



Gender And Trauma: A Textual Analysis of Barry Lyga's Boy Toy

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ABSTRACT

Trauma is an experience that is fundamentally beyond comprehension. It disrupts the victim's ability to process and understand the event fully, leading to a fragmented and delayed response whereas gender influences the experience and representation of trauma. This research papers examines psychological and emotional ramifications of trauma in general and gendered trauma in particular to highlight sexual abuse and its repercussions in Lyga's *Boy Toy*. Grounding the arguments on theoretical underpinnings of Trauma as contented by Cathy Caruth, the selected novel has been textually analyzed to explore and identify how trauma narratives are shaped by gender norms and expectations. This paper further walk around gender stereotypes an individual encounters at the hands of trauma and highlights that the prejudiced response towards them, is direct result of gender norms. The study maintains that gender performativity of the protagonist Josh, portrays how he manifests and deals with the trauma of sexual abuse. The paper concludes that gender inequality and bias of the society plays a role in strengthening the discrimination of trauma based on the gender of the victim as faced by Josh who is the victim of abuse, the narrative is sexualized, all while robbing the situation of the gravity that truly encompasses a victim experiencing trauma.

Introduction

Trauma concerning gender is widespread in contemporary society, and literature serves as a potent instrument for delving into its complex nuances. Lyga (2007) narrates the experiences of Josh Mendel, a student in high school who underwent sexual abuse at the hands of his female teacher at the tender age of twelve. Barry Lyga's *Boy Toy* delves into the consequences of the maltreatment, as Josh endeavors to reconcile with the events and cope with the psychological distress that he has gone through. Lyga presents a potent and obscure representation of Josh's trauma, skillfully illustrating the enduring effects that sexual abuse can inflict on an individual's existence and glamorized pornography in adolescents.

Trauma experienced by one gender is said to be "gendered." This expression recognizes the gendered and socialized nature of trauma survivors. Salih, (2007) explicates Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity and believes that gender is a socially constructed identity that is enacted via acts and behaviors (Butler, 1999). She says in *Gender Trouble* (1999) that gender is the repeated performance of bodily behaviors, following a set of rules, which over time create the impression of a stable and natural identity. A political analysis of gender concepts, if effective, will pull apart this illusion of constituent by examining the repetitive actions that establish gender and will place these actions within the frameworks imposed by societal forces that regulate and shape gender's social presentation. She does not suggest that the individual is free to choose which gender they are going to be a part of. "The script," is always already, determined within this "regulatory frame", this external understanding or rather universal understanding of gender (Salih, 2007). He furthermore suggests,

one's gender is "performatively constituted" is fixed, by the society, context, economy, within which one is situated, like how pink is a color fixed for women to the point of a color symbolizing the feminine entity. Gender identity may be affected by and change after traumatic experiences. Anxiety, depression, dissociation, and acts of self-harm are all possible outcomes rearranging the preconceived notion of identity in both men and women (Janson & Hazler, 2004). Whereas, in order to protect him, a man who has suffered sexual violence may need to adopt a more hyper masculine persona (Alaggia, 2005)

Public behavior between sexes and sexual abuse differs from each other. Sexual Trauma may result in Persistent pain or sexual dysfunction. Trauma's emotional and psychological impacts can be exacerbated by these physical manifestations, making it more difficult to express one's gender identity. Balaev (2018) believes that traumatic experiences and their associated dissociation make it difficult to assign clear meaning to them, as the penetrating fear disrupts the mind's ability to understand and articulate them. Even if the trauma can't be fully described or identified, it remains a persistent wound in the consciousness, deeply affecting an individual's sense of self. This trauma often negatively impacts the awareness and memory, making it challenging to integrate past events into an individual's personal life story.

Josh in the novel also lacks the linguistic capability to understand his trauma based on the external reactions he received on his abuse. The abuser may also place reliance on the victim's sexual curiosity or indulge into a victim's feeling of being unloved or unappreciated (Knoll, 2010). For Josh, pornography created a fantasy with Mrs. Sherman (Eve) in the form of "love" while for Vanessa, an idealized literary figure who made her feel seen became her undoing for the "love" she thought existed. The inquiry will be directed by the subsequent research questions:

1. What are the factors that contribute to gendered trauma in the novel *Boy Toy* (2007)?
2. What are the possible consequences of the depiction of trauma based on gender in the Barry Lyga's *Boy Toy*?

The principal aim of this study is to examine the depiction of gender-specific trauma in the novel *Boy Toy* (2007) and to highlight the representations of trauma. The research objectives are specified as follows:

1. To examine the psychological and emotional ramifications of trauma that is gender-specific, as experienced by the characters in the selected Novel.
2. To examine the potential implications of the representation of gendered trauma in contemporary literature in Lyga's *Boy Toy*.

Research Methodology

The present research paper employed Caruth's (1996) *Trauma Theory* as the theoretical framework and utilized qualitative research approach as the methodological framework to analyze trauma, gendered trauma and its possible consequences in Barry Lyga's *Boy Toy*. The conventional trauma paradigm was observed to generally underestimate the significance of seeking meaning in the face of adversity. Caruth (1996) illuminates the diverse manifestations and encounters of trauma. The comprehension of the psychological and affective consequences of traumatic experiences is facilitated by the conceptual framework afforded by the field of trauma theory (Balaev, 2018). The hypothesis posits that traumatic experiences can have enduring and extensive effects on an individual's psychological and emotional welfare. The research employed a qualitative approach utilizing thorough textual analysis to explore the existence of gender-specific trauma.

The objective of this analysis is to examine and contrast the gender-specific trauma depicted in the two literary pieces. *Boy Toy* depicts instances where educators inflict severe emotional and psychological damage upon their pupils by engaging in sexual relationships with them during their underage years. The objective of this study is to examine the representation of trauma, coping mechanisms of victims, and the enduring effects of trauma based on the gender of the victims in the selected literary works.

Literature Review

Gender plays a vital role in interactions, and how the public and institutions react to their disclosure, is also crucial. Josh Mendel's twisted viewpoint on his sexual connection with Evelyn Sherman, the seventh-grade teacher who exploited him, is at the heart Lyga's work. In *Boy Toy* (2007) Josh is called to testify in trial for Eve's alleged sexual abuse and must testify against her. Given Josh's young age and the lack of emotional support he receives from his parents and lawyer, the story successfully portrays how confusing and difficult

such a trial was for all concerned. The cultural assumption that law is the instrument we should use when harm happens to us is undermined by statutes of limitation that disadvantage the survivor of child sexual abuse, prosecutorial discretion that mitigates in favor of 'winnable' cases, and legal emphasis on individual culpability over cultural or institutional accountability (Wechsler, 2022).

Since the abuse was halted so quickly in *Boy Toy* (2007), there are less muddy regions between love and grooming. No one can pretend that Eve and Josh's relationship wasn't one of grooming and sexual assault now that she is behind bars for having sex with a juvenile and giving him alcohol. Josh's misdirected culpability for their relationship and Eve's detention is made clear throughout her trial, yet his love for Eve remains undimmed. Therefore, the ambiguity surrounding their sexual connection centers on Josh's sense of guilt and blame; he sees himself as the abuser, not the victim. Josh, now 18, shows clear signs of confusion for Eve upon confronting her after she is released from prison. He blames himself for having started their connection and hence for Eve's incarceration. Josh's guilt illustrates the significance of transparency and openness toward victims of abuse and their perspective on the event, as Knoll (2010) believes that the implications of concealing essential components of abuse can lead to an internalization of blame and self-loathing.

In this study, textual analysis has been carried out to conduct a comprehensive examination of the chosen literary work. Textual analysis involves understanding language and symbols present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of the text. It is done in order to interpret the text to get the sense or meaning out of it. Allows researchers to encapsulate information about how human beings perceive the world. It is a data gathering methodology that helps to evaluate cultures and how they resonate with humans (Arya, 2020). When a textual analysis is used on a text, we make an educated hypothesis as to what the most relevant and most likely the interpretation of the text might be (McKee, 2001). The current inquiry has evolved to rely on collecting and analyzing qualitative data from an assortment of sources. As a form of qualitative research, the aforementioned strategy is concerned with delving into and making sense of the complexities of human behavior and belief. The process of carefully examining the fabric is vital for perceiving hidden problems, hidden messages, and other aspects that would otherwise go unnoticed. The textual analysis in this study is informed by Belsey's (2013) theoretical framework. The idea, emphasized by Belsey (2013) that meaning is picked up from one's immediate surroundings is central to our inquiry. By doing a textual analysis of literary works, the researcher goes beyond the author's original goal by exploring the text's connotations and meanings. Because a word or phrase's meaning can change based on its context, this technique highlights the importance of context. The present study extends Belsey's (2013) theoretical framework to demonstrate the significance of language in our understanding of the surrounding world.

Trauma Theory

Trauma studies in literary criticism gained popularity with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996). At its core, trauma refers to the exposure from an abrupt or a tragic event through which the response often displays itself in a delayed, out of order mental disharmony. Caruth suggests that trauma is an "unsolvable problem" of the unconscious that highlights the contradictions of experience and language (Azmi, 2018). According to Caruth (1996), the rising frequency of complex war experiences and other severe crises over the past two decades has pushed doctors and mental health professionals to reconsider their approach to both physical and mental health. They now apply this revised perspective to a range of traumatic events, including rape, child abuse, car and industrial accidents, and more often interpreting these experiences through the lens of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The concept of trauma is a troublesome experience that impacts the self's emotional responses and perception of the external stimuli. Trauma studies highlight the impact of trauma in literature and society by investigating its psychological and cultural significance (Balaev, 2018). Though trauma theory mainly focuses comprehensively on the psychoanalytical perspectives, it often overlooks the growing influence of literature which fundamentally introduces a moral aspect into the frame of literary theory, consequently presenting the puzzling yet crucial aspect of proposing literary theory (Toremans, 2003).

Child Sexual Abuse

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "abuse is to use something for the wrong purpose in a way that is harmful or morally wrong". When two entities interact negatively with one another, we say that they are "abusing" one another. Abuse occurs when one person takes action with the intention of controlling another, and

it extends far beyond physical damage. Abuse comes in many forms, some of which are described here verbal abuse, physical abuse, mental/emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and hate crimes. In 2011, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expanded on the meaning of “sexual abuse” for the purpose of interpreting and applying article 19 (the right to freedom from violence), stating (p. 10): “Sexual abuse and exploitation includes: (Alaggia, 2005)The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful or psychologically harmful sexual activity; The use of children in commercial sexual exploitation; (Jaffe, Cero, & DiLillo, 2021)The use of children in audio or visual images of child sexual abuse; (Brokke, Bertelsen, Landrø, & Haaland, 2022)Child prostitution, sexual slavery, sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, trafficking (within and between countries) and sale of children for sexual purposes and forced marriage(Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2019). Sexual abuse comprises any sexual activities imposed by an adult on a child, against which the child is entitled to protection by criminal law. Sexual activities are also considered as abuse when committed against a child by another child, if the child offender is significantly older than the child victim or uses power, threat or other means of pressure(Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2019).One of the factors that is shown to influence the symptoms of trauma is the repetitive exposure to abuse that hinders the victims understanding and concept of trust, identity and belief in the world (Janson & Hazler, 2004). Findings have suggested that it is worse to be abused than to watch others in the same situation. It makes sense that there is a connection by being the main target of a threat and the increased emotional disturbances. As events progress, the victim may experience a greater degree of suffering than the eye witness (Janson & Hazler, 2004).

Victims of abuse often miss out on life-changing experiences because they believe they do not deserve them. The use of physical pain or threats of physical abuse with the intent to intimidate the victim is physical abuse. Slaps, shoves, punches, kicks, pulled hair, scratches, and even hospitalization-required injuries all qualify as forms of actual physical abuse (Christensen & Darling, 2019). A victim's injuries sustained during an episode of physical abuse can be fatal. Intense emotional manipulation with the goal of coercing the victim into complying with the abuser's objectives characterizes mental/emotional abuse, also known as physiological abuse. The goal of emotional abuse is to gain the victim's obedience and prevent the victim from rejecting the abuser. However, seeing the verbal, physical, or sexual abuse of another person can have a negative effect on a person's own health. The physiological ramifications of emotional abuse are severe. The process through which sexual offenders deliberately initiate and maintain sexually abusive interactions with youngsters is known as "grooming". In order for the abuse to continue for an extended length of time and to escape persecution, this process involves a number of procedures designed to prepare the child for a sexual connection in which secrecy and discretion are crucial (Hohendorff, Habigzang, & Koller, 2017). Spiegel (2003) describes the process of sexual violence through a sequence of steps, which he refers to as sets: (1) Domination, the process by which the offender approaches the victim; (2) Sexual abuse, or the episode of sexual violence itself; (3) Cover-up and (4) Invalidation, at which point victims keep the abuse a secret and deny its existence; (5) Reconciliation, or the acceptance of the abuse; (6) Reparation, or the exaggerated display of behaviors considered stereotypically masculine, or even asexual, in an attempt to manage the contradiction between the male gender role (e.g. strong, invulnerable) and that of a victim (e.g. fragile); and (7) Continuity, that is, the continuation of the cycle of violence until the victim receives adequate protection or help(Purcell, 2006).

In discussing this model, Spiegel (2003) highlighted the impact of social perception on the dynamics surrounding sexual violence targeting males. Factors such as concealment, invalidation, compensation, and continuity are all subject to the influence of social perceptions. The limited social acknowledgment of male sexual abuse, coupled with traditional masculine gender norms (such as strength and invulnerability), could diminish the probability of victims coming forward and lead to skepticism from external parties. The underrepresentation of male sexual violence is further evident in research, as the majority of studies on sexual abuse concentrate solely on female victims (Hohendorff, Habigzang, & Koller, 2017).

This analysis will delve into the aftermath of the sexual encounters, investigating the consequences experienced by all individuals involved and the long-term repercussions of the abuse. The study will highlight how the male gender in different dynamics faces stereotypes. Structuring the analysis around the research questions; we can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of gender-based trauma in the aforementioned literary work. It will open up discussion towards bias and mistreatments based on gender with direct inter comparison.

Analysis/Discussion

Investigating the emotional and societal repercussions of sexual misbehavior, Lyga's *Boy Toy* (2007) focuses on the psychological and societal effects of sexual abuse by a female teacher on a male student. Josh as compared to Vanessa experienced a gender bias.

Mom and Dad tried a bunch of things. There were the regular sessions with Dr. Kennedy, but also some New Age woman who explained to me that virginity was a state of mind and that if I didn't think of myself as "violated," then I wouldn't be. Um, OK. In the end, it was Dr. Kennedy who helped. And even then, I couldn't tell him everything. I couldn't get him to understand all of it. (Lyga, 2007, p. 60)

For a male victim, sexual abuse or feeling such was a state of mind but for Vanessa, she was forced to hold the responsibility of speaking out against her abuser or else she was "enabling rapists" (Russell, 2020, p. 225).

Victim blaming and attributes it to the "just world hypothesis," which states that an individual's moral action dictates the consequences that person must endure. The myths surrounding rape are examined along with how they are used to justify the abuser's conduct while shifting blame for the assault onto the victim.

Prejudice towards sexual assault survivors is rooted in rape culture, which includes just world views and rape myths. To those who don't fit the societal standard of "suitable sufferers," the supremacy of rape culture makes it more difficult to come out about experiences of sexual assault. Cultural norms and gender roles may influence how people react to one another, and the study addresses how gendered trauma affects gender identity and expression (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Furthermore, the thesis examines the role that cultural norms and gender stereotypes may play vital role in shaping individuals' perspectives on romantic relationships through an analysis of Josh and his relationships later on in his adulthood post abuse.

Identity and the Effects of Sexual Abuse

Lyga's (2007) novel is complex and introspective because a victim of sexual abuse might develop a distorted sense of self. The protagonist, Josh Mendel, survives a sexual assault at the hands of his middle school instructor Evelyn Sherman. This ordeal leaves Josh's sense of self is profoundly altered. This claim is supported by the following lines from the book:

I would have run like hell from this town when I was thirteen if I could have. I begged my parents to move us away. I couldn't stand walking down the street or the bus aisle or the school hallways, feeling people's eyes on me, knowing what they were thinking, knowing that they knew everything. I wanted to yell at them, to hit them, to beat them, to run away screaming... (Lyga, 2007, p. 60)

It becomes more obvious throughout the novel that Josh is struggling to make sense of his experiences. He feels like a failure and a lesser man not because of what has happened to him but rather what he indulged in without not really knowing much of what was happening; he blames himself. He feels he was the perpetrator. In "Session Transcript #214" (Lyga, 2007, p. 25) here we see Josh Mendel conflicted because of the way he is treated by female teachers:

Mendel: I don't know. I see the looks I get sometimes. Especially from the female teachers. It's like they're afraid of me. Like they have to avoid touching me or they'll catch the molester virus. Kennedy: You haven't molested anyone. You are the victim... the target of molestation. (Lyga, 2007, p. 26)

He feels powerless and confused because he can't escape the feeling of guilt when he says, "How can I describe it? I'm a completely different person now. It's a different world. Eve's thirty and free and a registered sex offender, and me? I'm just muddling through, hitting the ball, slamming straight A's, doing all the easy things in life." (Lyga, 2007, p. 81) The characters experience various manifestations of remorse and feelings of inadequacy throughout the narrative. This guilt and confusion is led by how Josh felt when he saw Eve sleeping in her bed and we see his internal dialogue "My hand, running up her leg, up under the skirt ... fingertips brushing against ... against ... shiny black— I stopped before I could take another step. What the hell was I thinking?" These lines indicate that Josh feels guilty for his attraction towards Eve hence why he blames himself for what Eve did. The most common myths suggest that men cannot be raped or sexually assaulted and that, if men are sexually abused, they are expected to be unaffected by the experience and should even find it pleasurable (Peterson, Voller, Polusny, & Murdoch, 2011). It becomes contradictory, the idea of male sexuality when boys who are exposed to porn find themselves in a position where fantasies can or may become a reality without understanding the consequences. When Josh tells Zik, his best friend that Mrs. Sherman (Eve) took him

to her apartment his response was that if he was in Josh's place, "I woulda seen the bedroom. I woulda gone there and snooped around, you know? See if she has any porn or lingerie." (Lyga, 2007, p. 110).

Josh is afraid of the trauma, the "flickers" he gets throughout the day which indicate PTSD behavior has disturbed his ability to feel attraction to women similarly when he is in that position as he was with Rachel, his behavior tends to be violent because he "ripped her underwear off" (Lyga, 2007, p. 244). He has a lot of self-doubt and anxiety about his sexuality, and he doesn't feel like he can talk to anyone about it. Josh believes that although his therapist Kennedy helped him but he still didn't understand him fully. His sentiments of humiliation and inadequacy are only exacerbated by his current situation of alienation and bewilderment. The effects of sexual abuse become obvious when the intimacy between Josh and Rachel unearths Josh's conflicted mind when it comes to his sexual relationship. He feels like a "damaged, broken, a bizarre temporal conjoined twin" (Lyga, 2007, p. 238). His self is divided between the present and what happened with Eve five years ago. What makes Lyga's depiction of the effects of sexual assault on men's sense of self in *Boy Toy* (2007) so ineffective is due to the stereotypical misandrist language in regards to Josh's interaction with Eve and the way his feelings are so pornographically portrayed. Obstacles to the admission of male sexual assault can be divided into three categories; Personal barriers i.e., lack of emotional awareness and the naming of the incident as sexual abuse; Interpersonal i.e., fear of not being believed by people around the victim or threats from the perpetrator; Sociocultural i.e., stereotypical masculine image which disallows victimhood in any sexual abuse. Admission of sexual abuse in position of the victim is deemed emasculating (Hohendorff, Habigzang, & Koller, 2017). Josh's struggle is allowed to unfold in all its tangled complexity instead. He demonstrates how experiencing a traumatic event may leave one questioning one's identity and values because no one ever told him the truth when he states, "No one ever said, He was wrong, Josh. You're not a little fucking perv." (Lyga, 2007, p. 277)

Masculinity and Sexualization

Josh, the main character, was molested by his elementary school teacher, Eve. She utilized her authority to influence Josh, convincing him that their relationship was mutually agreeable when in fact it was not. Josh, however, being a minor whereas Eve being an adult, he was unable to provide informed consent.

Josh's distorted views on masculinity and sexuality are the outcome of his exposure to pornography through Zik who himself was exposed to pornography. Teenagers are particularly vulnerable when trying to make an effort to control their urges because they are naturally more sensitive to stimuli that produce pleasure which is why they have more difficulty self-regulating their sexual responses (Sangeado, 2016). When Eve tries to manipulate Josh by taking advantage of the situation, he found and played porn on her husband's Xbox in her apartment. She managed the situation as an accident and gave time in between their interaction so he might think about what had happened and reach out to her as she tried to seemly push him away when she says Josh; I think it's probably for the best if you don't come over to my apartment anymore (Lyga, 2007, p. 134).

She takes advantage of Josh's shallowness to his desires and hiding his sexual fantasies. Eve coerces him into admitting his sexual fantasies around her. "Do you want to kiss me, Josh? Is that it?" (Lyga, 2007, p. 141), This insinuation is led by further manipulation when she says, "I'm your friend, too. And friends tell each other things." (Lyga, 2007, p. 141). In response to Josh making their position of student and teacher as impossible prospect Eve dissuades Josh in his rebuttal by asserting the claim that they are on equal grounds. She gains confirmation of Josh's desires and forces herself onto him as she admittingly excuses herself for by say "Josh, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry..." Josh did not expect this turn of events and was taken aback by surprise and froze up as can be seen from his account to her actions.

I was trying to figure out what she was sorry about when she kissed me. Not on the cheek this time. Not for just a second. Her lips against my lips. My head exploded. My heart stopped and started again in triple time. I flickered.

Such fantasy infused with reality made the victim, Josh feel like the abuser. When being confronted by his father about what happened between him and Eve his response was, "I don't remember" (Lyga, 2007, p. 246) followed by how his mind jumped to the memory of Eve telling him how much trouble it would be if people found. The idea of love and lust have been confused and sexualized through the intervention of pornography. The portrayal of sexual abuse on Josh's account is hyper sexualized in the same way adolescents view pornography all while being a young adult novel. The story exemplifies how sexual assault may affect a person's sense of self and their understanding of gender roles in long-lasting ways. He even blames himself during his and Eve's physical discourse, he felt "guilty for making a mess" (Lyga, 2007, p. 149). Josh's experiences have

impacted his difficulty in expressing sexual desire to women e.g., when he rips Rachel's underwear which resulted in the exposure of the abuse Josh had faced. He feels like he's betraying his abuser by having sexual feelings, and he feels bad about it. When it comes to sexuality and relationships; he also has trouble following his gut. Josh's story exemplifies how difficult it may be for survivors of sexual assault to have satisfying sexual partnerships.

The misunderstanding about gender roles that Josh experienced is another example of how sexual assault may affect a person. Sexual assault, as Josh experienced it, can cause a person to reevaluate their understanding of gender norms and duties. The enduring effects of sexual assault on a person's sexual development are made clear by Josh's story. A study established that 70% of sexual assault victims reported troubled in identifying with their sexual orientation while 68% were troubled and concerned about their masculinity. Researchers reported that male victims reported confusion in regards to their sexual identity irrespective of the sex of the abuser (Peterson, Voller, Polusny, & Murdoch, 2011). Josh has trouble accepting the reality of his abuse and following his inclinations. We can see this conundrum when he explains:

Lying here, I've figured out what the flickers are. They're my punishment. It's no coincidence that they started that day that I stood in Eve's bedroom, taking my first steps toward her, toward my sin, my downfall. The flickers are my past, constantly reignited, hammering at me from below and beneath and behind. I went to Eve. After the Happy Trio incident, she wanted to end it, but I begged her to take me back; I allowed it all to happen. I encouraged it all to happen. And I am damned for that. Eternally shattered, trapped in a world that is neither earth nor afterlife. I'm surrounded and penetrated by the ghosts of my own culpability. (Lyga, 2007, p. 309)

The effects of sexual abuse on a person's sexual development are demonstrated through Josh's story.

Stigma associated with male sexual abuse

Lyga (2007) ends up addressing the taboo of male sexual assault. People, including Josh's parents and the legal system, tend to disregard Josh's account of events. Josh's trauma doesn't stem entirely from what happened between him and Eve because he admits that he went back to Eve after the kissing incident and 'begged' (Lyga, 2007, p. 309) her to take him back. His trauma stems from the way the whole situation was treated by the detectives and by the people around him when the truth unfolded:

I was going to be watched, that I wasn't even to think about slipping away for even a single second. I was to tell my coach if I had to use the bathroom, and Coach would send someone to go with me, as mortifying as that was. I was under surveillance constantly. But at least I got to play baseball. When I returned to school, I was still the Ignored Kid. Everyone walked around me, looked through me, pretended I wasn't there. Which was fine—I didn't want to talk to anyone anyway. (Lyga, 2007, p. 272)

Josh's trauma is made worse by the way he was pushed into therapy by his parents without him or them really understanding what the child had really gone through apart from the conversation that happened in court. This is understood when Josh says:

My parents didn't know how to deal with me in the first few months after the trial ended so suddenly. On the one hand, I was the victim. That's what everyone kept saying. They wanted, on some level, to coddle and protect me. But on another level... On another level, it enraged them that all of this had happened, that Eve had collided with our lives and that I hadn't done anything at all to help out with damage control. I wasn't allowed to make or receive phone calls. I wasn't allowed out of the house unless it was with Mom or Dad or to go to school. And I had to come home right away. I couldn't tell if this was for my punishment, my protection, or for both (Lyga, 2007, p. 271)

Lyga's (2007) depiction of the prejudice against male survivors of sexual assault shows how our culture ignores their pain and denies them the help they need to recover. Studies suggest that 85% of the sample reported emotional distancing from family and friends. In the studies of college students, male victims of sexual abuses how decreased interest in social activities and lack of interest in academia (Peterson, Voller, Polusny, & Murdoch, 2011). He further shows the insensitivity towards Josh in the legal setting highlighting the lack of sympathy provided to male victims. The judicial system treats victims as means to an end, considering them as just objects or rather scapegoats for the greater good (Wechsler, 2022). We see a biased way of handling the male victim by a male attorney and almost adding more salt to the wound of trauma when Josh is being interrogated in the following lines, "Purdy kept firing questions at me, looking for details, when suddenly, out of

the blue, he said, "What kind of birth control did you two use, Josh? Was she on the pill? Did she make you wear a condom? Do you know what a condom is?" (Lyga, 2007, p. 261)

Conclusion

Boy Toy (2007) serves as portal for exploring the effects of sexual abuse on the victim's life after the abuse has ended. In conclusion, the result of this investigation highlights the stereotypical portrayal of sexual abuse based on the gender of the victim, significance of the issue of sexual abuse in literature and the necessity of analyzing such works via a feminist perspective. Through the contrasting narratives of Lyga (2007) the research provides identification of prejudice and stereotype on gender-based violence. The novels maintained that Josh's trauma doesn't stem entirely from what happened between him and Eve but from the way the whole situation was treated by the detectives and by the people around him when the truth unfolded. As a result, the study concluded that when a male protagonist is shown as the victim of abuse, the narrative is sexualized, all while robbing the situation of the gravity that truly encompasses the victim's experiences trauma and highlights the need of having resources and assistance to help trauma survivors recover and emphasizes the need for a holistic and compassionate response to sexual abuse by depicting the long-term ramifications of such abuse.

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