad magazine, the second from a convicted rapist.

³⁸ Dines, p. 17-20.

a video called “50 Guys Drill 1 Slut in Every Hole She Has” and others with references to gangbangs.³⁹

Given its excessive violence and misogyny, gonzo might not be the genre favoured by younger boys or even most men, but, as *Pornland* author Gail Dines wrote, even outside of gonzo, porn women “are always ready for sex and are enthusiastic to do whatever men want, irrespective of how painful, humiliating, or harmful the act is...what they want always mirrors what the man wants.”

What the man wants. That is what it all comes down to. Portrayals of sex in many of the media favoured by many boys are based in a man demonstrating his constant need for sex and his entitlement to get it any way he likes. He, the dominant player, calls the shots and uses her, the sexual object, as he sees fit.

This reduction of women to a sexual role can have a profound impact on boys and young men, creating a fixation on women’s sexual activities, linking women’s attractiveness to their ability to look and act “hot,” and promoting the idea that women are “sexual playthings” who are always eager to fulfill men’s wishes.⁴⁰

Sexual objectification can also open the door to aggressive behaviours. In fact, studies have shown links between objectifying and stereotyped media portrayals and various types of sexual aggression:

- regular exposure to stereotyped video game characters is associated with a greater tolerance for sexual harassment and increased rape myth acceptance;⁴¹
- reading men’s magazines, which typically contain objectifying imagery, is linked to lower intentions to seek sexual consent and adhere to sexual consent decisions;⁴²
- television portrayals that objectify or degrade women have been shown to play a causal role in gender harassment and sexual coercion intentions.⁴³

In short, many of the sexual narratives in teen media reinforce the worst stereotypes about male sexuality and blur the line between what constitutes “normal” guy behaviour and criminal acts. In this grey area many misconceptions about sexual relationships emerge, with rape myths perhaps the most damaging.

³⁹ GonzoXXXMovies <http://www.gonzosxxxmovies.com/> Accessed June 20, 2014.

⁴⁰ Peter, Jochen and Patti M. Valkenburg. “Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Internet Material and Notions of Women as Sex Objects: Assessing Causality and Underlying Processes” *Journal of Communication* 58, no. 3: 2009, cited in Owens, Eric W. et al. “The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 19, no 1-2. :2012, p. 106.

⁴¹ Dill, Karen E. et al. “Effects of exposure to sex-stereotyped video game characters on tolerance of sexual harassment.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44, no.5 (2008), p. 1402-1408.

⁴² Hust, Stacy et al. “Establishing and adhering to sexual consent: The association of reading magazines and college students’ sexual consent negotiation.” *Journal of Sex Research* 51, no. 3 (2014), p. 280-290.

⁴³ Galdi, Silvia et al. “Objectifying Media: Their Effect on Gender Role Norms and Sexual Harassment of Women.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2014), p. 13.

She Was Asking For It: Rape Myths and the Bystander Effect

The term “rape myth” refers to the many inaccuracies about sexual assault that permeate our culture. These myths create confusion over what the crime of sexual assault looks like and are one of the reasons that teenage boys who commit sexual assault may fail to see their aggression as anything other than a “normative sexual interaction.”⁴⁴ Indeed, one survey of American high school students found that 15% of females reported the use of physical force by a male while only 2% of males admitted using physical force, and 14% of females reported being raped while only 1% of males reported committing rape.⁴⁵ It seems the boys did not see things the same way girls did, an indication that there is a widespread misunderstanding among teens over what it means to cross the line.

As I started writing this book, an infamous case that shone a spotlight on rape myths was drawing to a close. The rape trial of two teenage football players in Steubenville, Ohio had concluded with guilty verdicts. At the end of the trial there was some fallout, but it didn’t land where one would expect. Instead of a thorough public shaming of the perpetrators, they received media sympathy while the victim had to deal with death threats and blaming.

To recap the Steubenville case for those who may not be familiar with it, two high-school football players took full advantage of a girl who was so drunk she could not walk. They penetrated her with their fingers and tried to make her perform oral sex, although she was so far gone she couldn’t keep her mouth open. Several people watched. No one intervened. Pictures and video were taken; the most egregious was a clip later released by hacker group Anonymous showing one boy who attended the party laughing and talking about how the girl was “so raped right now.”⁴⁶ Although the young man who made this comment appears to have understood the nature of the crime committed against this young woman, he may have been the only one. A more typical response came from student Evan Westlake, who said he didn’t think that what he was witnessing was rape, “I didn’t know exactly what rape was. I always pictured it as forcing yourself on someone.”⁴⁷ His comment reflects widely held rape myths, a subject explored by psychologist Heather Littleton who has consistently found that people’s ideas about rape—their rape scripts—do not match the reality of most rapes. Typical rape scripts are what Westlake had in mind. They involve:

- stranger attack;

⁴⁴ Littleton, Heather et al. “Priming of Consensual and Nonconsensual Sexual Scripts: An Experimental Test of the Role of Scripts in Rape Attributions” *Sex Roles* 54, no. 7-8 (2006), p. 557.

⁴⁵ Maxwell, Christopher D. et al. “The Nature and Predictors of Sexual Victimization and Offending Among Adolescents” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 32, no. 6 (2003), p. 472.

⁴⁶ Baker, Katie J.M. “Anonymous Leaks Horrifying Video of Steubenville High Schoolers Joking About Raping a Teenager ‘Deader Than Trayvon Martin’” *Jezebel* January 2, 2103.
<http://jezebel.com/5972553/anonymous-leaks-horrifying-video-of-steubenville-high-schoolers-joking-about-raping-a-teenager-deader-than-trayvon-martin> Accessed March 18, 2013.

⁴⁷ Carmon, Irin. “Four lessons from Steubenville” *Salon* March 18, 2013.
http://www.salon.com/2013/03/18/four_lessons_from_steubenville/ Accessed March 18, 2013.

- use of severe violence (choking, beating, using a weapon);
- use of rape drugs like Rohypnol (roofies).

In contrast, most rapes:

- are committed by an acquaintance or partner of the victim;
- rarely include severe violence;
- involve the voluntary ingestion of alcohol, leading to impairment.⁴⁸

The experience of most adolescent rape victims reflects the reality described by Littleton but because of scripts that tell them otherwise, most fail to recognize that what happened to them was rape. Teens are typically victimized by an acquaintance, and more often a boyfriend or girlfriend. For teens, drinking is a significant risk factor for sexual assault, and alcohol can also increase the severity of the perpetrator's aggression.⁴⁹

As Littleton notes, a person's rape scripts affect their acceptance of certain rape myths. That is, if people believe rape is a random, extremely violent attack by a stranger, they may think that victims whose experiences vary from that script are lying, misconstrued "seduction" as an assault,⁵⁰ or brought it on themselves because they were drunk or high.

Other rape myths incorporate victim blaming or excuses that exonerate the perpetrator. As professors of social work Sarah McMahon and Lawrence G. Farmer wrote in a 2011 paper, such rape myths have become more subtle over time. Most people no longer overtly state that a girl or woman is to blame for rape but make suggestions that imply she is: she put herself at risk by drinking too much, was too flirtatious, or looked too available in her short skirt. The myth of the overpowering male sex drive is often cited to reduce the accountability of male perpetrators: he was really turned on and couldn't stop himself. Alcohol is also a factor in rape myths, on the one hand blaming victims—she drank too much—and, on the other hand, excusing the aggressor—he was too drunk to know what he was doing or so wasted that he "accidentally" went too far.⁵¹ (Such distortions also exist for male victims of rape, a subject I will address later in this chapter.)

Beyond the act itself, rape myths also affect people's perceptions of what a rapist looks like. There is a notion that men who commit rape are very different from "normal" men. Many people assume that a rapist is sick, psychopathic, sexually frustrated, a drug abuser or alcoholic, or someone who "won't be able to have a woman because he is so gross."⁵² In reality, as we have seen, a rapist is far more likely to be a friend or acquaintance of the victim.

⁴⁸ Littleton, Heather. "Rape Myths and Beyond: A Commentary on Edwards and Colleagues (2011)" *Sex Roles* 65, no. 11-12 (2011), p. 794.

⁴⁹ Maxwell, Christopher D. et al. "The Nature and Predictors of Sexual Victimization and Offending Among Adolescents" *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 32, no. 6 (2003), p. 467.

⁵⁰ Littleton, 2011, p. 794.

⁵¹ McMahon, Sarah and Lawrence G. Farmer. "An Updated Measure for Assessing Subtle Rape Myths" *Social Work Research* 35, no. 2 (2011), p. 79-81.

⁵² Ryan, Kathryn. p. 779.

Jokes about rape contribute to the problem by minimizing the impact of the crime. In 2013 on the campuses of two Canadian universities, rape chants could be heard during Frosh week. From Saint Mary's University: "SMU boys, we like them young. Y is for your sister. O is for oh so tight. U is for underage. N is for no consent. G is for grab that ass." On the other side of the country at the University of British Columbia, a similar refrain: Y-O-U-N-G at UBC we like em young Y is for yourrr sister O is for ohh so tight U is for under age N is for noo consent G is for goo to jail."⁵³

In the world of entertainment, popular television show *Family Guy* has been roundly criticized for its jokes about rape. The show has been on the air for years and some of the problematic episodes are quite old, but that does not make them off-limits for kids. The program is available on Netflix and other online providers, making the entire series available at anytime. As far as rape jokes, a couple of episodes stand out.

In "Movin' Out (Brian's Song)" from season 6, a separate animation scroll featuring Marge Simpson of *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* character Quagmire appears at the bottom of the screen. He runs up behind her, tackles her and tries to force himself on her while she clearly tries to fend him off. She later escapes but he chases her with his pants halfway down his legs. She returns later to say the sex was fantastic and accepts his invitation for "round 2."⁵⁴

An episode entitled "I Dream of Jesus" includes a scene with lead character Peter asking a waiter in a 50s-themed diner for a record from the jukebox:

Peter: Can I have that record? I love that song. I'll let you have sex with my daughter...
Waiter: I don't know...let's see what your daughter looks like.
Peter: She's...uhh...right there! (The "camera" moves past his actual daughter to an attractive woman wearing a short black dress.)
Waiter: Ok, I'll do her. But can you tell her to cry and beg me to stop?
Peter: I think that can be arranged.⁵⁵

Because *Family Guy* is very popular with adolescent boys it is important to consider what kinds of messages they are receiving about rape when they watch this program: it is not a big deal, can be laughed at, and is not the dark and scary crime some people think it is. If boys add the Marge Simpson clip to the compendium of other images they encounter in our culture, they might start to believe that forced sex is enjoyable for both women and men. That message is certainly clear

⁵³ Laxer, Michael. "M is for misogyny: From frat boy chants to society" *Rabble.ca* September 9, 2013. <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/michael-laxer/2013/09/m-misogyny-frat-boy-chants-to-society> Accessed October 27, 2014.

⁵⁴ 20th Century Fox Television. "Movin' Out (Brian's Song)" September 30, 2007. There is some discussion as to whether the Marge Simpson scene was actually aired anywhere other than the US. This YouTube video shows the scene. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fA_QqFm5mWo

⁵⁵ 20th Century Fox Television. "I Dream of Jesus" *Family Guy* October 5, 2008.

in pornography where the targets of verbal and physical aggression—primarily women—show pleasure or at least have neutral responses to the behaviours being inflicted on them.⁵⁶

Rape myths also extend to boys who do not commit rape or sexual assault but choose to be bystanders when their peers engage in such crimes. Again, their lack of understanding of what rape means may prevent them from acting, as might an adherence to the “bro code,” a term used in the title of a documentary about cultural influences on male attitudes toward women. In this film, Thomas Keith talks about the pressure on boys to keep quiet about the transgressions of their male peers: “Don’t snitch, don’t tell, don’t act, is part of a pervasive male code.”⁵⁷ The end result is crimes like Steubenville and others like it that, because of the bro code, may never be reported even if witnessed by peers of the perpetrator.

Some studies have shown a link between the bystander effect and the use of pornography. In 2011, John D. Foubert, a university professor who writes regularly about sexual assault prevention, studied the impact of pornography on fraternity men’s attitudes about rape. The study focused on three types of pornography: mainstream, rape, and sadomasochistic. Foubert and his research team found that users of all three types of pornography showed significantly less willingness to intervene as a bystander in a rape situation. Those who had watched rape or sadomasochistic pornography also showed much higher acceptance of rape myths than the men who had not watched.⁵⁸ I have not yet come across a study that shows whether men’s rape myth acceptance is affected by mainstream programming with dismissive attitudes toward rape, like *Family Guy*, but it is a research question worth considering.

The rape myths that prevail in our culture have far-reaching effects. They cause sympathy for the victim to be displaced by blame, and distort teens’ views of sexual assault, leading them to doubt that actual crimes have been committed. Where there is doubt, there is less effort to step in and more acceptance of the notion that aggressive sex is just a case of guys being guys. The seeds of that doubt are sown in our media and culture, as we saw in my previous discussion of consent and the examples I cited earlier in this chapter: male sexual aggression is glorified; females are presented frequently as sexual objects, barely dressed and submissive; and the use of alcohol is portrayed as fun and a sign of maturity. It is the frat boy mentality writ large, where a predatory male views females as targets and encourages alcohol use to lower inhibitions. If he gets a little out of hand, it is not his fault; she brought it on herself by getting drunk and being flirtatious, and she may even secretly enjoy it.

The same kind of mythology is evident in another type of violation that is less physically invasive but equally traumatizing: sexual harassment.

⁵⁶ Bridges, AJ et al. “Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography videos: a content analysis update” *Violence Against Women* 16, no. 10 (2010).

⁵⁷ Keith, Thomas. *The Bro Code: How Contemporary Culture Creates Sexist Men* Transcript. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2011.

⁵⁸ Foubert, John D. et al. “Pornography Viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth Acceptance and Behavioral Intent to Commit Sexual Assault” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 18, no. 4 (2011), p. 220-224.

Harassment and Sexting

Sexual harassment is one of the most common forms of sexual aggression among adolescents. A 2011 report called *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School* by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) defines sexual harassment as:

...unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which can include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. [It] can include conduct such as touching of a sexual nature; making sexual comments, jokes, or gestures; writing graffiti or displaying or distributing sexually explicit drawings, pictures, or written materials; calling students sexually charged names; spreading sexual rumors; rating students on sexual activity or performance; or circulating, showing, or creating e-mails or Web sites of a sexual nature.

The AAUW report notes that teasing of someone who does not conform to gender norms is also sexual harassment, saying that: “Gender harassment is not necessarily sexual in intent or action, but it does address the targeted student’s sexuality and is used as a general pejorative to manipulate or control other students.”

Male harassment of females stems from the same place as all sexual aggression, namely the myths that boys: are overwhelmed by sexual desire and can be excused for being assertive or even aggressive about sex (sex role stereotype); have the right to evaluate or criticize girls’ sexual appeal (objectification); and are expected to initiate sexual encounters (heterosexual script). These ideas are promoted in our media, as the various music videos, TV programs, and films like *Iron Man 3*, *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles I* discussed earlier demonstrate.

A more recent, troubling example emerged in 2014 via the stalker fantasy video created by Maroon 5 for the band’s song *Animals*. In the video, lead singer Adam Levine plays a character obsessed with a woman who has no interest in him. He stands outside her apartment and watches her through her window, takes pictures of her from the street, then later enters her apartment while she is sleeping to photograph her. The video garnered widespread condemnation in popular media for romanticizing sexual violence, a charge that Levine did not anticipate when, in an interview before the video’s release, he referred to it as “really dark and weird and cool.”⁵⁹ Kids who do not read media criticism might have missed the memo that this video is neither romantic nor cool—it depicts a dangerous obsession and crime.

In school hallways, parties, and other places that young men and women congregate, the behaviours depicted in our media may be reflected in some boys’ attitudes and actions. A boy

⁵⁹ Denham, Jess. “Maroon 5 new video ‘Animals’ criticised for promoting sexual violence.” *The Independent*. October 2, 2014.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/maroon-5-animals-music-video-attacked-for-promoting-sexual-violence-against-women-9770094.html> Accessed October 19, 2014.

may rub against a girl suggestively in a hallway, tell her she is hot in front of his friends, make sexually suggestive statements, show her sexually explicit images, or call her a slut or “ho” if she is deemed too promiscuous. According to the AAUW study, 56% of girls in grades 7-12 experienced these types of sexual harassment in the single school year from 2010-2011.

The impacts of sexual harassment can be severe. Reactions vary but include: dread of school, absenteeism from school, feeling sick, finding it hard to study, and trouble sleeping. Students who were particularly badly affected noted that they had to find a new route to or from school, quit sports teams or activities, or even change schools.

As the AAUW report and many others have noted, kids’ use of electronic devices adds another element to the problem of sexual harassment. Where some would-be harassers may not be bold enough to confront a peer face-to-face, they have fewer inhibitions online. Cyber-harassment includes being sent unwelcome sexual comments, jokes or pictures; being the subject of a sexual joke, rumour, or image posted online; and being called gay or lesbian in a negative way.

Some 36% of girls in the AAUW survey reported being harassed electronically. And those who faced the double whammy of online and in-person harassment—whether male or female—were more likely to be negatively affected than those harassed through only one means.⁶⁰

Sexting is a practice closely associated with cyber-harassment, although its definition is a bit of a moving target. Researchers have questioned whether the practice includes images alone or text as well, and whether it is limited to phone transmissions or encompasses social media. The most common conception of the term centres on user-created content; that is, sexy selfies sent to peers. While the sending of an image is not necessarily a sign of harassment, the coercion that may precede the transmission and the sharing that may follow it definitely constitute harassment. In most cases, it is girls who suffer.

Research shows that sexting is a very gendered activity and is often done under duress. A group of UK teens talked in a 2012 report about how it works. Young men pester young women to send naked or sexual pictures. Girls who do not comply run the risk of being ostracized and ignored by groups of popular boys. Once a boy is in possession of a girl’s nude or nearly-nude photo, he may share it without her knowledge or consent to enhance his status among his peers. In the end, he looks cool, but any girl who complains will be blamed for being “stupid enough” to send the photo in the first place.⁶¹ As sociologist Jessica Ringrose and colleagues wrote in 2012, sexting may be a “new” problem but it reflects age-old stereotypes and double standards about male and female sexual roles: boys who collect naked pictures of girls are studs but the girls who send these images are dumb sluts.⁶²

⁶⁰Hill Catherine and Holly Kearl. *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School* Washington: American Association of University Women, 2011, p. 6-25.

⁶¹ Coy, Maddy et al. “*Sex without consent. I suppose that is rape.*” *How young people in England understand sexual consent.* London: Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2013, p. 47.

⁶² Ringrose, Jessica et al. *A qualitative study of children, young people and ‘sexting’: a report prepared for the NSPCC* London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2012, p. 7.

As technology evolves, sexting does too. When sexting first emerged it was typically done by phone. It has now moved onto social media with sites like Snapchat which is designed to make “snaps” disappear within ten seconds. Some girls in British Columbia found out the hard way that those pictures can be saved (a fact also acknowledged in Snapchat’s support pages). As reported in October, 2014, three teenage boys in Kamloops, BC were charged with criminal harassment after they saved and shared sexual Snapchat images they had coerced from a number of girls aged 13 to 15.⁶³

This unauthorized sharing of a peer’s sexual images—or exposure, as some teens call it⁶⁴—is yet another example of how objectification and the heterosexual script influence teens’ sexual behaviours. In such cases, girls are hassled to put themselves on display in a sexual manner for boys who then share these images, much like boys of an earlier generation would have done with a *Playboy* centrefold. (The key difference being that the *Playboy* model would have consented, an option today’s teen girls are not given.) This willingness to exploit girls and leer at them with friends proves the health of a boy’s sex drive, an all-important image for teen boys to project to their male peers.

Sexting has garnered many headlines but the jury is out as to its prevalence. Part of the problem is the definition, as I mentioned earlier. With no consistency in the concept of the term, researchers have come up with wildly divergent estimates of the number of teens affected by sexting, with incidence rates ranging from 15% to 40% depending on the study.⁶⁵ Even if we accept the lowest estimate, 15% is a significant number of kids. And, as we learned from the tragic story of Amanda Todd, the impact of the harassment that can emerge from a “sext” cannot be underestimated. The British Columbia teenager took her own life after the relentless bullying and sexual extortion she suffered when a single topless photo of her was widely shared.⁶⁶

Of course, male harassment of females is only part of the story. Boys can also be victims of harassment. In the AAUW study, 72% of male harassers said they had harassed a boy, while 50% of female harassers had targeted a male victim. Stereotypes may tell us otherwise, but boys do suffer from the sexual aggression of others. What’s worse, they have fewer outlets for sharing their experiences of aggression and the emotional fallout that often follows.

⁶³ Canadian Press. “Kamloops Sexting Case: Teens Plead Guilty to Criminal Harassment” *Huffington Post* October 28, 2014.

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/10/28/kamloops-sexting-case-criminal-harassment_n_6064916.html
Accessed October 29, 2014.

⁶⁴ Ringrose et al, p. 41.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

⁶⁶ CBC News. “Amanda Todd suicide: RCMP repeatedly told of blackmailer’s attempts” *CBC News* November 15, 2013

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/amanda-todd-suicide-rcmp-repeatedly-told-of-blackmailer-s-attempts-1.2427097> Accessed December 4, 2014.

When Boys are Victims

A year after the Steubenville case, another rape story involving football players made headlines. This time the victims were male. In Sayreville, NJ, senior football players subjected first-year players to a hazing ritual that involved, in the carefully chosen words of the media, “improperly touching the boys in a sexual manner.” At least one case involved anal penetration with a finger that was later forced into the victim’s mouth. Once the story was made public, seven players were charged with sexual assault,⁶⁷ undoubtedly because of the outrage expressed in the media.

In our culture, discussions of adolescent sexual aggression typically centre on the familiar notion that boys are the aggressors and girls are the victims. While it is true that girls experience more sexual harassment and assault, the number of male adolescent victims is significant, as is the impact on them.

The fact that few people recognize that males can be victims of assault and harassment shows the degree to which stereotypes and sexual scripts affect people’s perceptions of adolescent sexual aggression. Consider the stereotypes of teenage boys: they are emotionally and physically strong, assertive or even aggressive, and perpetually aroused. How could they ever be victims of sexual aggression? If, by chance, they are, wouldn’t they just roll with it and laugh it off? How badly could they really be affected?

Quite badly, as it turns out.

The AAUW report cited earlier includes some illuminating statistics about the experiences of middle- and high-school-aged boys:

- 40% of boys in grades 7-12 report being sexually harassed, compared to 56% of girls;
- 22% of boys had experienced unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures directed at them, compared to 46% of girls;
- 19% of boys had been called “gay” in a negative way, compared to 18% of girls who had had that experience;
- 24% of boys had experienced online sexual harassment, compared to 36% of girls;
- 10% of boys reported being shown sexy or sexual pictures that they did not want to see, compared to 13% of girls.

Even more enlightening is the impact of these behaviours. After being harassed:

- 25% of boys felt bothered to the extent that they did not want to go to school, compared to 37% of girls;
- 21% of boys felt sick to their stomach, compared to 37% of girls;

⁶⁷ Brumfield, Ben. “7 high school players face sexual assault charges over alleged locker room hazing” CNN <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/11/us/new-jersey-football-abuse-scandal/index.html> Accessed October 13, 2014.

- 24% of boys found it hard to study, compared to 34% of girls;
- 14% of boys had trouble sleeping, compared to 22% of girls.⁶⁸

Cultural stereotypes would have us believe that boys are largely unaffected by sexual harassment, but these numbers show that is not the case. Boys and girls are both victims and while the numbers are not equal, they are closer than most people probably realize.

For boys, a good amount of the harassment they suffer arises because they do not conform to the traditional male gender role. It is not only boys who are perceived as gay who are affected but also those who are “different,” that is, studious or slower to mature physically.⁶⁹

Both the AAUW report and another done in 2008 by sociologist James Gruber showed that being called “gay” is a particularly damaging form of sexual harassment for boys.⁷⁰ As psychologist Leah C. Funk wrote in a 2011 article, “failing to live up to the masculine gender ideal is no laughing matter.”⁷¹ It can lead to anxiety and depression, personal distress, lowered sense of school belonging, and lower life satisfaction among boys.⁷² This trend is seen also in the research into sexting, which talks about the pressure boys feel to engage in the practice in order to confirm their masculinity or, in another example of the bro code, ignore sexting and harassment by their male peers to avoid being labelled “gay.”⁷³

Among the findings in the AAUW report, perhaps most surprising is the revelation, cited earlier, that half of the girls who sexually harass their peers choose boys as their targets. The idea of girls harassing boys flies in the face of gender stereotypes and the heterosexual script, which dictates that males are aggressors who act on passive females.

The same kind of misunderstanding exists in cases of sexual assault, which, in the US, are more prevalent among adolescents than any other age group, with one-third of victims falling between the ages of 13 and 17. While the overall numbers of female victims is generally reported as being significantly higher than the number of males, a 2009 study of one group of middle- and high-school-aged teens had some surprising results:

- 28% of middle school boys and 26% of high school boys reported being kissed, hugged, or touched against their will;
- 4.1% of high school boys and 5.5% of girls reported being forced into oral sex, a measure not tracked for middle school students in this study;
- 3.1% of high school boys reported being raped, compared to 11.8% of girls.

⁶⁸ Hill and Kearn. p. 6-25.

⁶⁹ Collier, Katie et al. “Homophobic Name-Calling Among Secondary School Students and Its Implications for Mental Health” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 42, no. 3 (2013), p. 363.

⁷⁰ Gruber, James E. and Susan Fineran. “Comparing the Impact of Bullying and Sexual Harassment Victimization on the Mental and Physical Health of Adolescents” *Sex Roles* 59, no 1-2. (2008), p. 9.

⁷¹ Funk, Leah C. and Cherie D. Werhun. “‘You’re Such a Girl!’ The Psychological Drain of the Gender-Role Harassment of Men” *Sex Roles* 65, no. 1-2 (2011), p. 14.

⁷² Collier et al, p. 365.

⁷³ Ringrose et al, p. 41-43.

In reality, the numbers for sexual assault vary widely between studies, with girls often having much higher incidences of the crime than reported here. One such study pegged the numbers at 15% of boys and 50% of girls.⁷⁴ We hear plenty about the female victims of these crimes, and rightly so, but precious little is said about the 15 out of every 100 boys who are also victimized.

Research on adults has shown that the impact of sexual assault on males is no less severe than it is on females. Male victims tend to blame themselves, feel depressed or anxious, and question their masculinity either because of their inability to fight back or the fact that they said “no” to a willing female.⁷⁵

If boys do report a sexual assault, which is unlikely, they will run into a brick wall of indifference known as the male rape myth. Psychologists Nicola Fisher and Afroditi Pina described this myth in the context of an article about adult male victims. According to the myth, males: cannot be overpowered or forced to have sex by a woman because they are bigger and stronger; are to blame for not fighting harder; can cope well after an assault;⁷⁶ and enjoy sex regardless of whether it is forced. Psychologist Michelle Davies describes how the heterosexual script contributes to this myth of male enjoyment:

As socialization encourages men to seek and respond to any opportunity to engage in sexual activity with women, sexual coercion may be conceptualized as sexual experience...rather than a violation of will.⁷⁷

As with sexual harassment, the number of girls reporting rape was much higher than the number of boys, but boys may tend to under-report. Their reluctance to talk about it is, again based in gender stereotypes and rape myths, namely that boys or men will appear weak and unmanly if they admit to being raped or sexually assaulted in any way.

Nicola Fisher believes part of the problem facing male victims, in addition to cultural forces and stereotypes, is the conceptualization of rape itself. There is a tendency to believe that if injuries were not sustained rape could not have occurred. This myth affects victims of both sexes, but males more because cases involving male victims and female perpetrators tend to leave fewer physical scars. Rather than using physical assault, female perpetrators are more likely to use verbal intimidation or exploit a man who is intoxicated. As Fisher and others have said, the tendency to look at physical harm more than lack of consent can obscure real crimes of rape and sexual assault.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Young, Amy et al. “Adolescents’ Experience of Sexual Assault by Peers: Prevalence and Nature of Victimization Occurring Within and Outside School” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38, no. 8 (2009), p. 1072-1076.

⁷⁵ Davies, Michelle. “Male sexual assault victims: a selective review of the literature and implications for support services” *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 7, no. 3 (2002), p. 206-211.

⁷⁶ Fisher, Nicola L. and Afroditi Pina. “An overview of the literature on female-perpetrated adult male sexual victimization” *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 18, no. 1 (2013), p. 57.

⁷⁷ Davies, Michelle, p. 206.

⁷⁸ Fisher and Pina, p. 56-58.

The fundamental cultural conception, then, is that men and boys do not suffer assault or harassment. This notion is reinforced by the fact that the topic of male sexual assault and harassment rarely makes headlines. When sexual assault and rape statistics are reported in the news, the focus is most often on the number of female victims. There is generally little acknowledgement that men and boys are assaulted and harassed too, and sometimes by females.

On the rare occasions that pop culture broaches the topic of males as victims, the harassment or assault is not presented as problematic. In fact, in the few instances I have seen recently, it has been brushed off as no big deal.

The television program *Supernatural* has included multiple scenes of men kissed and groped against their will or manipulated into sex. As with its female victims, this series ignores the larger issue of consent but when men are involved, it sometimes goes further, showing characters laughing about the incidents, as Dean does in the season one episode “Shadow.” He and his brother are tied to a chair by a woman who proceeds to writhe against Sam while kissing him against his will, yet brother Dean simply jokes that the next time Sam wants to “get laid” he should find a woman who is not so crazy.⁷⁹

And then there is the Castiel incident outlined in chapter 4. In the climactic scene, the reaper—occupying the body of April to whom Castiel lost his virginity the night before—ties Castiel to a chair with his arms behind his back. Castiel is clearly angry that he was used in the manner he was, but the reaper taunts him by straddling him and saying she found him attractive. She then cuts open his shirt with a knife and later uses the same knife to slash him multiple times before delivering a final, fatal blow. Not exactly a happy story, but in the end, after Castiel is brought back from the dead, lead character Dean laughs that the one-time angel “gave it [his virginity] up to a reaper.”⁸⁰ And the body that reaper occupied? Dead as a doornail, not that anyone gave her a second thought until a few episodes later when, yet again, the whole situation was given the “bro code” treatment. Dean and Sam Winchester were having a beer with Castiel who mentioned something April had told him. The dialogue proceeded as follows:

Castiel: Well, Bartholomew wants to reverse Metatron’s spell, presumably retake Heaven once his following is large enough. That’s according to April.

Dean: The reaper you banged.

Castiel: Yeah, and you stabbed.

Dean: Yeah. She was hot.

Castiel: So hot. And very nice. Up to the point she started torturing me.

Dean: Yeah. Well, not every hookup’s perfect. (Dean then pats Castiel on the arm and grins.)⁸¹

⁷⁹ Warner Bros. Television. “Shadow” *Supernatural* February 28, 2006.

⁸⁰ Warner Bros. Television. “I’m No Angel” *Supernatural* October 22, 2013.

⁸¹ Warner Bros. Television. “Holy Terror” *Supernatural* December 3, 2013.

No regret. No remorse. Clearly Castiel is over whatever bothered him about his encounter with April, as he revels in the fact that he “banged” a hot woman.

For its part, *Family Guy* is an equal opportunity offender, depicting male sexual violation as just as funny as female violation. Lead male character Peter has been raped by a “breeding bull”⁸² and was shown being assaulted by the steam from a pie—ridiculous, yes, but the scene made light of him being thrown to the ground and having his pants ripped off before making a further joke about his male neighbour being forced to watch.⁸³

Scenes like these are symptomatic of the way male sexuality is treated in our media and wider culture. Self-sufficient, sexually precocious, and physically tough, boys are thought to be immune to any kind of sexual violation. This toughness is also thought to be a bulwark against worries over body image, another misconception about boys born of male stereotypes.

⁸² 20th Century Fox Television. “Dial Meg for Murder” *Family Guy* January 31, 2010.

⁸³ 20th Century Fox Television. “Amish Guy” *Family Guy* November 27, 2011.