"I Knew You Were Trouble": Considering Childism(s), Shame Resilience, and Adult Caretaker Characters Surrounding YA Rape Survivor Protagonists

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ABSTRACT

Adult characters in young adult (YA) literature remain largely unexamined. In this article, *All the Rage* (2015), *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* (2016), *Speak* (1999), and "Wolf" from *The Rose and the Beast* (2000) are closely analyzed to evaluate whether these characters engaged in childism(s). Particularly, YA sexual assault narratives warrant critical consideration, as caretaker characters hold potential to significantly impact assaulted adolescents' abilities to enact shame resilience. The four stories suggest that how parent and school-based professional characters impact survivor protagonists is directly correlated with if, or the degree to which, the grown ups participated in "positive" or "negative" childism.

Introduction

Recently, feminist literary scholar Roxane Gay reveals in *Hunger: A Memoir of (my) Body* (2017) that her parents learned she was gang-raped as a twelve year old after reading *Time* magazine. She reveals: "when [the rape] was all over, I pushed my bike home and pretended to be the daughter my parents knew, the good girl" (44), explaining: "I couldn't let my parents see who or what I had become because they would be disgusted" (47). However, after reading *Time*, Gay's father told her she "deserved justice" and upon hearing this, she admits, "I went inside myself as I so often do… [but now]… My family knows my secret. I am freed" (287). Gay's experience is a recent, poignant reminder of the important role adults play in the lives of children who have experienced sexual violence; as she powerfully explains, the nature of young people's relationships with adults can determine whether they go "inside [themselves]" in the aftermath of violence(s) as she did, or choose to disclose the trauma. Her expressed "free[dom]" achieved in her adulthood with the knowledge that they supported her survivorship also speaks volumes; indeed, caregiver knowledge, acceptance, and support of survivors of sexual violence often means a great deal.

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Gay's experience is helpful to keep in mind in turning attention to the arena of children's and young adult (YA) literature generally because, as Vanessa Joosen argues, the role of adult characters remains largely unexamined. In considering the sub-genre of sexual assault narratives, the caretaker characters – largely the parents and education professionals – often play significant roles for rape survivor protagonists. How grown-ups are characterized in such trauma texts is important for many reasons including how the didactic capacities of such characters might serve to "teach" a reader – whether the reader is a young adult or an adult – how an adult might react to a violated young person. As Eric L. Tribunella argues, "works [with childism or child hate] show adults holding a terroristic purchase over children. For the child reader, the implication is that adults must always be object of suspicion"; such stories "therefore confirm what many children surely intuit: that the world is hostile to them even as it appears to idealize their youth and as it claims to protect them from danger" (146). He goes on to argue that girls are particularly encouraged by literature and culture "to be keenly sensitive to these possibilities" (146). Furthermore, an adult reader of such YA might also be "taught" how an adolescent might perceive adult involvement in (or avoidance of) a situation where a youth has had their sexual integrity compromised. Joosen addresses the gap in literature on this front; there is "a didactic potential that materialises in different adult subject positions in a literary text. This didactic aspect of children's literature, educating not just children but also adult readers, is downplayed in the research" (215). Elizabeth Marshall also touches on this issue, arguing "Adults who read literature geared for children or young adults often expect these texts to offer moral lessons" ("Girlhood" 232). As such, YA sexual often communicate powerful messages about the dynamics between young people and grown-ups, particularly those in caregiver roles.

In this article, I examine two groups of adult characters parents and school professionals in four YA sexual assault narratives; Courtney Summers' *All the Rage*, E.K. Johnston's *Exit, Pursued by a Bear*, Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, and Francesca Lia Block's short story "Wolf" from *The Rose and the Beast* (2000). These texts have been selected for this argumentation because in each story, parents and/or professionals significantly impact the adolescent rape survivors' experiences of coping with the aftermath of sexual violence and subsequent healing. As Sarah Ullman argues, "It is important to understand the effects of positive social support as well as positive and negative social reactions in relation to adjustments to sexual assault" (60), and so, it is my contention that what these suggest is that the impact these adult YA characters have on the sexual assault survivor protagonists is directly correlated with if, or the degree to which, the grown ups participate in a kind of "positive" childism (Wall) or "negative" childism (Young-Bruehl, *Childism- Prejudice*, Young-Bruehl; *Childism*). Furthermore, if they engage a "positive" form of childism (Wall) where they

foster and create space for protagonists' agentic behaviour, those grown ups establish more meaningful relationships, which I argue, encourage shame resilience (Brown). The parents and professionals in YA sexual assault fiction certainly warrant increased scholarly attention, as the adult character subject positions have been lightly and sporadically addressed across the literature.

To engage in this work, I first introduce my theoretical frameworks of childism(s) (Young-Bruehl, *Childism- Prejudice*, Young-Bruehl, *Childism*; Wall), and shame resilience theory (Brown). In discussing childism(s), I briefly touch on its prevalence in children's and YA literature generally, and pick up more specifically on how the grown-ups have been previously analyzed in the texts under discussion here in my overviews of each story. Because *Exit* and *All the Rage* are newer publications, adult characters have not yet been critically examined,[1] however, *Speak* and "Wolf" have both garnered significant scholarly attention and as such, I engage with ideas about the adults in the literature here. After situating my work in the field, I examine the four selected texts by attending to the (1) parents, including grandparents, and surrogate parents, and (2) school-based professional characters including chiefly coaches and teachers.

Theoretical frameworks: childism(s) and shame resilience theory

Childism: opposing conceptions and its place in children's and YA literature

Childism is an important concept because "Childhood is, of course, a part of every human being's existence. No one, then, is unaffected by childism" (Myles 1). Two distinct understandings of childism will be drawn from for the purposes of this article, as the term "childism" has been used to describe opposite notions. First, psychoanalyst Elisabeth Young-Bruehl understands childism as akin to terms such as "racism" or "sexism." She asserts firmly that childism is a kind of unique ("Confronting Prejudice") prejudice against children, expressed across a spectrum of behaviours including abuse and neglect ("Childism-"). She powerfully states that "in its most general meaning, childism is denial of the need to be cherished" (263), asserting: "We expect not just to be cared for, but *lovingly* cared for, in our natal helplessness and, to some degree, always" (263). With regard to identifying and naming childism as Young-Bruehl understands it, Margaret Ruth Kind importantly asks: "when children are treated in… disrespectful, even destructive manners, how can childism be more obvious?" (134). Young-Bruehl's conceptualizing of childism is that it ultimately functions as an inherently negative, oppressive force that must be resisted. For the sake of clarity throughout this article, Young Bruehl's take on childism will be referred to as "negative childism."

Alternatively, the second understanding of childism that will be drawn from for this analysis is a positive one. Unlike Young-Bruehl, John Wall

argues that "childism" is a kind of "radical" "third wave" of childhood studies wherein "childism would seek not only to understand children's agency and to empower children's participation but to also ask how children's different and diverse lived experiences call for structurally transformed scholarly and social norms" (70). He theorizes childism as akin to other positive, progressive schools of thinking including feminist, race and queer theories, defining it as "the effort to not only pay children greater attention but to respond more self-critically to children's particular experiences by transforming fundamental structures of understanding and practice for all" (68). While Wall certainly recognizes Young-Bruehl's ideas as useful, he also emphasizes, "it is important to identify not only what victimizes children but also what empowers them" (71). Wall's ideas about childism are certainly positive, hopeful, and focused on resilience, and as such, again, for the purposes of this article, Wall's understanding of childism will be referred to as "positive childism."

Although childism(s) generally "remain[] unrecognized even though it was first articulated 40 years ago" (Myers 12), as briefly discussed, conceptions Young-Bruehl's "negative" childism has been taken up in children's and YA scholarship (see, for example, Coats; Curtis; Joosen; Nance-Carrol; Short; Todres and Higinbotham; Tribunella); as Tribunella argues: "children's literature has been as much about child-hating as it has been about child-loving " (137). Sometimes "negative" childism is explored under a different name, including Perry Nodelman, who discusses children's literature as a form of colonialism, or Elizabeth Marshall's exploration of "monster" female schoolteachers in children's and other popular culture texts for youth ("Monstrous"). As such, children's and young adult literature particularly attends to critically examining the oppression of young people. For this project, both Young-Bruehl's and Wall's ideas will be used, however, Young-Bruehl's "negative" childism will be drawn upon more heavily for two central reasons: (1) because the texts under discussion here are about sexual assault, the focus is necessarily more so on "what victimizes children" (Wall 71), and (2) in children's and YA literature, the problematic nature of childism has been heavily explored. In light of this, to better situate my ideas in scholarship on YA fiction, I will tend to analyze the stories privileging Young-Bruehl's "negative" childism, but will also pause to illuminate moments where "positive" childism presents in the texts.

Shame resilience theory & YAL

Brene Brown's shame resilience theory (SRT) emerges from her decade-long grounded theory study on 215 women and their understandings of shame. Her research importantly broke silences on the subject of shame, "taboo among researchers, practitioners, and clients" (43). SRT emphasizes "the need to

increase personal power by understanding the link between personal experiences and socio/cultural systems" (50) and it holds potential for women to (1) reduce their sense(s) of shame and accompanying emotions through specific strategies and (2) promote the positive impact(s) that can arise for women from communicating the significance of empathy and support from others. SRT has a lot to offer including a working definition of shame as a "psycho-social- cultural construct" (45) and a conceptual identity for shame as a "web of layered, conflicting, and competing expectations that are, at the core, products of rigid socio-cultural expectations" (46).

Primary concerns related to shame that SRT illuminates include feeling trapped, powerless, and isolated (45–6) and the theory especially highlights how thrusting "unwanted identities" (46) onto women makes them more vulnerable to shame. A central element to combat such concerns related to shame is exercising empathy, and Brown suggests that shame resilience is best understood on a series of continua including: vulnerability, critical awareness, reaching-out and speaking shame (47–9). These continua are particularly useful in understanding how adult characters may or may not have worked with female protagonist rape survivors to develop strategies for shame resilience. For instance, with regard to the critical awareness continuum, Brown posits that women struggle significantly with "surviving trauma" and so, "critical awareness allows women to link the social/cultural expectations that shape and narrowly define [their own experiences with trauma]" (48). Learning to unpack and contextualize an experience with trauma, such as sexual assault, can be powerful with "realizing [you're] not alone" (48). Using an SRT continuum such as critical awareness, then, might open opportunities for YAL rape survivors to examine their trauma more holistically – to realize that they're certainly "not alone" because "we live in a culture that condones and celebrates rape" (Hooks 295).

In considering what SRT might offer children's and YA fiction scholars, Valerie Murrenus Pilmaier compellingly uses SRT to showcase how it informs understandings of, particularly, stories about traumatized youth. She analyzes Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), a story where the heroine, an orphan named Anne Shirley, has survived considerable childhood trauma. When we meet Anne, she has "survived by demonstrating her pragmatic usefulness to women" (Murrenus Pilmaier 155), expects "she will be treated only as a servant," and "understands her security is precarious" (155). Indeed, she is a girl who has "experienced neglect, privation, and perhaps even violence" (155), and Murrenus Pilmaier cites Slater (2010) who claims that Anne has suffered "severe trauma" (Slater in Murrenus Pilmaier 157). However, Murrenus Pilmaier uses SRT to demonstrate how Anne uses her vulnerability as a tool to change her life, and how she harnesses her vulnerability to cultivate community connections. Particularly, Anne endeavours to do this because "cultivating

and maintaining female relationships is essential to a sense of emotional stability for Anne (and for most women), her success at demonstrating vulnerability signals to young female readers the importance of cultivating this skill for themselves" (152). In this way, Anne demonstrates that she is capable of reducing her feelings of powerlessness by strategically bonding with, namely, her adoptive parents and reaching out to those who offer her empathy, support, and assistance in nurturing her skills. These relationships function as conduits for enacting resiliency to combat shame.

SRT offers a powerful lens with which to reconsider both female protagonist survivors of trauma such as Anne, as well as female protagonist sexual assault survivors. SRT also provides opportunities to critically consider YAL adult characters in the lives of those survivor protagonists and how they may or may not function to foster YA shame resilience.

Examining Caretaker Characters in YA Sexual Assault Narratives: Parents and Professionals

Overviews of the YAL and a review of the literature that examines adult characters

Both *All the Rage* and *Exit* are the most recent examples YA trauma stories in the text set under discussion, and such YA rape novels continue to grow in popularity, warranting attention. Beginning with *All the rage*, as Kris Rothstein argues, sexual assault survivor Romy Grey "is already shattered" (unpaginated) from the start. The sheriff's son has raped Romy and no one, aside from her mother and Todd- her mother's boyfriend believes her. This dark novel chronicles Romy's grapplings with abandonment by friends who now bully her, mistreatment by Sheriff Turner, and being "physically and psychologically haunted by the crime" (Stevenson 570). While she finds refuge in her waitressing job outside of town where her co-worker, Leon, becomes a love interest, Romy struggles in the aftermath of her assault. Romy especially spirals emotionally in learning that she was made a target at a wild party where students wrote "rape me" on her torso after she passed out from being drugged and another student was found dead. In the end, she advocates for herself and begins to heal.

Exit, Pursued by a Bear is a notably "lighter" story, in which "There are no caricatures, only well-drawn strong female protagonists and caring but believably flawed adults" (Salge 106); protagonist Hermione Winters finds comfort and community after a fellow cheerleader rapes her at training camp. As Philips highlights, the story is aptly named because: "The novel's title, from a stage direction in Shakespeare's A Winter's Tale, suggests the dangers young adults face in the real world" (unpaginated)—in this case, the prevalence of sexual violence. Despite her dangerous experience and the painful hurdles she endures

in the aftermath of rape, including a pregnancy and subsequent abortion, Hermione persists, drawing strength from her "army of allies" (an issue I have explored elsewhere: Author) throughout her healing process.

Unlike *All the Rage* and *Exit*, *Speak* and "Wolf" have both garnered significantly scholarly attention—and rightly so. As earlier influential publications, both tales pave the way for many of the sexual assault YA narratives that follow, including *All the Rage* and *Exit*. Numerous scholars have analyzed *Speak* from a variety of lenses. It is a story about Melinda Sordino who is assaulted at a party. Immediately following her attack, she calls 911 for help and is subsequently publicly shamed for alerting police to the party, ruining the fun. After walking home alone and terrified, she remains silent about her rape for much of the novel, while her former friends bully her – much like in *All the Rage* – and her rapist continually harasses her. She finds relief in her art class and slowly gains the courage to disclose. For the purposes of this article, I will draw from those whose explorations include discussions of the adult characters.

Several scholars (see, for example, Detora; Dykstra; Hubler; Schiffman), to varying extents, discuss the adult characters in *Speak*. For instance, Angela E. Hubler and Robyn L. Schiffman importantly draw attention to Melinda's absent parents; Hubler argues: "more of the novel is devoted to depicting poor parenting than violence against women" (119) and Schiffman asserts: "one of the great mysteries of the novel concerns where her parents were [the night she was raped]," pointing out how "The absented parents are not even silent witnesses to their daughter's trauma… Melinda is an outcast at home as well" (unpaginated). Mr. Freeman is a typical focus across scholarship on *Speak*, often due to his outstanding compassion; Chris McGee, Robert C. Dykstra, and Jessi Snider commend him. McGee, for example, calls him "*the* [my emphasis] wise and caring adult" (180) – as if there is only one. Dykstra considers what ministry students might glean about the pastoral care of adolescents from examining the adults in *Speak*, particularly addressing the ethics of Mr. Freeman's gesture to offer of a ride home to Melinda on a cold day. Many of Dykstra's students "assumed Mr. Freeman will in fact abuse her," which Dykstra admits, "came as a welcome relief" because "it demonstrates seminarians' heightened sensitivity to ways authority figures… can abuse… power" (641). Despite the risk, "there may also be risks for her in refusing it" because "she needs at some point to find a trustworthy adult in whom to confide" (641). As such, he emphasizes that adults who work with young people have a great deal to learn from characters such as Mr. Freeman, including the skill of listening intently and empathetically.

The short story "Wolf" is a powerful re-worked fairy tale that "resists a simple reading" ("Girlhood" 225) with an unnamed survivor protagonist who "takes possession of [her] stor[y]" (Martin 11). She runs away after being sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend and reaching a breaking point.

Because the protagonist deeply loves her mother, she does not disclose her abuse to her. Rather, she bolts, and continues to worry about his rage and her mom's safety. When she arrives at her grandmother's desert home, she is terrified to realize that the abuser has followed her. Fortunately, her grandmother quickly grabs a shotgun to defend them both. When the protagonist screams that he raped her and he has the audacity to laugh, she snatches the gun and shoots him dead. In the "provocative" ("Girlhood" 225) ending, the grandmother accepts blame for the crime as a final protective effort.

Several scholars address or touch on this intense story (see, for example, Martin; Richards; Russell). However, Marshall deeply examines this "exemplary tale" ("Girlhood" 218); indeed, she largely hails this text as "worthy of closer scrutiny" (219) because it "prods readers to contemplate the ways in which representations of adolescent femininity carry lessons about sexuality and violence that are embedded within conventional fairy tales" (219–22). Furthermore, she commends Block's story for being deliberately focused on the male abuser, thus emphasizing "the threat of [adult] male bodies" (224). She calls for critical examinations of the rapist in such stories, particularly here, of the "rapacious" adult male's "skanky" (224) body, as a way to push back against tendencies to imagine the female body as pre-defined rape space (Hall): the kind of thinking that short-changes the rape survivor protagonist's "girl power" as a kind of "victim power" ("Girlhood" 218), resulting in a complicated representation of girlhood. Marshall also importantly considers the significance of the adult characters, the grandmother, and especially, the mother to the protagonist – ideas I endeavour to build on in this article. For instance, she highlights that the mother-daughter relationship functions as a counter-narrative; in other father-daughter incest stories, "the mother is collusive in the daughter's seduction" (224). In this story, the mother-daughter bond is strong, with both characters willing to suffer risk for the other. Overall, each sexual assault narrative under discussion here is compelling in its own regard, particularly through the lenses of "negative" childism (Young-Bruehl; *Childism- Prejudice*, Young-Bruehl; *Childism*) and shame resilience (Brown) theories.

"I'll be damned if I don't worry about you": The parents

In each story under discussion, parents play significant, diverse roles. In *All the Rage, Exit*, and "Wolf," parents primarily support the female survivors to develop shame resilience (Brown). However, there are exceptions. In *Speak* and, in another respect, "Wolf," parents are arguably guilty of not only "negative" childist (Young-Bruehl; *Childism- Prejudice*, Young-Bruehl; *Childism*) behavior in *Speak*, but the mother's boyfriend as surrogate parent in "Wolf" is the predator. Such characters are important to consider; as Young-Bruehl argues, we need to analyze parents ("Confronting Prejudice") because usually,

adults that children know are typically those who hurt them rather than strangers ("Childism-").

In *All the Rage* and *Exit*, both protagonists have two parents who develop their shame resilience (Brown). In *All the Rage*, in particular, mother characters are exemplary. Both Romy's mother and her waitressing colleague, Holly – a sort of surrogate mother to Romy and actual mother to a teenage daughter she constantly frets over – are incredibly loving, fostering shame resilience in Romy in a "positive" childist manner. For instance, Romy's mother works tirelessly, both at home and at work, "cleaning an office building every other night" (Summers 53), providing for her family. After moving, Romy reveals: "Mom unpacked all my things even though I told her she didn't have to" (21). Her acts of service usually extend beyond typical parenting behaviour, perhaps so that Romy might concentrate on healing from her sexual assault. As another example, while bra shopping, Romy's mom urges her to choose something fancier; giving Romy a "look," she says, "you could have something nicer… I always feel great when I have a good bra on" before "wander[ing] over to a rack of pink bras with fine, black lace edging" (39). However, her mother drops the subject after seeing Romy's upset expression; Romy anticipates fear and shame when buying a fancy bra and "can't stand" (40) thinking about the male cashiers seeing her underwear. Because Romy's mother likely senses that Romy's plain choice is connected to her rape, she does indeed "drop it" (39), demonstrating her consistent combatting of Romy's shame, which "often produces overwhelming and painful feelings of confusion, fear, anger, judgment, and/or the need to hide" (Brown 46). Romy frequently experiences powerlessness, a main concern related to shame (45). Particularly, because Romy was reeling from someone writing the word "slit" in the dirt on her car window moments earlier, probably "because "slut" was too humanizing" (Summers 38), Romy was likely resisting what Brown calls an "unwanted identity," a "quintessential elicitor of shame" (46). By engaging Romy in a discussion about the bra purchase, Romy's mother was thus likely endeavouring to connect with her daughter and develop Romy's "reaching out continuum" – "the measure of one's ability to reach out to others" (48) – a critical component of SRT.

Holly, Romy's waitressing colleague and surrogate mother figure, also aims to foster shame resilience in Romy. Even when Romy's work ethic wanes, Holly is still a caring "second mother." For instance, when Romy is visibly upset at work, just "staring… at [her] hands, until [her] nails blur red," Holly immediately softens and alters her tone to "sound different" (Summers 91) when asking if Romy is alright. Later, Holly reveals, "You're not my daughter, but I'll be damned if I don't worry about you [waitresses]… I worry about you when you wander off… Anytime something bad happens to a woman close to me, it's how I think. *I have a daughter*" (155). Holly also, like Romy, lives in considerable poverty and despite this, demonstrates strength.

Holly understands the weight of shame: "Raising four kids alone while her husband is deployed and her mother-in-law with Alzheimer's just moved in because they can't afford assisted living so all her care is getting pinned on her eighteen year old son when Holly's not home but *sure, look at [her] like [she's] a piece of shit for sucking on [cigarettes]*" (26). Romy herself revisits the shame of her poverty, and her rape only seems to compound it. For instance, Romy admonishes her clothing: "My bra, one of the two I own, is an embarrassment" (18) and her looks: "I smile with my mouth closed, suddenly self-conscious about my teeth which are more crooked than they should be" (60). She consistently notices others' wealth: "he's marked for… empire" (32) or when her mother uses the self-service bar at gas stations (36). She reveals, "I've moved… [to] a place where the houses… resemble chipped and broken teeth" (36), worrying what wealthier community members might think of her family's home. In contrast, Holly makes no apologies for her economic status and is shamelessly frank about her long days for working "money, money, money" (26), demonstrating a strong work ethic and influencing Romy's critical awareness continuum, which "represents both the level of awareness a woman has about the social/cultural forces that shape her experiences and her ability to critically assess her personal experiences in the context of those forces" (Brown 48). This allows for "The ability to deconstruct and contextualize a situation" which can be normalizing, helping women to realize "they [are] not alone in their experiences" (48); Holly's bluntness about her economic struggle therefore inspires Romy's "consciousness raising," which can help her perspective on both her struggles in poverty and with the aftermath of her rape.

Romy's mother's boyfriend, Todd, is another champion "positive" childist (Wall), who supports Romy's shame resilience (Brown) process. For example, when Romy returns from school he "salutes" her, enquires about her day, and offers her a beer (Summers 20). Next, when Romy and her mother move in with Todd, he says he has something to show her in her new room: "something that's not mine: an antique bureau. Todd notices me notice it" (21). Romy thanks him for this "beautiful" (21) gift, which belonged to his own "sweet" mother who died. Romy then stores one of her prized possessions – her red lipstick, which she applies in a somewhat obsessive ritual of self-care – in this bureau, in "the drawer Todd set aside just for me" (121). Todd endeavours to make Romy feel at home, and also, this gifting of an heirloom signals that he considers her family. He also offers her keys for the house and his vehicle, insisting, "It's your place now too, kid. Short of burning it down, do what you like" (22). Symbolically, keys are significant because they "function to let us in or out, to lock or unlock" and "evoke the tension between seeking and finding, restricting and releasing, withholding and giving, prohibiting and admitting" (Ronnberg & Martin 562). Todd eliminates such tensions by making clear that Romy is free to claim the

space, which helps Romy battle isolation – feelings of being "increasingly disconnected, and, due to a lack of consciousness and lack of choice… powerless" (Brown 46) – another main concern of SRT.

However, Todd perhaps most importantly embodies a "positive" childist (Wall) attitude and fosters Romy's shame resilience (Brown) during several painful encounters with police. Romy is first pulled over after bolting from school when her underwear is displayed as a prank. Understandably upset, she drives "fast, fast, faster" (Summers 76) until Sheriff Turner, the father of her rapist, stops her. When she's escorted home, Todd mindfully, gently quiets Romy's mother's immediate chastizing, saying: "I think we can figure this out inside" (79). Later, when Romy is found roadside after a party and is brought home by an officer, Todd doesn't hesitate to reach out to comfort Romy; he "put his hand on [her] arm and squeezes it" (105). Officer Turner soon surfaces again to question Romy about disappearing one night and Todd deflects Turner's victim blaming to accuse: "Should we talk about what *you* did?" (108). Heatedly, he fires that Turner was not doing his "goddamn job" – he "didn't even *start* looking for [Romy] until [he]… had to. I was out there *all* night doing your fucking work" (108). Todd then invites Turner to "see [him]self out" (109). When Turner returns to question Romy about a murdered classmate, Todd reaches a breaking point: "You can't just come in here and do this to my family. What she's been through… I won't have it… I promise you, you don't want to fuck around with this one" (301). Finally, when Turner soon accuses Romy about lying that a classmate planned to rape her, Todd cracks; he "slams his hand on the table" yelling: "*Don't* call her a *liar*" (305). Such moments illustrate how Todd alleviates Romy's feelings of being trapped and isolated, two central concerns of SRT. He proves that Romy can rely on him, thereby fostering her "reaching out," "the ability to reach out to others to both find empathy and offer empathy" and the "building of support networks" (Brown 49).

In *Exit*, Hermione's entire community functions much like Todd from *All the Rage* as the majority act as allies for her. Hermione's parents are considerate, patient, and cautious throughout her healing process, especially immediately following her rape. Their panic is palpable in returning home from a trip to see Hermione; she says: "my parents are running for the house. I'm not even sure my Dad turned off the ignition" (Johnston 80). Her mother, "moving faster than [Hermione] has ever seen," "fl[ies] across the carpet" to hug her "more thoroughly than [she] has ever been hugged" (80). Although they struggle with how to best support her, they learn to empower her to control her healing process. For instance, Hermione notices that her father does not hug her immediately following her attack, realizing "He's afraid that if he touches me, I'll forget that he's my dad, not my rapist" (82). However, he quickly rebounds when she tells him she needs him to hug her, "so now he does. All the time" (84). Together, her parents treat Hermione

respectfully, like the young adult that she is, to navigate this new reality after her attack. Hermione chronicles:

> We all sit around the table at breakfast and dinner, and try to figure out how it works now. None of us are sure. It's probably the scariest part of the whole thing so far. Words have changed meaning for my parents too, but the translation seems harder for them. Their words have no emotion or too much emotion or the *wrong* emotion. Not only am I broken, I've broken my parents. (84)

Though a painful process, Hermione's parents choose to be vulnerable *with* her instead of trying to control her experience. At the same time, they balance employing parenting strategies to keep her safe and make her feel loved; for example, she relays: "Mum and Dad don't like my door closed anymore. They worry" (86). They vacillate between providing reliable, nurturing support, creating space for Hermione to heal her way, and allowing themselves to demonstrate how they are also struggling with her rape. As "positive" childists, they "acknowledge children as children with children's needs" and also, that "children… continue to feel the elemental need" "to be cherished" ("Childism-" 263).

Speak and "Wolf," both have "negative" childist (Young-Bruehl; *Childism-Prejudice*, Young-Bruehl; *Childism*) parents. In *Speak*, Melinda's parents are neglectful and critical. Although unaware of their daughter's rape, they nevertheless ignore concerning changes in Melinda including signs of alienation, anxiety, and depression. For example, their absence is typical: "At first, Mom was pretty good about preparing dinners… *but I knew it would end* [my emphasis]" and her family largely stays in touch through post-it notes left in the kitchen. This is troubling because working parents should "maintain a daily routine of spending time with their children as soon as they get home" ("Confronting Prejudice" 278). However, Melinda does not even expect anything more familial, asking: "What else is there to say?" (Anderson 14). This sharply contrasts with her friends, including Heather; Melinda notices that "Heather's mom acts very excited to see me" (32), revealing: "[Heather] has a nice mom… she's like a dog that keeps jumping into your lap. She always walks with me down the halls chattering a million miles a minute" (24). Melinda's parents' "negative" childism is perhaps best illuminated the first time she details family dialogue: "The parents are making threatening noises… I am the victim" (35). Her mother's smile is "creepy" (35). Her father is worse: "Bang[ing] the table" so that the "silverware jumps," he tells her to "cut the crap" (35), to get her grades up "or [her] name is mud" while "attack[ing] a baked potato" (36). Melinda alarmingly interprets her parents' cruel discipline as competitive, characterizing her mother as "annoyed at being upstaged" so she feigns sweetness before warning, "look at me when I talk to you… I said look at me… Look at me now" in a "Death Voice… [the] Voice that used to make me pee in my pants"

while "grasping a knife" and Dad "snort[ing] like a bull" (36). Back in her room, she hears them "holler at each other" (36).

This scene certainly represents classic "negative" childist behaviour that falls under the second of Young-Bruehl's childist images, "found particularly among narcissists," where children are viewed as, among other things, "rebels" in the role of "the extension of their parents' lives" ("Childism-" 260). Melinda's parents understand her poor grades as an "aggressive" rebellion that must be halted – "beaten or terrorized out of [her]" (260). For example, her mother's repeated demands for Melinda to listen to look at her are a kind of "Obey me" cry wherein "the assumption is, "I own you! You are my property"" and "The psychological imperative is… "Make me feel Great"" (260). Furthermore, Melinda's mother's "annoy[ance] at being upstaged" showcases how sometimes narcissistic parents perpetually battle one another for power ("Confronting Prejudice"); when Melinda retreats, leaving them to scream at one another, it is indicative of how Melinda has internalized the familial power dynamics and understands that her identity and feelings "[have] been taken over ("Confronting Prejudice" 247). Her parents never inquire if anything is preoccupying Melinda, distracting her from her studies. She remains silent (a prominent theme) while they ignore that their child is coping with personal turmoil. Rather than considering that a compassionate intervention might be warranted – an easy assumption in light of Melinda's solemn, miserable state – narcissistically, her parents are wholly distracted by scholastic failings that might bring shame to their family, clearly communicated by her father's warning that name will be "mud." In this way, they are childist adults who "put their own well-being first, rather than the child's best interest" (Joosen 206).

In Block's short story collection that includes "Wolf," Marshall powerfully argues that overall, it "fills in silences that surround the relationships of women… in familiar fairy tale narratives" ("Girlhood" 224). While in the original story of Little Red Riding Hood the mother and grandmother have only very small parts, in "Wolf" specifically, the mother and grandmother are prominent, and staunchly loving and supportive. In fact, the protagonist admits: "they are the only [people] I have in the world" (Block 104–5). Her mother is more of a "best" friend than a parent – "People thought [they] were sisters" (105). The mother is clearly devoted, telling her daughter, "Baby, I'll always be with you. No matter what happens to me I'm still here" (106). Likewise, the protagonist is committed to her mother's happiness, keeping the boyfriend's sexual abuse – when he "started coming into [her] room" – a secret because her mother would "hurt so bad" (p. 106). As she flees home, she agonizes: "I shouldn't have left my mom alone like that… maybe I should go back but I was chickenshit" (107). The narrator worries about their toxic relationship because their fighting is "nothing new" and his drinking is described as the "same old thing" (101). The daughter also knows that if

her mother discovers the abuse, there's "no fucking way was she going to sit around and let that happen" (Block 101). Such reciprocal protective efforts demonstrate how they act as "allies rather than as competitors for male affection" ("Girlhood" 224). As well, the narrator's mother's attitude that there's "no fucking way" she would knowingly allow a sexual predator in the home is indicative of her commitment to "positive" childism (Wall) wherein she views her daughter as a "social agent" and "legitimate subject [] of human rights" (69).

The daughter flees to her "cool" grandmother, this "sort of… wise woman of the desert who's been through a lot in her life" (Block 120–121) and is sharply perceptive; the narrator reveals that even though she had not divulged any details about the boyfriend, her grandmother "knew that he was fucked up. She didn't know how much, though, or she wouldn't have let us stay there" (122). Also, though she arrives unannounced, she finds herself "standing next to [her] grandma… she had a shotgun in her hand," pointed at the boyfriend, who had followed the narrator. The grandmother fastens her gaze on him and asks the protagonist, "Babe, are you okay?" which is when the protagonist "just los[es] it," screaming: "he raped me for years… I wanted to kill him" (127). Then, when the protagonist pulls the trigger, her grandmother takes the blame. This moment crystallizes that "there are real perils in telling the truth" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo 176), which is particularly important for a discussion of childism(s). Returning again to Marshall's analysis, she argues that the "heroine's success [is] ambiguous" ("Girlhood" 226); because the grandmother takes the blame for the crime, "the solution to this problem [of sexual abuse] lies in the rescue" (226). Marshall's concern lies in how "Block's heroine has a "voice" but no real power as she only borrows the gun. One might then conceptualize this "girl power" as a kind of "victim power" (226).

Overall, parent figures often play significant roles in the lives of YA characters due to their typical closeness, or at least, proximity to their children. These characters' access to children demands critical analysis, and considering of whether adult characters take up "positive" or "negative" childist behaviors might enhance any examination. When it comes to sexual assault survivor protagonists in particular, parent figures can greatly help or hinder these adolescent characters, so what kind of childism(s) they might engage with, as well as whether parents empower their children to resist shame, is worthwhile investigating.

"I knew you were trouble the first time i saw you": The professionals

While there are no school professional characters in "Wolf" and mere nominal interactions between Romy from *All the Rage* and her educators, adult school professional characters are prominent in *Speak* and *Exit*. In

Speak, Mr. Freeman is as an exemplary educator and ally while other staff members fall disturbingly short in displaying an ethic of care. In *Exit*, professionals, particularly Hermione's cheerleading coach, largely support her. The experiences of rape survivor protagonists with their teachers are especially important because, as John Hattie argues, "the power of positive student-teacher relationships is critical" (118).

It is worth beginning with a close analysis of Romy's interactions with Coach Prewitt, the lone teacher Romy really interacts with, before delving into more complex relationships that Melinda and Hermione have with adult professionals in the other stories under discussion. Overall, Romy describes her educators as "cold to her" (Summers 209), and the noticeable absence and/or fleeting presence of teacher relationships here is significant. We meet Coach Prewitt, a kind of "monstrous pedagogue" ("Monstrous" 464), hovering over a collapsed student in gym class, "barking out questions" to rouse her (Summers 14). When another student observes that they "shouldn't be out here anyway" due to the heat wave, Prewitt "squints" and fires back, "This heat ain't news… You come to my class, you come prepared" before "spit[ting]" and yelling, "Get back to [running]!" (14). This introduction immediately suggests that she is negligent with her students' health; Prewitt's behaviour is unsympathetic and dangerous. Moreover, not listening or believing her students when they voice their suffering is a detrimental message for rape survivors such as Romy. Even more damning, after Romy thinks: "I'd burn this place to the ground before I'd ever willingly make a difference for it" (15) – certainly a ferocious indictment of the school – Prewitt inappropriately "grabs [Romy] by the arm and pulls [her] aside" to lecture her on her lacking effort.

Another scene that demonstrates Prewitt's unwillingness to listen to or advocate for students is when Romy is knocked down while running track in gym class. A student named Brock literally chases and sexually harasses her, pant-threatening, "This too close to you, Romy?… Gonna cry rape?" (46). After falling, she looks up to Coach Prewitt's face in hers, accusing her of not eating. When Romy tells her that he tripped her on purpose, Brock denies it, and Prewitt decides Romy will "live" (Summers 47), dismissively sending her to the school nurse. Worse, she forces another student to accompany her even after Romy protests. She thinks to herself: "I've got another *no* on the tip of my tongue, but Prewitt's just daring me to say it" (47). Such moments culminate to suggest that Prewitt is certainly a "negative" childist (Young-Bruehl; *Childism- Prejudice*, Young-Bruehl; *Childism*). As Michael D. Burroughs and Deborah Tollefsen argue, "the adult plays a central role in creating successful testimonial interactions with children. The child develops an identity as a reliable testifier (or unreliable testifier) in virtue of her treatment by the adults as "responsible hearer"" (360). However, Coach Prewitt casts Romy in the role of the "unreliable testifier" and Prewitt secures

herself as an "[ir]responsible hearer." Certainly, Coach Prewitt seems to "hold in [her] mind an image of stereotype of children… that is rigid" ("Childism-" 259).

Speak represents a diversity of professionals, in this case, teachers, who exhibit childist behavior in both Wall's and Young-Bruehl's understandings of it. To begin with "positive" childist teachers who help build Melinda's shame resilience (Brown), her art teacher – "the aptly named Mr. Freeman, who eschews bourgeois practicalities such as school budgets and grades" (Detora 29) – certainly fits the bill. He immediately stands apart, setting a tone of hope and creativity during his first class, telling students:

> This is where you can find your soul, if you dare. Where you can touch that part of you that you've never dared to look at before. Do not come here and ask me to show you how to draw a face. Ask me to help you find the wind. (10)

In fact, Mr. Freeman becomes a role model for encouraging shame resilience (Brown) in Melinda, as even "his name itself hints at the role he plays in the novel by dictating his purpose" (Schiffman unpaginated). He is "the only authority figure… able to provide Melinda with an outlet for her distress" (Snider 305) because he nurtures Melinda's interest in artistic expression and "gently push[es] her to find her voice" (Cleveland & Durand unpaginated). As McGee describes, Mr. Freeman "has Melinda work on drawing trees, a metaphor so important (and quite blunt, to be frank) that it appears on the cover of the book as an easy signifier for growth" (179). However, when he does so, he insists on her power; when she chooses a tree for her project, he tells her that she "chose her destiny" (Anderson 12). Later, he "encourages but never demands" (Snider 305), offering a mix of both 'tough love' and unabashedly encouraging praise, such as commending: "You are on fire, Melinda, I can see it in your eyes… This is wonderful, wonderful!" and "Excellent, excellent" but later "sighs" at one iteration of her artwork, telling her she "can do better" (Anderson 62). Most importantly, he treats all his students like actual artists rather than mere amateurs. Mr. Freeman "studies" Melinda's "homely project" and "taps his chin" looking "way too serious to be an art teacher" (64). As Snider argues, Mr. Freeman is pivotal because he encourages Melinda to speak "with a subversive voice that she willfully chooses herself" (305). This is perhaps best demonstrated when he "consult-[s] [Melinda] and consider[s] [her] viewpoint[]… to help [her] understand [her] own experience" ("Confronting Prejudice" 12) by asking: "You've been through a lot, haven't you?" (Anderson 299) and it is inferred that she discloses her rape to him. In this way, Mr. Freeman listens to Melinda as a victim of not only rape, but also, "negative" childism.

In stark contrast to Mr. Freeman is Mr. Neck, "the social studies teacher who is described as aggressive, hot-tempered, and unreasonable" (Mootz 23) – a "clear-cut childist" (Joosen) who deliberately frightens and verbally

abuses. His behaviour exemplifies "The magnitude of the power differential between adults and children… children have few safeguards against abuse of power… adults are afforded nearly limitless possibilities in what they can do to children" (Myles 22). When we first meet him, he barks out to Melinda like she is a dog, telling her to "sit" during the pep rally (Anderson 5). Soon after, when Melinda retreats to the hallway after potatoes were hurled at her, he punishes her with a demerit rather than investigating. Further, he accuses: "I knew you were trouble the first time I saw you… I can tell… just by looking in [your] eyes" (9). Later, indicative of her fear of him, she literally runs away when he chases her through the cafeteria to hound her about her homework; she knows "hates" (155) her. As an instructor, she describes him as a "guard dog" (117) with "steroid rage," (41), who "storms into class" like "a bull chasing thirty-three red flags" (53). While teaching, he largely ignores students. Most damningly, he is racist, demeaning immigrants and blaming "foreigners" for his own son's ineptitude with securing a job. Seemingly hoping to rally support for his hate speech, he assigns the following debate topic: "America should have closed her borders in 1900" (54).

In turning to characters that demonstrate a great deal of "positively"
Mr. Neck's behaviour is a classic example of child hate in children's and YA literature, as well as a damning example of "negative" childist behaviour (Young-Bruehl; *Childism- Prejudice*, Young-Bruehl; *Childism*). At the most basic level, Mr. Neck is certainly a childist who "approach[es] children with disdain or do[es] not take children's needs, capacities, and rights seriously" (Joosen 206), but Mr. Neck also is symbolic of the larger issue of "negative" childism in schooling. Mr. Neck's entire pedagogical approach is fixed squarely on dominance, which he largely achieves through fear, rather than providing an enriching learning experience. When Mr. Neck tells Melinda that he immediately "knew [she] was trouble" (Anderson 9), his intention is to shame her, and shame has the capacity to fester in women and play a "role in a wide range of mental and public health issues including self-esteem /concept issues, depression, addiction, eating disorders, bullying, suicide, family violence, and sexual assault" (Brown 43). Furthermore, as Young-Bruehl argues about shame and schooling, "As violence-prevention theorists have… stressed, shaming harms children; it produces anger and resentment" ("Confronting Prejudice" 277), which we certainly see happen with Melinda. During this moment with Mr. Neck, when Melinda thinks to herself: "Shut your trap, button your lip, can it. All that crap you hear… about communication and expressing feelings is a lie. Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say" (Anderson 9), the anger and resentment is palpable. Simply, "Discipline means teaching, not punishment" (Brazelton & Greenspan in Young-Bruehl 278) – an understanding Mr. Neck is sorely missing.

In turning to characters that demonstrate a great deal of "positively" childist (Wall) understanding, an exemplary adult includes Coach Caledon from *Exit*, who leads Hermione's cheerleading team. Caledon is the complete

opposite of Coach Prewitt in *All the Rage*; Hermione describes Caledon as beautiful, an excellent mother, inspiring presence, and trustworthy. Unlike the threatening Mr. Neck in *Speak*, Caledon rules through establishing mutual respect with her team – by "meet[ing] each child's individual way of actively relating to the world, [and] encouraging [them] to learn through their own calm guidance and modeling" ("Confronting Prejudice" 277). As such, her treatment of Hermione in the critical first chapters, before and immediately following her attack, is worthy of close inspection. Perhaps most importantly, Caledon proves calm, capable, and comforting when Hermione is raped. This is significant because unfortunately, it is rare that teaching staff are capable to effectively support students who have experienced sexual violence of any kind; for instance, "often students who have been harassed and report their experiences to teachers do not receive validation of their experiences from school personnel who may not label the behaviour as sexual harassment and thus do nothing to stop it" (Charmaraman, Jones, Stein, & Espelage 439). Alternatively, Caledon proves to be a natural ally for Hermione in a "positively" childist (Wall) way. Of course, first, Caledon takes care of logistics while Hermione is in the hospital following her attack, offering a key positive social reactions Ullman calls "tangible aid" which "consists of actions or assistance" including "spending time with a survivor, taking her to police or medical providers, giving her a place to stay, or giving her resources following an assault" (65). For example, when the nurse assures Hermione that Caledon is "taking care of" (Johnston 52) contacting her parents on their vacation, this is an instance where Caledon, as an "informal social network member," offers support that "may buffer effects of trauma" (Ullman 65). When Caledon does enter the room, Hermione describes:

> I can tell that Caledon wants to rush in, pick me up, and make sure I'm okay. She stays outside of my personal space though, and I'm so grateful for the breathing room that I want to vomit again, except I've got nothing left. (Johnston 53–54)

After Caledon's initial, immediate emergency support of Hermione, she continues to progress in a "positively" childist (Wall) way, beginning with the drive home from the hospital. It is worth examining one particularly significant moment where Caledon "made a kind of nest for [Hermione] on the bench seat in the middle of the van" (Johnston 70), as it might be considered evidence of Caledon "seeing [a] survivor[] in a multidimensional way [while] witnessing… recovery" (Ullman 116). Such a multidimensional lens is indicative of Caledon's encouragement of Hermione's shame resilience (Brown). To begin with, the symbol of the nest has been discussed widely across great literature; for instance, Steve Lukits compellingly analyzed the metaphor of the "devastated" or "ravaged" nest, home to "distressed bird" Catherine Earnshaw of *Wuthering Heights* (1847) – a story where "we can only speculate the range of sexual violence that could have transpired" (Pike

375), particularly to a teenaged character. The symbol of the nest combines Catherine's "desire for freedom with the recognition that men have prevented it" (Lutkis 106). However, Hermione's characterization of this "nest" space of textile comfort that Caledon creates for her holds great potential for more positive symbolic possibilities; first, "cloth resembles language in many ways. The words form syntax similar to how threads produce fabric" (Ronnberg & Martin 456). The creation of this nest might be understood as another way in which Caledon communicates support for Hermione and demonstrates an impressive ethic of care. Building such a nest might also suggest that Caledon might be creating a situation where Hermione might powerfully envision herself as a bird, "able to move between the worlds… move between the elements – from the outer world of the senses to an inner vision" (238). In fact, bird symbolism and violence against women have long been connected in literature; the classic memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), addresses Maya Angelou's rape at eight years old, the silence that followed, and her eventual healing – becoming a "caged bird" able to "sing." Mary Vermillion argues that the memoir "celebrates Maya's body and words, critiques the rape and racial oppression that she suffers" (254). Caledon's casting of Hermione into the role of a bird by providing her a nest can be read as a gesture towards highlighting her resiliency – her ability to "sing" from her "caged" experience of rape. Finally, the nest as a home is another strong connection in this moment, as Caledon invites Hermione to find a sense of place, of home, as she is being moved "between the worlds" (Ronnberg & Martin 238) of the hospital and her familial home.

School professionals in their various roles significantly impact young people's daily lives, shown plainly and sometimes painfully in the stories under discussion. Because trauma enters schools, educators carry immense influence on young people's processes of healing. As evidenced especially with Mr. Freeman, a school professional has the ability to be a beacon of hope and can effect change if they choose to conduct themselves in a "positively" childist (Wall) manner that promotes shame resilience (Brown). However, "negative" childist (Young-Bruehl, *Childism- Prejudice*; Young-Bruehl, *Childism*) adults in schools can also pose a significant threat to young people, particularly those in crisis, such as our rape survivor protagonists discussed here.

Conclusion

Overall, children's and YA literature is an important arena for exploring different ideas about oppression and empowerment, and considering how different forms of childism impact youth.

Stories of young people deserve more attention; Todres and Higinbotham argue:

Children's literature has been ignored as a rights-bearing discourse and a means of civic socialization. Until recently, scholars have almost completely ignored children's literature, disregarding the rich theoretical and cultural potential that the genre offers. (5)

Furthermore, how different forms of childism impacts young people's shame resilience, particularly those who are suffering due to trauma, is critical. Adults hold extraordinary influence, especially those in caretaker roles. As Young-Bruehl argues, "all… who[] care for children- must cooperate with one another, and neither compete nor shift blame onto one another for problems that arise as a child grows up and moves into the arenas that the various adults oversee" ("Confronting Prejudice" 278). Adults in YA fiction thus send important messages through story about how they might play a role in development, and in some cases, healing processes. The compelling adult characters in *All the Rage, Exit, Pursued by a Bear, Speak*, and "Wolf" demonstrate in a myriad of ways the didactic potential of YA fiction as a site where authors can complexly present adults that reveal, among other items, the multidimensional nature of childism(s) and how these forms might influence shame resilience.

Returning briefly to Roxane Gay, she chronicles a meaningful conversation she had with her mother after her parents found out she had been gang-raped as a girl. She reveals that they talked about "how sometimes children, even ones with great parents, are too scared to talk to their parents about the trauma they experience" (286). Her story functions as a reminder of why it is crucial to consider the impact adults can have on the lives of young people, even fictitious ones, and even when the impact is that of absence and silence.

Notes

See (Author) where I briefly touch on Dr. Hutt and Officer Plummer in *Exit* and Melinda's teachers in *Speak*.

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