

RESISTING RAPE MYTHS IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION: AN ANALYSIS OF YOUNG
ADULT NOVELS *SPEAK* AND *CRANK*

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

Kaylee Blanche Jangula Mootz

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Department:
English
Option:
Literature

April 2016

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

Resisting Rape Myths in Young Adult Fiction: An Analysis of Young Adult
Novel *Speak* and *CRANK*

By

Kaylee Blanche Jangula Mootz

The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota State
University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Dr. Alison Graham-Bertolini

Chair

Dr. Miriam Mara

Dr. Christina Weber

Approved:

4/12/16

Date

Dr. Gary Totten

Department Chair

ABSTRACT

Introducing young people to fiction that depicts rape is important in that reading this type of fiction can be a more effective strategy for reducing rape-myth acceptance in young people than lecture-based prevention programs. To be fully effective, literature used for lowering rape-myth acceptance must fully resist rape myths. This paper analyzes *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson and *CRANK* by Ellen Hopkins to find the ways in which each novel resists and conforms to rape myths, to determine whether these texts would be suitable for reducing rape-myth acceptance, and to identify ways in which future texts that aim to reduce rape-myth acceptance in young readers can be more effective. Neither *Speak* nor *CRANK* fully resists rape myths, which reinforces the validity of rape myths to young adult readers. Both novels resist rape myths that attempt to deny the reality of rape while conforming to rape myths that blame the victim.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Alison Graham-Bertolini, Dr. Miriam Mara, and Dr. Christina Weber, for their help and feedback on my thesis project. I especially want to thank Dr. Graham-Bertolini for giving feedback on multiple drafts on this paper, for her support and encouragement through my writing process, and for being an excellent resource for me in several ways during this last year. I also want to thank the English Department of North Dakota State University for providing me with an excellent education and opportunities for intellectual and professional growth. A special thanks goes to Emilee Ruhland for innumerable encouragements, writing sessions, and high-fives. And lastly, I want to thank most sincerely my husband Graham for his unquestioning support, sacrifice, and devotion during my graduate education. Without him, I would not be who I am today.

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INTRODUCTION

At the 2016 Oscars ceremony, televised on February 28th 2016, Lady Gaga performed her latest single “Til It Happens To You,” which calls attention to the pain and trauma of sexual assault. This performance was groundbreaking in many aspects: first, it is remarkable that the Oscars chose to have Lady Gaga perform that particular song, with full knowledge of the song’s message; second, Lady Gaga invited victims of sexual assault to join her on stage during her performance to emphasize visually the real, tangible, human effects of rape and sexual assault; and last, Vice President Joe Biden followed Lady Gaga’s performance by giving a speech about the importance of ending sexual assault and emphasizing the need for cultural change. This political intervention, along with several other highly publicized campaigns to end sexual and domestic violence in the media, signals a distinct shift in public awareness of sexual assault. Though feminists have been theorizing, attempting to solve, and educating on the topic of rape for decades, it is only now that the epidemic of rape in our country has come to the forefront. While this attention is certainly heartening to feminists and academics alike, there is still a great deal of work to be done to bring about the change sought.

The drastic cultural shift necessary to bring about the end of rape must begin in the ways we discuss and depict rape in our cultural work. Fiction authors may include depictions of rape in their novels for differing reasons. Some authors have more specific goals in their choices to create stories and characters impacted by rape. Two such authors are Laurie Halse Anderson, author of *Speak* (1999) a *New York Times* Best Seller, winner of the ALA Best Books for Young Adults award in 2000 and the 2000 Golden Kite Award, and Ellen Hopkins, *New York Times* Best Selling Author of *CRANK* (2004). Both novels, *Speak* and *CRANK*, are significant in their extreme popularity and their ability to reach young adult audiences about difficult topics such as

rape and drug addiction. Both have been suggested reading for high school teachers in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, the *ALAN Review*, and other venues for teachers and scholars of young adult literature. Their popularity coupled with the authors' intentions to educate teenagers on difficult topics, have contributed to my choice to analyze *Speak* and *CRANK* in terms of the way each narrative asks readers to confront their previous notions of rape, via rape myths, or reinforces cultural beliefs about rape that allow rape to continue. Introducing young people to fiction that depicts rape and resists rape myths is important in that reading this type of fiction can be a more effective strategy for reducing rape-myth acceptance in young people than traditional, lecture-based prevention programs.

Rape is a massive, multifaceted problem that requires an equally multifaceted solution. However, before addressing how to end the epidemic of rape, the problem must be defined. I refer to any unwanted sexual penetration of the physical body, through coercion, force, or any other form of non-consent, as rape, and refer to any other unwanted sexual encounter, including touching, groping, kissing, etc., as sexual assault. This definition is used by the Centers for Disease Control in their report on Intimate Partner Violence, as well as similar definitions used by scholars such as Susan Brownmiller, Joanna Bourke, and others. Though rape and assault often go hand-in-hand, it is important to delineate the difference between the two so as to not silence the specificity of the trauma attached to each. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey conducted by the CDC in 2010, nearly one in five women in the United States have been raped at some time in their lives (1). More than half of these victims were raped by an intimate partner and 40.8% were raped by an acquaintance (1). It is also estimated that 13% of women experience sexual coercion in their lifetime, meaning that their consent was received through verbal coercion when they had originally expressed non-consent

(2). 1.3 million women reported being raped within one year of taking the survey (2009-2010)

(3). This epidemic differs from other health epidemics in that it is socially created, conditioned, and maintained. Our culture has created an environment that normalizes sexual violence and degradation of women, commonly referred to as rape culture, and makes rape both possible and acceptable. Rape culture works to embed acts of aggression within normal male sexuality and to disguise rape as something that is not real, not a problem, or only committed by a disproportionately small minority of mentally ill individuals, rather than a significant cultural problem. This is done through many cultural norms, such as conservative gender roles, rape myths, and victim blaming. However, feminists have been working against these cultural norms with fervor. Peggy Miller and Nancy Biele write that,

rape is not a personal aberration in which a solitary male overcome by lust or perversion attacks a culpable, provocatively dressed female. Instead, rape in all its forms [...] is an act of violence, a violation of the victim's spirit and body, and a perversion of power, a form of control exercised over more than half of the population. (49)

They go on to say that “something much larger than individual pathology is involved. Rape is a hate crime, the logical outcome of an ancient social bias against women” which is supported by language, law, and custom (52). Similarly, Susan Brownmiller, in her groundbreaking work *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, writes that

Once we accept as basic truth that rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear, we must look toward those elements in our culture that promote and

propagandize these attitudes, which offer men, and in particular, impressionable adolescent males, who form the potential raping population, the ideology and psychological encouragement to commit their acts of aggression without awareness, for the most part, that they have committed a punishable crime, let alone a moral wrong. (391)

A comprehensive shift in cultural perspective is necessary to achieve what Brownmiller, Biele, and Miller call for in their writing—to recognize rape as a widespread and highly significant cultural problem. Our society must work to correct the sexist cultural belief systems that protect rape culture and excuse rapists. An important aspect of this cultural perspective shift is dismantling rape myths, which work to excuse the rapist and blame the victim for her assault.

Martha Burt (1980) was the first to define rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” which create an environment hostile to victims (217). Kimberly Lonsway and Louise Fitzgerald extended Burt’s definition in their article “Rape Myths: In Review” by writing, “Rape Myths are attitudes and generally false beliefs about rape that are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (133). Like most stereotypes, which take one individual experience and attribute it to all experiences within a certain group, the “truth” of these myths is not significant; what is significant is the fact that these attitudes and beliefs are universally applied and used to erase individual experiences of rape (135). Lonsway and Fitzgerald outline six different types of rape myths: denial of rape’s existence, denial of rape’s seriousness, excusal of the perpetrator, responsibility of the victim, only “bad women” get raped, and women lie (138). Though individual rape myths seem innumerable because they change and develop to fit the time in which they are stated, most rape myths can be placed into these categories. Examples of myths

that deny the existence of rape include: “all women want to be raped” (Brownmiller 311); “no woman can be raped against her will” (Brownmiller 311); the idea that rape cannot result in pregnancy (Bourke 54); and the idea that unless the victim is physically wounded it wasn’t rape (Bourke 41). Examples of myths that deny the seriousness of rape include: rape is part of humans’ primitive natures (Bourke 68); women are not actually harmed by rape (Bourke 43); “if you’re going to be raped, you might as well relax and enjoy it” (Brownmiller 311); and the idea that consent in the past should mean consent into perpetuity (Bourke 42, 45; Valenti 300, 301). Examples of myths that excuse the perpetrator include: men are more innately sexual and cannot control themselves (Bourke); men get “carried away” because they are too aroused (Bourke 41); “real” rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both (Burt 217); and the idea that men who are drunk are less responsible for their actions (Bourke 57). Examples of myths that blame the victim for her assault include: women who flirt are asking for trouble (Bourke 72); women “tempt” men by their actions and clothing—which includes “what was she wearing?” (Bourke 73); the idea that intoxicated women should have “known better” than to put themselves “in danger” (Bourke 57); “if you go a little, you need to be willing to go all the way” (Bourke 44); if she “got herself into that situation” she deserved to be raped (Bourke 43); women who dress provocatively are responsible for their rape (Bourke 406); “she was asking for it” (Brownmiller 311); any woman who is not a virgin is a slut and therefore deserves to be raped (Valenti 300; Bourke 80); and women say “no” but mean “yes” (Bourke 67). The rape myth “only ‘bad women’ get raped” is an extension of the myths that deny the seriousness of rape and blame the victim. And finally, examples of the myth that “women lie” include: “women want to see men suffer” (Bourke 34); women lie to get a husband or money (Bourke 36); men are always at risk for being falsely accused (Bourke 23; Miller and Biele 50); and women cry rape only when they have been jilted

or have something to cover up (Burt 217). Each rape myth has its own variations and interplays between other myths and they all serve to justify, excuse, and cover up rape.

The primary function of rape myths is to excuse both rape in general and the specific actions of the rapist. Joanna Bourke writes that rape myths illustrate cultural sympathy for abusers (48). Abusers, and those who believe rape myths, use rape myths to justify inflicting pain on their victims, as in “she deserved it” or “he could not stop himself” (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 137). Furthermore, Bourke observes that rape myths facilitate the judgment of the rapist based on the “morality” of the victim (48). If the victim is a non-virgin, has been drinking or doing drugs, was flirting with the rapist (or anyone else), was wearing “risqué” clothing, or acting “slutty” (or any other manner of “bad” behavior) she is deemed a “bad woman” and therefore, the myths decree, she deserves to be raped. In addition to blaming the victim, analyzing the supposed morality of the accuser gives the rapist an excuse for “misunderstanding” the victim’s non-consent because of her past actions.

In addition to justifying and excusing rape, rape myths also function to obscure the reality of rape. Bourke notes that rape myths are used to smear the characters of people who suggest that rape exists and is a problem (49). Similarly, Lonsway and Fitzgerald write that women who believe rape myths use them to assert their immunity to rape victimization—“The belief that only certain types of women are raped functions to obscure and deny the personal vulnerability of *all* women by suggesting that only *other* women are raped” (136). By blaming the character of the victim for her victimization, rape myth not only trivializes rape (Lonsway and Fitzgerald), but also convinces women to blame themselves when they are victimized. Brownmiller writes that not only do rape myths have clear benefits to men as excuses, but also silence women who believe that they are at fault for their victimization, stating, “to make a woman a willing

participant in her own defeat is half the battle” (312). Even if a victim does not personally believe rape myths, the victim will likely expect to be blamed for her assault because of the widespread acceptance of rape myths and victim blaming beliefs, which may affect her willingness to disclose or report the rape.

There has been extensive research conducted to understand who believes rape myths, which rape myths are most believed, and why. Overwhelmingly, research indicates that men are more accepting of rape myths (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 142; Qi, Starfelt and White 3; Bohner, Siebler and Schmelcher 288; Lanier and Green 81). Sarah McMahon also reported that male athletes (6, 9) and males pledging fraternities (7, 9) had significantly higher rape-myth acceptance than their counterparts. McMahon also found that 53% of students polled strongly agreed or agreed that “If a girl acts like a slut, she is eventually going to get into trouble” (9). Overall, she found that gender, knowing someone who had been sexually assaulted, and athlete status were all significant predictors of rape-myth acceptance. She found that females, non-athletes, and people who knew a victim of sexual assault were less likely to accept rape myths. McMahon also found that the rape myths most likely to be believed were “He didn’t mean to” and “she lied” (9).

In relation to these findings, a wealth of research has been conducted to investigate the relationships between rape-myth acceptance, acceptance of dating violence, and rape proclivity. Burt was the first to find that acceptance of interpersonal violence was the highest predictor of rape-myth acceptance (228). She also found that rape-myth acceptance correlated significantly with sex role stereotyping and distrust of the opposite sex. Similarly, Lonsway and Fitzgerald found that high rape-myth acceptance correlates with acceptance of domestic violence and sexual harassment (149). They also found that self-reported likelihood of raping (if the respondent knew

he would not get caught) was higher in men who have a higher acceptance of rape myths and that self-reported likelihood of using sexual force (not including rape) was higher in men who have a high acceptance of rape myths (151). Lonsway and Fitzgerald argue additionally that women with higher rape-myth acceptance are more likely to be coerced into sex (152). Cynthia Lanier and Bradley Green found that rape-myth acceptance significantly predicted forced sex at follow-up questioning (81) and write that “a male with attitudes congruent with those associated with date rape may not believe he had truly ‘forced’ someone to have sex, but rather had played an appropriately aggressive male role” (91). Likewise, Bohner, Siebler, and Schmelcher found that rape-myth acceptance affects rape proclivity, meaning those with higher rape-myth acceptance indicated they were more likely to force someone to have sex (292). What these findings, and many other studies linking rape-myth acceptance to rape proclivity, mean for feminists, policy makers, and educators trying to eliminate the problem of rape is that in order to reduce instances of rape, rape myths must be dismantled at both the individual level and the cultural level.

The majority of contemporary rape prevention programs focus on changing beliefs about rape, and specifically on lowering rape-myth acceptance¹. Lowering rape-myth acceptance has several potential benefits including lowering the perpetration of forced sex (Lanier 883), making bystanders more willing to intervene when they see a potential rape about to occur (McMahon 9), and creating an environment more supportive to victims of sexual assault and rape. It may be possible that even if a would-be rapist did not receive rape prevention training himself but his peers had that that positive peer pressure may be enough to lower would-be rapist’s rape proclivity. Bohner, Siebler and Schmelcher, in their study of the impact of peer rape-myth

¹ For more information on prevention programs that focus on lowering rape-myth acceptance, see Lanier and Green, McMahon, Lanier, Fay and Medway, and Bohner, Siebler, and Schmelcher.

acceptance, found that when male students believe others' rape-myth acceptance is high that their rape-myth acceptance was also high and alternatively that when male students believe others' rape-myth acceptance is low that their rape-myth acceptance is low (288). Bohner, Siebler and Schmelcher explain this phenomenon by arguing that perceived social norms have a significant impact on an individual's actions (290), meaning if a male student believes that their rape-supportive attitudes will be accepted by others in their peer group, they are more likely to maintain these attitudes. Bohner, Siebler and Schmelcher also found that the perceived rape-myth acceptance of others affected the subjects' rape proclivity (292). Studies like these, and those outlined previously, suggest that it is imperative to lower rape-myth acceptance if the epidemic of rape is to be solved. Karen Fay and Frederic Medway found in reviewing several rape prevention programs that a mixture of role-playing, critical thinking, and reflection (rather than lecture) was effective in reducing rape-myth acceptance when students were asked to consider what cultural forces contributed to the frequency and cultural acceptance of rape, such as media violence, gender role stereotyping, and cultural myths (226, 227, 232). Burt suggests lowering rape-myth acceptance by fighting sex role stereotyping at a young age and by promoting sex as a mutually undertaken, freely chosen and fully conscious interaction (229). Burt's assessment in 1980 that sex must be taught and understood as a positive experience for both partners has still not been fully realized as many contemporary feminist activists, scholars, and educators are insisting that our culture needs to embrace a model of enthusiastic consent.

Cara Kulwicki writes that educators must impart to their students that sex is normal and healthy, and that it must be consensual and *pleasurable* for all participants (305). She writes that educators must teach enthusiastic consent (308) and that "*the genuine desire for sexual pleasure and the expression of that desire* should be an accepted standard" (310). For Kulwicki, the most

effective way to eliminate rape is to teach both boys and girls to want sex and say so, otherwise it is wrong (310). Enthusiastic consent is certainly an appropriate starting place, but several scholars believe that what is needed is a shift from a sex-negative culture to a sex-positive culture, a culture that accepts and celebrates free female sexuality as the norm. Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti in the introduction of their book *Yes Means Yes!: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World Without Rape*, write that creating a culture that values genuine female sexual pleasure is paramount to ending rape culture and rape (7). Many authors in this collection share this sentiment, including Lee Jacobs Riggs who writes that

Sex-negative culture—culture that values the lives, bodies, and pleasure of men (and in particular white, middle- or upper-class, heterosexual men without disabilities) above those of women and transgendered people, and promotes shame about sexual desire, particularly female or queer desire [...] teaches us that pleasure is sinful and provides us with narrow scripts for appropriate sexual encounters. (110)

Sex-positive culture on the other hand would use consent as the baseline for acceptable sexual encounters (110). Similarly, Jill Filipovic argues that current gender roles—which situate men as inherently aggressive and sexually volatile, and women as gatekeepers who embody sex and must set and hold men’s boundaries—perpetuate rape culture and that to dismantle rape culture, positive masculinities and a sex-positive model for women is necessary. These goals, to shift perspectives about male and female sexuality, are not simply accomplished. Accepting free female sexuality, as well as emphasizing positive masculinities, requires society to reassess the humanity of the female subject. Valuing female pleasure and sexuality asserts the belief that women are, first, worthy of pleasure and also independent of men’s pleasure.

Recognizing the humanity of women is essential in eliminating rape, rape myths, and rape culture. Brad Perry writes “[...] we might have a shot at realizing a grand vision: a culture where people experience sexuality in a state of well-being—a culture incompatible with sexual violence because of a deeply shared belief that sexuality is a precious part of everyone’s humanity” (198). Rape prevention educators Joseph Weinberg and Michael Biernbaum share this ideal when they write that threat of legal sanction does little to change men’s attitudes or behavior, but rather the key is to reach them on an emotional level (90). Weinberg and Biernbaum state that a requirement of their training is charging the men with responsibility for their own behavior and for respecting the integrity of their partners (93). They write “consent raises the issue of personhood—ours *and* hers” (94) and emphasize the need for the men in their program to reflect on the humanity of not only their partner, but also of themselves as men. Creating empathy is a key component in effective rape prevention programs, and also in creating a sex-positive culture (which would replace rape culture).

The question becomes: how can educators, activists, scholars, and feminists alike blend these approaches to eliminate the problem of rape? The answer is certainly complicated, multifaceted, and not one-size-fits-all. Multiple approaches are needed to bring about effective change. One approach that has not been fully taken advantage of is the use of literature that presents rape through the eyes of the victim, which can be used to lower rape-myth acceptance by reaching readers on an emotional level and lead to a greater appreciation of female sexuality and personhood. Bourke states most eloquently, “*Only an appreciation of the suffering person is capable of exposing the underlying functions of rape myths: that is, attempts to reduce the lived experiences of specific individuals to undifferentiated bodies*” (24 emphasis added). This “appreciation of the suffering person” cannot be attained through facts or figures or information

presented in a standard rape prevention program. Literature can fill this gap by creating empathy in readers for a character who is a victim of rape. Though this may be a less direct approach than a standard rape prevention program, literature offers a more effective change in perspective by creating empathy for victims, giving the reader a sense of “knowing” a victim’s experience, and vicariously experiencing the pain and trauma of assault. McMahon found that those who knew someone who had been sexually assaulted had lower rape-myth acceptance and were more likely to intervene if they witnessed a potential rape in progress (6). Fiction in which the main character is a victim of rape can offer readers an “appreciation of the suffering person,” a sense of “knowing” a victim, and a vicarious experience through which they can confront their previous conceptions of rape in a way unavailable to them otherwise.

Humanities scholars and educators have argued for the effectiveness of literature in cultivating empathy, compassion, intelligence, and well-rounded personhood for decades. Louise Rosenblatt in her book *Literature as Exploration*, writes, “Through books, the reader may explore his own nature, become aware of potentialities for thought and feeling within himself, acquire clearer perspective, develop aims and a sense of direction. He may explore the outer world, other personalities, other ways of life” (vi). She argues that reading literature offers readers insight and knowledge that cannot be gained in any other way because of the personal nature of reading and the connection readers develop to characters. Rosenblatt discusses the vicarious attachments readers form with characters, stating “How much more directly and completely is this tendency to *live* ourselves into the object of our contemplation fulfilled when we are concerned with the personalities and joys and sorrows, with the failures and the achievements, of authors or characters in literature!” (46 emphasis added). Furthermore, she writes that by living vicariously through the characters in fiction readers can gain insights more

deeply and powerfully that they could have otherwise—“new understanding is conveyed to them in a living, vivid, and dynamic way. They meet new characters or new social conditions and human conflicts directly and personally” (47). Martha Nussbaum in *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* is more direct in her argument for the potential of literature. Nussbaum argues that

narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist’s interest—with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society’s refusals of visibility [of people’s suffering]. We come to see how circumstances shape the lives of those who share with us some general goals and projects; and we see that circumstances shape not only people’s possibilities for action, but also their aspirations and desires, hopes and fears. (88)

She also writes that reading literature “cultivates a sympathetic responsiveness to another’s needs” (90), and that “literary imagining both inspires intense concern with the fate of characters and defines those characters as containing a rich inner life, not all of which is open to view; in the process the reader learns to have respect for the hidden contents of that inner world, seeing its importance in defining a creature as fully human” (90). Nussbaum goes on to say that literature may not be an instantaneous solution to society’s problems, but that the act of reading and engaging with characters outside of oneself, is the beginning of social justice (94). In this way, by encouraging readers to confront rape, rape myths, and victimization directly and personally through literature, the attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate rape in our culture can be eliminated more effectively than with standard rape prevention programs.

There is one study that already tests the effectiveness of this argument. Victor Malo-Juvera found in his article “*Speak*: The Effect of Literary Instruction on Adolescents’ Rape-myth

acceptance” that the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, when taught in the middle school classroom using a dialogic approach (rather than a lecture-based approach), was effective in lowering rape-myth acceptance in both male and female readers (420-21). This evidence should encourage educators and parents to introduce young readers to texts that depict rape through the eyes of the victim in order to lower readers’ rape-myth acceptance. However, to be fully effective, literature used for lowering rape-myth acceptance must fully resist rape myths. In the sections following I analyze the young adult novels *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson and *CRANK* by Ellen Hopkins and analyze the ways in which each novel both resists and conforms to rape myths, not only to determine whether these texts would be suitable for reducing rape-myth acceptance, but also to identify ways in which future texts that aim to reduce rape-myth acceptance in young adult readers can be more effective. Additionally, I discuss the ways in which each novel positively or negatively depicts female identity and sexuality to identify the novels’ ability to promote positive female sexuality and identity to readers. Neither *Speak* nor *CRANK* fully resists rape myths, which reinforces the validity of rape myths to young adult readers. Each novel resists rape myths that attempt to deny the reality of rape while conforming to rape myths that blame the victim and silence victims whose experiences do not adhere to “true rape” stories. With this assessment in mind, the novels *Speak* and *CRANK* do some important cultural work in creating reader empathy for victims of rape, but may still reinforce cultural norms that blame the victim. Future young adult authors who aim to reduce rape-myth acceptance through their fiction should work to resist all major rape myths, remove responsibility from the victim, and refuse to excuse perpetrators’ actions so that readers may be inspired to support victims and reject rape culture that perpetuates female victimization.

SPEAK AND RESISTING RAPE MYTHS

Rape is a social epidemic that affects 1 in 5 women in the United States (CDC 1). As noted in the introduction, the problem of rape is allowed to continue because our culture has created an environment that normalizes sexual violence and the degradation of women. This cultural climate, which is hostile to women, is commonly referred to as rape culture. Rape culture works to embed acts of aggression within normal male sexuality and dismiss rape as a nonexistent or insignificant problem. The dismissal of rape is aided by several social practices, such as conservative gender roles and rape myths. Rape myths are defined as “attitudes and generally false beliefs about rape that are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 133). These attitudes are numerous and often change over time, but their functions are the same, which is to excuse the perpetrator’s behavior, to blame the victim for her assault, and to deny the existence or seriousness of rape (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 138; Bourke 48). As noted previously, many studies have found that because of the link between rape-myth acceptance and rape proclivity, reducing rape-myth acceptance can be effective in reducing instances of date rape. Several rape prevention programs have already prioritized reducing rape-myth acceptance. In addition to these programs, introducing young people to fiction that depicts rape and its aftermath, and also resists rape myth, can be a more efficient strategy for reducing rape-myth acceptance in young people than traditional, lecture-based prevention programs. Fiction that resists rape myth can be more effective in reducing rape myth because it can allow the reader to empathize with a fictional victim, gain a sense of “knowing” a victim by creating a bond between character and reader, and vicariously experience what a victim experiences. The young adult novel *Speak* (1999) by Laurie Halse Anderson is a novel that could offer such experiences. In fact, researcher and middle

school teacher Victor Malo-Juvera has used *Speak* in the middle school classroom to reduce rape myth with some success. However, close reading reveals that *Speak* resists some rape myths, such as “all women want to be raped,” “if you’re going to be raped you might as well relax and enjoy it,” “he couldn’t help himself,” and “she lied,” but conforms to others, such as only virgins experience “real” rape, “real” rapes are inherently violent, and women who choose to drink are partially responsible for their assaults. *Speak* does have several positive attributes that may aid in reducing rape-myth acceptance and victim blaming, such as introducing readers to feminist criticisms of gendered double standards, positively depicting female solidarity and power, and contrasting positive masculine traits with negative masculine traits. Further, this novel has already done invaluable cultural work by giving a voice to young victims and giving parents and educators a tool to begin conversations about rape and sexual assault. However, *Speak* does reinforce some rape myths, which may inadvertently blame the victim or silence victims whose experiences do not align with stories of “true rape.” By analyzing the ways that *Speak* conforms to rape myths, future authors who seek to do the cultural work of lowering rape-myth acceptance in young readers can learn from *Speak*’s refutations and confirmations of rape myth to strengthen their messages. In the following chapter, I analyze how *Speak* resists rape myth and also promotes positive female identity. Alternatively, in chapter 3, I discuss the ways in which *Speak* conforms to rape myth and what might be done to address these instances of victim blaming in young adult novels that attempt to lower rape-myth acceptance in readers.

Speak (1999 Square Fish) is a *New York Times* Best Seller, winner of the ALA Best Books for Young Adults award in 2000 and the 2000 Golden Kite Award. *Speak* tells the story of fourteen-year-old Melinda Sordino who was raped by an upperclassman at a summer party. She begins her freshman year as an outcast because she called the police from the party to report the

rape. However, when the police arrive Melinda is too afraid to speak to them, flees the party, and goes home. She withdraws from her family and friends and becomes nearly mute as a result of her traumatic experience. Despite her trauma, Melinda is a witty, sometimes angsty, but relatable teenager who must navigate her first year of high school with no friends, emotionally unavailable parents, and apathetic school administration. Her attempts to heal are thwarted by the looming presence of the boy who raped her, Andy Evans. Not only does Andy delight in pestering Melinda, who is clearly afraid of him, but he also dates Melinda's previous best friend, Rachel. In the hopes of protecting Rachel, Melinda discloses the rape to Rachel before the prom (approximately nine months after the rape). This is the first time Melinda admits she was raped to another person. In fact it seems that Melinda herself does not understand what has happened to her until three-quarters of the way through the novel, where she uses the word "rape" for the first time. Shortly after her disclosure to Rachel, it seems that rumors spread throughout the school that Melinda has accused Andy. In the climax of the novel, Andy violently confronts Melinda about her accusation and attempts to rape her again. Melinda finds the power of the voice within her and is able to subdue him long enough for help to arrive. After this moment of triumph, Melinda regains her ability to speak and continues to heal from her trauma.

Scholars, teachers, and librarians have lauded *Speak* for its ability to reach teenaged readers and its potential for starting discussions on difficult issues, like rape, in a more comfortable way than a teacher-led lecture. High School teacher Mark Jackett reflects that he has found *Speak* very effective in eliciting student discussions on rape, including what to do if students find themselves in a similar situation, how to help a peer who has been assaulted, and the sexual double standard that Melinda recognizes throughout the novel. Young adult literature scholar Janet Alsup argues that *Speak* is not a traditional "rape story" that can be easily

dismissed as boring, cliché, and something that the reader has “heard before” (165). Readers are compelled to pay attention to *Speak* because of its unconventional form—including lists, bulleted points, asides, script-style dialogue, and headings—which symbolically represents Melinda’s inability to speak about what has happened to her in a conventional way. Alsop argues that *Speak* acts as a site of discursive resistance against rape culture, though Melinda does not recognize her feminist inclinations (165). Likewise, young adult scholar Elaine O’Quinn praises *Speak* as “an important book in its exploration of the kind of agency involved when women endeavor to overcome personal violation” (55). O’Quinn writes that Anderson’s text allows readers to experience a “capable rather than neutralized persona of main character, Melinda Sordino, ... [who] refuses to become a victim of the violent force that threatens her, but is instead emancipated by it, ...” (55). By relating to Melinda as she triumphs over her trauma, female readers can be empowered to do the same. Victor Malo-Juvera sees even more potential in *Speak*. His 2014 article in the *ALAN Review*, “*Speak*: The Effect of Literary Instruction on Adolescents’ Rape-myth acceptance” discusses the findings of his study, which attempted to test whether *Speak* could reduce rape-myth acceptance in middle school readers. He found that reading *Speak* significantly reduced rape-myth acceptance in young readers both male and female (418). Malo-Juvera attributes this reduction to the feeling of shared experience given by fictional texts and that the students were able to discuss Melinda’s experience more readily than if it had been a personal event (420). He argues that rape-myth acceptance interventions are often lecture-based, where students are expected to listen and absorb facts, and that providing contrary information is not enough to change strongly held beliefs, like those involved in accepting rape myth (421). By reading, which allowed students to “vicariously experience the aftereffects of a date rape through a primarily aesthetic reading transaction” and by allowing students to express

their thoughts and feelings in writing and discussion, the experience of the novel had an important impact on students “moral reasoning” (421). Malo-Juvera certainly discovered significant findings, but failed to investigate specifically why certain rape myths were reduced and some were not. This is a gap that my analysis may help to fill.

In many ways, Anderson’s novel resists rape culture and rape myth. One of the clearest examples of this resistance is the description of Melinda’s rape. Anderson resists what Laura Mulvey dubs the *male gaze* (2088) by refusing to sexualize the rape or describe it in a titillating way. Melinda is blunt and direct about her non-consent and the pain she felt when recollecting the rape. Her description of the rape as non-consensual, painful, and not in anyway enjoyable is an active refutation of the rape myths “all women want to be raped,” and “if you’re going to be raped you might as well enjoy it.” Melinda gives a verbal “no” in addition to the multiple instances of the word “no” in her internal monologue: “ ‘No.’ No I did not like this” (135); “In my head, my voice is as clear as a bell: ‘NO I DON’T WANT TO!’” (135). Though she cannot physically fight back, because Andy is much larger than she is, Melinda does try to pull away and scream: “His lips lock on mine and I can’t say anything. I twist my head away. He is so heavy. There is a boulder on me. I open my mouth to breathe, to scream, and his hand covers it” (135). Anderson’s choices of descriptive words such as “heavy,” “boulder,” and “ground” which is repeated three times, symbolically indicates to the reader the baseness of Andy’s actions and also reaffirms that there is nothing romantic or desirable about this situation for Melinda. Also the narrative quickness of the action in the scene may give the reader a sense of anxiety because it seems that no one, including the reader, can help Melinda: “wham! shirt up, shorts down, and the ground smells wet and dark and NO!” (135). Melinda’s understanding of the rape as “he hurts me hurts me hurts me and gets up” is also an important resistance of rape myths. Melinda

does not understand her rape as sexual, but rather as pain and violation. There is no narration indicative of penetration, genitalia, or sexual performance. This situates Melinda's rape squarely in the realm of violation rather than seduction. This also removes focus from the perpetrator's sexual gratification and instead focuses on the victim's pain and perspective of violation. This is an important resistance to denial of the seriousness of rape and the myth that women enjoy and want to be raped. The purposeful choices of the author in this scene emphasizes to the reader that rape is wholly a violation and therefore resists rape myths. This scene also privileges the perspective of the victim for the reader and may allow the reader to more readily accept other victims' experiences as true.

Recognizing Melinda's clear non-consent is also important in negating rape myths that excuse the rapist. Melinda's verbal "no," as well as her attempts to turn away and scream, are important in making clear that the perpetrator was not simply mistaken in his actions. Celia Kitzinger and Hannah Frith write in their article "Just Say No? The Use of Conversation Analysis in Developing a Feminist Perspective on Sexual Refusal," that men who claim "misunderstanding" are simply justifying their coercive behavior (295). Further, Kitzinger and Frith state that the problem with women's refusals is not how women refuse, but rather how men receive refusals (310) as some rape myths attempt to insinuate. Andy hears Melinda's "no" but continues to violate her anyway. His forceful kissing and his hand over Melinda's mouth both are actions to silence her "no" and her cries. Andy's recognition of Melinda's "no" reinforces his responsibility for the reader and reveals his understanding of what he is doing. Further, Andy's peers never excuse his actions as misunderstandings or by suggesting he was too drunk to stop. Andy is guilty in Melinda's eyes, and therefore the eyes of the reader, as well as the girls who respond to Melinda's writing on the bathroom stall: "He's a creep," "He's a bastard," "Stay

Away!!” “he should be locked up,” “he thinks he’s all that,” “call the cops,” “[...] I went out with him to the movies—he tried to get his hands down my pants during the PREVIEWS!!” (Anderson 185). By refusing to excuse Andy’s behavior as a misunderstanding *Speak* resists rape myths that would attempt to remove the rapist’s responsibility. Insisting on Andy’s guilt and responsibility may reduce readers’ willingness to excuse other perpetrators’ behavior when encountered with situations like this in their own lives.

In addition to refusing to excuse Andy’s behavior, the narrative of *Speak* never blames Melinda for her victimization. Melinda never blames herself for what has happened to her. In an imagined dialog with daytime television talk-show hosts Oprah Winfrey and Sally Jessy, Melinda imagines that Oprah says to her, “You said no. He covered your mouth with his hand. You were thirteen years old. It doesn’t matter that you were drunk. Honey, you were raped. What a horrible, horrible thing for you to live though [sic]” (Anderson 163). Sally Jessy concurs by saying, “I want this boy held responsible. He is to blame for this attack [...] It was not your fault” (163). These imagined affirmations are important for the reader as well as Melinda’s psyche. It is in this moment that Melinda is able to process what has happened to her and call it rape, while still refusing to blame herself for Andy’s behavior. Likewise, once her schoolmates and parents find out about the rape, they never blame her or question her actions leading up to the rape. There are many rape myths that function to explain why the victim deserved what happened to them (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 137). Bourke writes that often rape myths claim that immorality of women is to blame for rape (74), and that any flirtation or risky behavior signals that the victim was compliant in their rape and therefore responsible (72). McMahon found that students often believed that women put themselves in bad situations by flirting, drinking, dressing provocatively and were therefore at least partially responsible for their rapes (5). And

Qi found that victims who were drinking at the time of their assault were found to be more responsible for their victimization than those who were sober (2, 11). *Speak* never conforms to these rape myths, which place the blame on the victim. None of the characters try to analyze Melinda's clothing choices, criticize her for being at a party and drinking, or attempt to tell her that she "should have known better" or that she "was asking for trouble." Instead, her schoolmates reaffirm her choice to speak out against her attacker. This narrative move to denounce the rapist and believe the victim is a significant shift away from the typical disbelief of the victim and excusal of the rapist that rape myths rely on and may influence young adult readers to do the same.

Beyond resistances to specific rape myths, *Speak* has other positive attributes that may help combat rape myths by questioning conservative gender norms and sexist culture and affirming the validity of female power and experience. Melinda's humor and sarcasm often has a feminist sensibility. She is often aware of the sexism and gendered double standards that exist in her school environment. She learns early in the school year that female students avoid the janitors' closet because the janitors stare and whistle at them as they walk by (26). When studying Picasso in art class, she thinks to herself "Picasso sure had a thing for naked women. Why not draw them with their clothes on? Who sits around without a shirt on plucking a mandolin? Why not draw naked guys, just to be fair? Naked women is art, naked guys a no-no, I bet. Probably because most painters are men" (118-19). Melinda's observations do not end at simply noticing a discrepancy. She actively reasons through why these gendered standards exist. Roberta Trites writes in *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*, that feminist characters in novels for young readers "[use] introspection to overcome her oppression and almost always overcomes at least part of what is oppressing her" (3). Further, Trites writes

that feminist protagonists reject stereotypical gender roles and have an active role in saving themselves (24). Melinda exhibits all of these characteristics. She constantly questions her experience and uses introspection to overcome her trauma.

Melinda's humor and candor when questioning the sexism in the world around her is a simple way to introduce young readers to feminism. Melinda wonders during her English class whether Hester Prynne "tried to say no" in *The Scarlet Letter* (101)². This is a very mature leap in understanding as compared to her classmates. Melinda understands that within rape culture women's choice in matters of sex/rape do not matter as much as their supposed "purity." Another lesson in basic feminism comes from the mouth of Melinda's lab partner, David Petrakis. When Melinda chooses to do a report on the suffragettes, Mr. Neck, the social studies teacher who is described as aggressive, hot-tempered, and unreasonable, decides to amend the assignment to include an oral component only after Melinda turns the report in (154). Because of her inability to speak, not to mention the vulnerability that comes from speaking in front of a class and the fact that the assignment was changed specifically because of her, Melinda tries to find a way to not give her report aloud (156). David Petrakis supports her decision to boycott reading her report aloud, but later tells Melinda, "But you got it wrong. The suffragettes were all about speaking up, screaming for their rights. You can't speak up for your right to be silent. That's letting the bad guys win. If the suffragettes did that, women wouldn't be able to vote yet" (159). David is in this moment affirming not only the feminist movement and women in general as powerful actors in history, but also affirming Melinda's personal power in writing her own

² The choice of using *The Scarlet Letter* in Melinda's English class is not only significant because of its sexual content matter, it is also significant because this is a commonly used text in High School English classrooms. By choosing *The Scarlet Letter*, Anderson is hoping that the reader will engage with this widely read text in a deeper way and question the sexism in Puritan Era America.

history. This is a very smart and purposeful move by Anderson. By contrasting kind, smart, respectful David Petrakis with aggressive, “predator” (5) Mr. Neck and repeat rapist Andy, *Speak* shows the difference between hegemonic masculinity and positive masculinity³. *Speak* shows that young men do not have to ascribe to violent masculinities, but can choose to be kind, respectful, and question the status quo.

Likewise, *Speak* shows that young women do not need to accept rape or sexual assault as the status quo. The narrative of *Speak* recognizes the power that young women both individually and collectively hold to effect change. This is represented most clearly in three scenes: the writing on the bathroom wall; Melinda’s confrontation with Rachel; and the climactic scene in which Andy attempts to violate Melinda for a second time but where she is able to fight him off and regain her voice. Toward the end of the novel, Melinda becomes fearful for her former best friend Rachel, who is going out with Andy. Melinda doesn’t want Rachel to suffer in the same way that she has even though Rachel has been cruel to her all year (149). In an attempt to warn Rachel and other female students about Andy, Melinda writes in permanent marker on the bathroom stall “Guys to stay away from” and writes “Andy Evans” directly beneath (175). Other characters note throughout the text that Andy has a reputation for “getting what he wants” (90, 172, 175), but this is the first instance in which Melinda publically, albeit anonymously, joins in on this conversation. Later, Melinda is elated to find that other young girls have responded to her writing saying: “He’s a creep,” “He’s a bastard,” “Stay Away!!” “he should be locked up,” “he thinks he’s all that,” “call the cops,” “[...]I went out with him to the movies—he tried to get his hands down my pants during the PREVIEWS!!” (185). This moment is a powerful discovery for both Melinda and the reader. Andy is revealed as a repeat

³ For discussions of how positive masculinities can help fight rape culture see: Filipovic 26, Brownmiller 391, and Bourke 436-37.

sexual offender who continues to victimize young girls. The text does not give any indication if any of the girls who wrote on the wall were raped, like Melinda, or if any of them took any action after his unwanted actions. It is assumed that sexual offenders continue to victimize women until they are caught and brought to justice. By highlighting the fact that Melinda's rape is not an isolated incident, the text signals to the reader that without the voice of young women calling for retribution and justice from a perpetrator, like Andy, other women will continue to be violated. By emphasizing the strength of the collective female voice, young female readers can be empowered to stand up for themselves and their peers. Melinda is no longer alone, forced to suffer in silence. Melinda and these other writers refuse to accept that Andy's behavior is normal or acceptable. They are speaking out, in unison, against cultural values that suggest that young men can take advantage of young women without recourse. These young female voices tell the reader and Melinda that change is possible with the help of other women and that no woman has to accept sexual violation.

It seems however, that anonymous accusations against Andy Evans are not enough to deter Melinda's previous best friend Rachel from dating him. Though the text does not indicate whether Rachel has seen the writing on the bathroom stalls, Rachel does receive and read an anonymous note from Melinda (183). This may be an indication that anonymous accusations are easily discredited by the "she lied" rape myth. Without knowing the identity, the humanity, of an accuser, it is easy to believe a perpetrator's excuse of "she lied," but, as Bourke writes, seeing the real suffering personhood of a victim can unsow the disbelief caused by rape myths (24). When Melinda's anonymous note warning Rachel to stay away from Andy is ignored (152) and Rachel decides to go to the prom with Andy (176), Melinda decides that she has to tell Rachel what happened over the summer so that Rachel won't be raped as well (180). Melinda sits with

Rachel in the library and attempts to talk to her about Andy, even though Rachel tries to ignore her. They write notes to each other to avoid getting in trouble with the librarian. Melinda discloses to Rachel: “I called [...] [the police] because some guy raped me. Under the trees. I didn’t know what to do. [...] he hurt—I scribbled that out—raped me” (183). At first, Rachel is sympathetic, even though they haven’t spoken in months: “Oh my God, I am so sorry, she writes. Why didn’t you tell me?” Melinda begins to cry: “I couldn’t tell anybody.” Rachel continues to ask questions: “WHO DID IT???” Melinda does not hesitate: “Andy Evans.” To which Rachel stands up and shouts “Liar! I can’t believe you. You’re jealous. You’re a twisted little freak and you’re jealous that I’m popular and I’m going to the prom and so you lie to me like this. And you sent me that note, didn’t you? You are so sick” (183). Rachel in this moment adheres to the rape myths of “she lied” and “women accuse men of rape to get back at them.” This betrayal from Rachel is sharp for Melinda and for the reader because the reader knows that Melinda is not lying and indeed has good intentions in disclosing her rape. For this brief moment, the reader gets a glimpse of what it feels like to be disbelieved. And though it seems that Melinda’s attempt has been in vain, Rachel breaks up with Andy at the prom after confronting him about raping Melinda (191). This is another affirmation of the power of solidarity for young women. Rachel could have chosen to ignore Melinda and stay with Andy in order to be popular, but instead she chose to align herself with women and not be silent about Andy’s violation of her peers. The message is that if more women would stand with women by refusing to believe rape myths, this could evoke real change in our society. Anderson is also, in this moment, urging female readers not to accept behavior like Andy’s from potential boyfriends. Melinda and Rachel are both role models for young readers to stand up against rape myths and to stand in solidarity with victims of rape and sexual assault.

Melinda is elated at the support she begins to feel after Rachel dumps Andy and after she discovers the writing on the bathroom wall that she begins to feel that she “[doesn’t] have to hide anymore” (192). She cleans out the janitor’s closet that she has been using as a hide-away nook, thinking to herself that she does not need it anymore, when Andy finds her. He locks himself inside with Melinda saying, “Rachel blew me off at the Prom, giving me some bullshit story about how I raped you” (193). He immediately deflects the accusation with rape myths that excuse his behavior: “You know that’s a lie. I never raped anybody. I don’t have to. You wanted it just as bad as I did. But your feelings got hurt, so you started spreading lies, and now every girl in school is talking about me like I’m some kind of pervert. You’ve been spreading that bullshit story for weeks. What’s wrong, ugly, you jealous? Can’t get a date?” (193) In this speech, Andy quickly cycles through the rape myths “she lied,” “every woman wants to be raped,” and “women accuse men to get back at them.” Andy is attempting to erase Melinda’s experience by using these rape myths to discredit her. Andy then tries to rape Melinda again, but in the struggle she finds a piece of broken mirror and holds it to Andy’s neck with the words, “I said no” (195). The noise of the scuffle draws attention to the closet and the girls’ lacrosse team finds them and brings help. Andy’s attempts to reinforce rape culture and rape myths that are in his favor are literally and symbolically derailed when Melinda is able to defend herself and find her voice. She finds her voice and her strength to reject Andy’s violation and his rape myths. In this way, the readers are asked to reject rape myth as well. The reader knows, via experiencing the rape through Melinda, that Andy is trying to force Melinda into silence once again. So too, the reader is asked to reject the lies that attempt to keep rape victims silent and confirm the strength of women to change the future.

In knowing and feeling a bond with Melinda, the reader is affected more deeply by her experience. The reader rejoices at Melinda's triumphs, like when she stands up to Heather who had previously been using her (176) or as she excels at art, but also feels more sharply Melinda's pain. The reader vicariously experiences Melinda's trauma as she attempts to heal from her rape. This is a vital component in building empathy for rape victims and thereby reducing rape-myth acceptance. Experiencing the impact of rape on a victim through Melinda helps to align the reader with the victim, and inspires the reader to confront their preconceived notions of rapist/victim. Understanding the trauma and suffering of a rape victim by vicariously experiencing Melinda's struggles begs the reader to reevaluate the misconception that rape is not a serious affront to the victim. This narrative in many ways resists rape myth and rape culture by creating empathy with a rape victim and by affirming women's voices.

In the final pages of the novel, Melinda muses, "IT happened. There is no avoiding it, no forgetting. No running away, or flying, or burying, or hiding. Andy Evans raped me in August [...] It wasn't my fault. He hurt me. It wasn't my fault. And I'm not going to let it kill me. I can grow" (198). This is not simply a moment of transcendence for Melinda. It is also a call to action for readers. There is no use in ignoring the past. One in five women in America have been raped in their lifetime and more will continue to be victimized unless something changes. These final moments in such a powerful narrative call for readers to make change in the future, to reject rape myth and to no longer accept the behavior of rapists as normal. *Speak* is a ground-breaking and important novel in the fight against rape culture. Future authors that seek to continue the important cultural work of reducing rape-myth acceptance in young adult readers can learn from the successes of *Speak* in calling for cultural change.

CRANK AND RESISTANCE OF RAPE MYTHS

I have argued in the previous two sections that introducing young people to fiction that depicts rape and its aftermath, and also resists rape myth can be a more efficient strategy for reducing rape-myth acceptance in young people than traditional, lecture-based prevention programs. I continue to argue this point in the following section. Fiction can be effective in reducing rape myth because it can allow the reader to empathize with a fictional victim, gain a sense of “knowing” a victim by creating a bond between character and reader, and vicariously experience what a victim experiences. The young adult novel *CRANK* by Ellen Hopkins is a novel that could offer such experiences because of the intense, first-person descriptions of rape, and its trauma, by narrator Kristina.

CRANK is used by librarians, teachers, and counselors to begin discussions about difficult topics, such as drug use, addiction, and rape, in the hopes that young people who read *CRANK* will be better equipped to face choices about drugs they may be confronted with as they age out of high school (Hill). Ellen Hopkins has said in interviews that she hopes that *CRANK* speaks to and instructs readers about the dangers of drugs (Hill). Very little has been written critically about *CRANK* to date, though it has been well received by popular news media, such as the *New York Times*, which has lauded the novel for its accessible perspective on the dangers of crystal meth. This relative critical silence is an important opportunity to analyze the ways in which this novel perhaps does more harm than good. A close reading of the text reveals that *CRANK* resists some rape myths, including “rape is not a serious problem,” and “all women want to be raped,” as well as refuses to excuse the rapist’s behavior. *CRANK* also has some positive attributes that may aid in reducing rape-myth acceptance and victim blaming, such as providing a main character with significant agency, who expresses her sexual desires and acts on them.

Unfortunately, *CRANK* conforms to several rape myths that blame the victim, such as “she should have known better,” “she was asking for it,” and blaming her for using drugs before the rape. While this novel has significant value for introducing young adult readers to the dangers of meth, future works that seek to combat rape may use the affirmations and criticisms of *CRANK* to strengthen their messages for young adult audiences. In the following chapter, I outline the ways in which the narrative of *CRANK* resists rape myth and also promotes positive female identity.

CRANK (2004 McElderry) is the *New York Times* Bestselling Novel by Ellen Hopkins about seventeen-year-old Kristina Snow’s addiction to crystal meth. Kristina begins the novel, which is written in visually artistic, first-person free verse, as a well-behaved, high achieving, loving, but slightly ignored, daughter who spends the summer with her estranged father. During this summer she dons the persona of Bree, who is the opposite of what Kristina is at home: “obscene,” “loud,” and “not quite sane” (Hopkins 5). Through Bree, Kristina has the courage to act out her inner desires, which she had previously been too shy and tentative to consider. She meets and dates a boy named Adam who introduces her to not only the dating “game” but also to crystal meth. From that moment on, Kristina/Bree spends most of the novel high. Kristina/Bree is not only struggling with addiction, but also struggles with relationships with her father and mother, and seeks affection and attention from boys, all of whom also use meth/crank. Following her desires for meth and physical affection leads Kristina/Bree into frightening situations. During the course of the novel she is nearly assaulted by three strangers while walking home, and is the victim of rape by Brendan, one of the boys who she is seeing. After the rape, the speed of Kristina/Bree’s self-destruction increases: instead of simply snorting meth, she starts to smoke and shoot it intravenously; she steals her mother’s credit card to pay for more drugs; she tries

ecstasy and blood letting; and she ends up in Juvenile Detention where she makes connections with a meth cook and begins dealing. Toward the end of the novel, Kristina/Bree finds out she is pregnant as a result of her rape and she tries to stop doing drugs. Ultimately, she is unsuccessful. At the close of the novel, disappointed by motherhood and still addicted, Kristina/Bree leaves her child in search of meth.

There are several rape myths that are resisted within the text, two of which are that “rape is not a serious affront to the victim” (Bourke 43) and “if you’re going to be raped, you might as well enjoy it” (Brownmiller 311). These myths are resisted in the descriptive words chosen by Hopkins to narrate Kristina/Bree’s rape. The pacing and word choice describing the event communicates to the reader the real pain and trauma of rape. The words “tore” (341), “bites,” “bruises,” “pain rippled,” “shredded” (342), “terror,” “pushed,” “tear,” and “bloody” (343) are all visceral words that brings out the corporeality of what is happening to Kristina/Bree. Hopkins refuses to gloss over the act of rape, or talk about it in an abstract way; rather, the words chosen are meant to have a distinct effect on the reader and to emphasize the reality of what rape is for victims. Like *Speak*, *CRANK* refuses to soften this scene to make it romantic or exciting for Kristina/Bree. She does not swoon, or “give in” after the action begins. Kristina/Bree “[...] laid there, sobbing, as he worked / and sweated over me. Stoked by the / monster, it took him a long time to finish” (342). The narrative’s refusal of ambiguity in what happened in these moments causes the reader to confront the pain and agony of sexual assault. There is no room for confusion about the way Kristina/Bree feels about this event: she did not enjoy it, she did not want it, and it did really happen. In this way, *CRANK* resists multiple rape myths that attempt to erase victims’ experiences and communicates to young adult readers that rape is a painful,

traumatic violation. By emphasizing the reality of rape to young adult readers, readers may be more likely to resist rape myths and believe victims of rape and sexual assault.

The reader is further convinced that what happened to Kristina/Bree is strictly a violation by her immediate reactions to the event and her calling her assault rape instantly and without wavering. Following her assault, Kristina/Bree refuses Brendan's flippant nature. She "didn't dare look him in the eye" (Hopkins 343) and when Brendan tries to force her into brushing off the incident by saying, "What the hell / is the matter, Bree?", Kristina/Bree shuts Brendan off from her true self, stating "My name is Kristina" (343). In this moment, Kristina/Bree closes her essential self—Bree—and denies Brendan access to that part of her identity. This is an important move not only in reasserting her agency in these moments after she has been violated, but also in reinforcing to the audience that this is an unforgivable violation, one that irreversibly changes the relationship between perpetrator and victim. Kristina/Bree also asserts her agency by naming what has happened to her rape. She uses the word rape multiple times, in a letter to Adam (352), when she tells Chase what has happened (359), when she confronts Brendan at the airshow (401), and when she contemplates telling her mother that she is pregnant (502). In this way, Kristina/Bree places the blame of the assault on Brendan and removes herself from responsibility. Rather than excusing Brendan's behavior or suggesting that something she did caused this violation to be something other than rape (for example "bad sex" or a "misunderstanding" Jervis 163), Kristina/Bree proclaims that she was raped and that Brendan is a rapist.

Refusing to excuse Brendan's behavior is an important counter to rape myths. *CRANK* reinforces Brendan's responsibility for his actions when he refuses Kristina/Bree's verbal non-consent more than once. The narrative makes Kristina/Bree's non-consent and Brendan's

dismissal of it clear. Kristina/Bree asks Brendan to “Wait,” but he responds, “I’ve waited for weeks. / Put up and shut up” (Hopkins 341). She attempts again, “Brendan, please stop.” He refuses again, “No. You promised, / you damn little tease.” Her final indication of verbal non-consent is a threat, “I’ll scream,” but Brendan still does not stop, “Go ahead. No one can hear / [...] Still, as I opened my mouth, his / hand slapped down over it. Those / sublime muscles hardened” (341). Brendan’s recognition of Kristina/Bree’s non-consent is important in indicating to the reader that his behavior does not stem from misinterpretation or a mistake in understanding. In this way, Brendan’s behavior cannot be excused, as often is the case in date rape scenarios. Celia Kitzinger and Hannah Frith argue that date or acquaintance rape does not occur because of the way that women refuse sex—such as not saying the actual word “no” loudly and immediately—but in how men receive refusals (310). Kitzinger and Frith argue that it is not that men misunderstand “no” but that they do not like being refused. They conclude that sexual coercion cannot be fixed by changing the way women refuse (such as in “just say no” campaigns) and that “men’s self-interested capacity for ‘misunderstanding’ will always outstrip women’s earnest attempts to clarify and explain” (311). Brendan’s behavior in refusing to assent to Kristina/Bree’s “no” reinforces that the burden of rape lies on the perpetrator rather than the victim.

Another way that *CRANK* resists rape myths, as well as refusing to excuse the perpetrator, is by including other stories of sexual assault within the narrative. These inclusions resist the rape myth that “rape is not a problem” (McMahon 7). On the night that Kristina/Bree tries meth for the first time, three strangers corner her in an alley as she tries to walk home (111). Kristina/Bree notes that her intoxication “was license enough” to assault her as “Hands / covered [her] mouth, / rough, / held [her] arms, / strong, / ripped [her] clothes, / vicious” (114). Though

she does not experience a completed rape in this moment, it is clear that she has been affected by this assault as she collapses into tears in Adam's arms (118).

Kristina/Bree's friend Robyn is also a rape victim. Robyn recounts her experience in response to Kristina/Bree's disclosure of her own rape. Robyn explains that an adult, male stranger, who drove her out of town and got her high, raped her (402). She says "And after he started, he got mean. / He did things to me—terrible things, I've still got the scars— / things no sane person would ever do. Of course, / he wasn't exactly sane. / Afterward, neither was I" (403). Though Robyn's story is brief, it is in this way, by including more than one narration of sexual assault, that the novel illustrates the epidemic nature of rape for young women.

The novel refuses to designate rape to a single instance perpetrated by a single male who had couldn't "control their urges" (Filipovic 20). The insistence that rape is a widespread, ever-present problem refutes the incorrect notion that rape is not a serious problem that does not represent a real threat to women. Additionally, Brendan's characterization resists the rape myth that rape is only committed by strangers who jump out from the shadows (Bourke 41). Brendan is described as gorgeous (Hopkins 306), he is a lifeguard (249), and he impresses Kristina/Bree's mother when he picks Kristina/Bree up for a date (339). Brendan is not the stereotypical pervert who is mentally ill and socially inept. He is not the criminal lurking in the shadows. He is a seemingly regular guy, and in this way Brendan's depiction in the novel resists the rape myth that only perverted strangers commit rape and that regular guys are not capable of rape (Bourke 41). This also suggests to readers that victims should be believed when they accuse seemingly "regular guys," such as their boyfriends, friends, or neighbors, of assaulting them. Rape myths, like these, that suggest only violent strangers commit rape silence over half of the rapes committed (CDC 1).

The final rape myth that *CRANK* resists is the myth that victims cannot get pregnant from rape and that if they do, it was not truly rape (Bourke 54). By Kristina/Bree discovering that she is pregnant (Hopkins 480), and realizing that Brendan is the father (491), the rape myth that women cannot get pregnant from rape is opposed. However, Kristina/Bree spends little time reflecting on the fact that the child is a product of rape. Kristina/Bree's thoughts about the child do not analyze its creation or the responsibility of its existence. This could have been a moment of profound introspection for Kristina/Bree and the reader about the difficulties of having a child that is a product of rape and the ways that rape continues to affect victims long after their attack. This is a complicated and possibly contradictory move by Hopkins when analyzing it in terms of rape-myth acceptance. By including the pregnancy as a result of Kristina/Bree's rape the narrative of *CRANK* refutes the myth that rape cannot result in pregnancy. However, by choosing to have Kristina/Bree keep the baby, Hopkins is forcing the burden of responsibility for the child's life on Kristina/Bree with no investigation of the responsibility of Brendan (or his potential rights as a father, which could be used to further victimize Kristina/Bree). The messages regarding this particular rape myth are not especially clear for young adult readers.

Much like the complicated and contradictory way that *CRANK* deals with pregnancy as a result of rape, *CRANK* is fraught with contradictory elements which both affirm and deny positive female identity. The effect of these contradictory elements could potentially leave young adult readers confused about whether Kristina/Bree is a "good" character and whether she is to blame for her painful experiences. In some ways, *CRANK* has the potential to be considered a feminist Young Adult novel. Trites argues that feminist children's novels share several defining characteristics, including resistance of stereotypical gender roles and the protagonist's level of agency and voice. According to Trites, feminist protagonists in fiction for young readers assert

their agency to choose for themselves their personalities and how they behave, apart from their parents' wishes (7). Kristina/Bree establishes herself as someone different from who she was as a child, someone apart from her mother's wishes as evidenced by her assumed name of Bree instead of Kristina. From the beginning, Kristina designates her previous self as a "good girl" (Hopkins 8), "gifted" (5) and "perfect" (5). In her recognition of Bree, the personification of her inner desires, Kristina rejects what others believe she should be in favor of making her own decisions. The problem with these designations is that if her previous self, Kristina, was good, gifted, and perfect, she is implying that her current self, Bree, is someone who is not good, not gifted, and not perfect. In this moment of transition, Kristina/Bree both affirms herself as able to decide who she is going to be, but depreciates this very choice by suggesting that who she chooses is less than who she was. When Kristina/Bree returns home from visiting her father, she recognizes that she has thoroughly and irreversibly changed. She thinks to herself, "I [...] / didn't [...] / belong [...] / to [...] / my [...] / mom [...] / anymore" (293/94). By recognizing her individuality, Kristina/Bree both reinforces her sense of agency and depreciates her worth as a young woman. Again, these contradictory messages may leave readers questioning whether it is better to attempt to choose their own identities or to remain in rigid, traditionally accepted roles.

The act of calling herself Bree is significant in terms of the feminist potential of the novel. Trites argues that in naming themselves, protagonists gain a subject position and agency (31). Kristina's act of naming herself Bree gives her the control over her life as an adult subject that she lacked before the narrative began. However, Kristina/Bree proves herself to be entirely unable to handle her life as she becomes addicted to hard drugs. Kristina/Bree is confronted with the questions: "Who's Kristina?" (98), and "Who's Bree?" (202). For the characters who speak these questions, they are literal questions of what name belongs to whom, but for Kristina/Bree

the question is a matter of identity. Kristina/Bree must decide who is Kristina, who is Bree, and who she will choose to be. Kristina/Bree says to Adam early in the novel “Kristina is who they made me. / Bree is who I choose to be. [...]” (162). She discovers “Bree was the essence of me.” (243). Kristina/Bree’s choice to become an individual who is driven by her inner desires without regard for what society expects from her, shows both development of her agency and a contradiction of that agency by her lack of good judgment.

More contradictory messages come in the form of Kristina/Bree’s sexuality. Kristina/Bree does have sexual desire and is not afraid to pursue it. This could be an affirmation of sexual desire as a component of women’s humanity (Perry 198), which should be embraced and freely expressed (Riggs 113; Filipovic 26). Throughout the narrative, Kristina/Bree’s inner monologue narrates her desire for Adam, Chase, and Brendan. Her desire begins early in the text with a simple kiss from Adam—“I wanted him to kiss me, / with every nerve, / every fiber, / every molecule / of my being” (76). But it isn’t long before she desires more. She embraces her inner compulsion to sexual engagement, thinking “I was ready to do it / oh, so ready. / right that very instant...” (163). She also verbally indicates her desire to Chase saying, “make love to me” (363), and “kiss me again” (272). Her recognition and verbal indications of her sexual desire are critical to promoting consent culture and combatting rape myth. Kristina/Bree’s ability to say “yes” gives readers an example of enthusiastic consent—the practice of individuals asking for sex when they want it, rather than simply not saying “no” (Filipovic 21). Kristina/Bree has real sexual desire, for more than one person, and she never feels ashamed for it. She is also never shamed by anyone else in the narrative for her desire, not by her parents, friends, or the boys she dates. Accepting female desire and sexual activity as a positive and natural part of being a woman is a significant step in combatting rape culture and rape myth. Cara Kulwicki writes in

“Real Sex Education” that, “*the genuine desire for sexual pleasure and the expression of that desire* should be an accepted standard” (310) rather than the current model of sex education that enforces shame and silence about women’s sexuality. Similarly Lee Jacobs Riggs, Jill Filipovic, and Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti, in separate articles, all argue that if our culture could accept and celebrate female sexuality in the same way that our culture caters to male sexuality that this climate would be inhospitable to rape. That if sexuality was understood as an essential part of everyone’s humanity and women were treated equally in sexual relationships, that women would not be raped by intimate partners. Kristina/Bree’s actions embrace this model of female sexuality as an essential element of personhood as also offers readers a positive sexual script that promotes affirmative consent.

However, the narrative of *CRANK* contradicts Kristina/Bree’s free sexuality by personifying Kristina’s desire as the subversive Bree who leads Kristina down the path of destruction. Kristina/Bree’s hunger for drugs and sex seem analogous as she seeks danger both in the form of “bad boys” Adam, Chase, and Brendan and in the form of drugs. She describes her desire as subversive, forbidden, and all consuming. By signifying Bree as the “essence” (Hopkins 243) of Kristina’s desires and by treating Bree as dangerous, Hopkins adheres to the cultural message that Lisa Jarvis argues blames women for their assaults, saying “the message is clear: Your sexual desire is dangerous. You can stifle it or you can be a slut who lives in fear and gets what she deserves” (167). By depicting Kristina/Bree’s sexual desires as dangerous, the narrative conforms to the rape myth that women who are promiscuous get what they deserve by being raped (Brownmiller 311; McMahon 4, 9; Bourke 406; Lonsway 137). *CRANK* further links the desire for sex with the desire for drugs by depicting Kristina/Bree as high every time she has sex. Once she has tried crank, sex and being high become inseparable. By associating the

dangerousness of hard drugs, like meth, with sex, the implied conclusion is that sex, for women specifically, is dangerous and will therefore lead to rape. Implying that female sexual desire is dangerous not only reinforces the rape myth that women who are promiscuous get what they deserve, but also functions to keep women scared and force them to police their own behavior.

Further contradicting Kristina/Bree's free sexuality, Hopkin's never allows Kristina/Bree to be the actor in her sexual experiences. In each of her relationships, with Adam, Chase, and Brendan, Kristina/Bree *wants* to engage sexually with them but is always passive and allows the boys to be the actors in the situation. Adam always initiates their contact (46-49, 72, 96, 167). Adam is the one to tell Kristina/Bree "touch me there" (96), and when Adam coerces Kristina/Bree into giving him a hand job she thinks to herself "Yes, just like that. / For him. / But what / about me?" (168). When with Chase, Kristina/Bree recounts how he "asked to / kiss / me, and I let him" (271). Similarly, Kristina/Bree uses the same language about Brendan—"I let him kiss me" (310). The choice of language in "I let him kiss me" as opposed to "we kissed" or "I kissed him" illustrates her passiveness. She is not the actor in these situations, nor are the two acting together, rather the boy acts upon her. Kristina/Bree is conforming to the traditional gender norms of sexual behavior. These same behaviors are what Filipovic argues must be changed. Filipovic writes, echoing other feminist writers, such as Adrienne Rich, and Monique Wittig, that female sexuality has culturally and historically been constructed as passive and male sexuality as aggressive (18). In this way, men are taught that sex is something that men "do to" women who are the gatekeepers and must attempt to stop male advances (18, 20). Sexual aggression, Filipovic states, is entrenched in male sexuality and males are taught to attempt to "get" sex from women who hold and embody it (19). By allowing this dynamic to continue, no amount of "suggestions" to women about how to protect themselves from rape will make any

difference (23). Filipovic argues that to see significant change in rape culture, culture must change the way it perceives gendered sexual behavior and teach positive sexualities to both men and women (26). She closes her article by suggesting that recognizing and celebrating free female sexuality in an equal relationship to male sexuality is going to make the most dramatic change in reducing rape. The narrative of *CRANK* designates Kristina/Bree to a traditional passive role when there was potential to make her an equal actor in her sexual experiences. By contradicting this example of free female sexuality by depicting unequal sexual relationships, *CRANK* does a disservice to readers who could be influenced by such narrative choices.

Because the narrative of *CRANK* designates Kristina/Bree's sexual desires to the realm of danger and risk, *CRANK* leads readers to blame Kristina/Bree for her victimization in the form of the rape myth "she should have known better." When Kristina/Bree hangs out alone with Brendan the first time, she thinks "His style was 'No is not an acceptable / answer' " (310). They kiss and Brendan tries to force her to have sex:

He started / to unbutton mine [shirt], silencing my protest. / Shhh. Don't say no. /
'I can't. I mean, I never...' Crank-enhanced / goosebumps lifted as he moved / his
hands gently across my skin. 'Stop.' / You know you want to. / 'I do, Brendan, I
really do. But I can't. / It's the wrong time of the month.' / I'd decked him. He
slapped back. / Then, why did you call? (310)

In this interaction, Brendan ignores her non-consent more than once and only stops when Kristina/Bree lies about menstruating. This foreshadowing, along with Kristina/Bree's estimation that Brendan would not take "no" for an answer is meant to indicate to the reader that Brendan will act this way again. Kristina/Bree also knows that should she see Brendan again that he will repeat his actions "Should I call Brendan? Set myself up? / Would I truly let him be first? / Was I

ready to lose the big V?” (335). She chooses to see him again, thinking, “Besides, I could always say ‘no.’ / Couldn’t I?” (339). By foreshadowing the rape in this way, the reader knows what is going to happen and feels helpless to stop it. This frustration predisposes the reader to adhering to the rape myth of “she should have known better” and blaming Kristina/Bree for putting herself in that situation. What may be difficult for the reader to tease out in this moment is that it does not matter whether Kristina/Bree expected Brendan to act the way he did. What does matter is that Brendan actively ignored Kristina/Bree’s nonconsent and raped her. By emphasizing Kristina/Bree’s knowledge of Brendan’s prior reputation and bad acts the narrative deemphasizes Brendan’s responsibility for his own behavior. By predisposing the reader to criticizing Kristina/Bree for her choices to go with Brendan, get high, kiss him etc., the narrative reinforces rape myths that blame the victim for their own victimization.

However, what the narrative does well is to provide the reader with an in-depth view of the devastation that comes in the wake of sexual victimization. Kristina/Bree’s experience of trauma after her rape is important for reducing rape-myth acceptance in readers. According to Sarah MacMahon knowing a victim of rape significantly lowers a person’s rape-myth acceptance and makes them more likely to interfere with rape accepting attitudes or in an instance of sexual assault (9). Because approximately one in five young women have been sexually assaulted in their lifetimes (CDC 1), it is likely that many young people know a victim of sexual assault. However, victims do not necessarily disclose their assault to the majority of their friends or family. Researchers Vaughn Rickert, *et al*, suggest that most rape victims only tell one individual, usually a close friend (19). Because of this, reading fiction through the eyes of a rape victim is especially beneficial. Bourke suggests that the only way to illuminate the falsehood of rape myths is to recognize the suffering of the human victim (24). Experiencing Kristina/Bree’s

inner struggle and pain as she attempts to recover from Brendan's violation can help to humanize victims of rape and reveal the true functions of rape myths to silence the victim, as Bourke suggests. Kristina/Bree's honest introspection on her experiences gives readers access to her experience of sexual assault. When Brendan drops Kristina/Bree back off at home, she is stunned and disgusted that Brendan shows "not a blink of remorse" (345) for what he has done.

Kristina/Bree "stared at Brendan, / trying to find some words— / any words—to express / the terror of those minutes, / the horror of his violations, / the humiliation at his benediction" (346).

Kristina/Bree is able to express via her inner monologue her feelings of betrayal, pain, and horror, in a way that is denied to most rape victims. Kristina/Bree wonders, "if I'd ever feel completely human again" (350) illustrating the deep change created by such a personal violation.

She feels as though she is irreversibly damaged as she relives the violation again and again (358). Kristina/Bree's addiction deepens in this time as she begins using meth daily.

Kristina/Bree's strengthening addiction and the inner descriptions of her pain communicate to readers the horrors of rape and allow them to vicariously experience her trauma.

CRANK's representation of rape and Kristina/Bree's trauma following the rape resist several rape myths, including "all women want to be raped," "rape is not a serious problem," "rape is committed by violent strangers," and "women cannot get pregnant from rape." However, *CRANK* offers contradictory messages that both affirm and deny female agency and sexuality. Kristina/Bree is a potentially feminist protagonist who asserts her agency and exhibits real sexual desire, but the narrative of *CRANK* negates both her agency in showing her as never in control of her life and unable to make sound decisions, and her sexuality by depicting her sexuality as subversive and denying her equal recognition in her sexual experiences. These contradictory messages may leave readers questioning whether Kristina/Bree's choices and actions were

responsible for her victimization and may lead readers to blame her for the rape. *CRANK* is effective in allowing the reader to vicariously experience rape. By experiencing rape through the eyes of the narrator readers may build sympathy for real victims and become less likely to accept rape myths or engage in victim blaming. *CRANK* does successfully present rape as real, pervasive, and devastating for victims. However, in many ways, *CRANK* presents a narrative consistent with rape myth and leaves Kristina/Bree open to victim blaming. Because *CRANK* leads readers to blame Kristina/Bree (or her drug use) for the rape, young adult readers will not be inspired to reflect on the seriousness of rape in our culture. By blaming Kristina/Bree, the reader is left feeling dissatisfied with her choices, rather than questioning what can be done so that this atrocity never happens again. This is a distinct difference between *CRANK* and *Speak* in that *CRANK* does not leave the reader with a moment of transcendence or a call to action. Future authors that wish to reduce rape-myth acceptance in young adult readers through their fiction may consider the ways in which *CRANK* potentially reinforces more rape myths than it resists.

SIMILARITIES IN HOW *SPEAK* AND *CRANK* REINFORCE RAPE MYTHS

Chapters one and two discussed the ways in which *Speak* and *CRANK* resist rape myths and present female agency and sexuality. However, as argued previously, both novels conform to some rape myths and ultimately fail to reduce rape-myth acceptance in many ways by reinforcing victim blaming. Here I analyze the ways that the two novels conform to rape myths and the ways in which the narratives perpetuate victim blaming. The similarities between the depictions of rape in *Speak* and *CRANK* may illuminate which rape myths are more deeply held and which are more summarily dismissed. There are several similar affirmations of rape myths in the two novels, including that “real” victims of rape are virgins when they are raped, that rape is always violent and involves force; and that victims who drink or do drugs are partially responsible for their assaults. The inclusion of these myths may silence real rape victims’ experiences by reinforcing mistaken ideas about what constitutes a “true” rape.

In *Speak* and *CRANK* the main characters, Melinda and Kristina/Bree respectively, are both virgins⁴ when they are raped. While this could possibly be an accurate depiction of rape for young women of this age group, this is a subtle affirmation of the rape myth that only virgins can experience “true” rape (Valenti 300). This rape myth stems from the belief that those who have previously consented (either with the perpetrator or those who are simply not virgins) cannot refuse consent at a later moment (Bourke 42). This is a complex rape myth that is couched in the

⁴ The concept of virginity is a socially created state of being that does not have a biological basis. Meaning: the intact-hymen, which has long been understood as the anatomical signifier of never having sex before, does not actually prove or disprove whether a woman has had sex before. The concept of virginity is especially fraught when one considers that there is no male equivalent and that any non-penis-in-vagina sexual intercourse does not equally affect the hymen, and therefore does not hold the same meaning. Nevertheless, I use the term virginity, recognizing its contestable validity, for its cultural meaning of never having had sex before and because the narrative of *CRANK* uses the term.

belief that a woman's worth is tied to her sexual purity (Valenti 299). This belief suggests that once a woman is no longer a virgin, the woman is "spoiled" and it does not matter what happens to her sexually (Bourke 80). Historically, this meant that the rape of a virgin was a theft from the woman's father because he could not marry off a non-virgin to a dowry-paying suitor. As time has gone on, the meaning has slightly changed to indicate that a virgin is a "good" woman morally, whereas a non-virgin is a "bad" woman and immoral. As such, virginity is culturally weighted as a "gift" of purity and cleanliness that can never be taken back (Valenti 299).

Kristina/Bree expresses this idea when she thinks "[...] the gift he had / stolen, the one I should have given / and never could again. [...]" (Hopkins 345). Kristina/Bree's belief that her virginity has innate worth and that without it she is depleted of something sacred reinforces the belief that a woman's virginity is the ultimate signifier of her worth and morality (Filipovic 16, Valenti "Purely" 299). Jessica Valenti argues in "Purely Rape: The Myth of Sexual Purity and How it Reinforces Rape Culture" that "The purity myth—the lie that sexuality defines how 'good' women are, and that women's moral compasses are inextricable from their bodies—is an integral part of rape culture" (299). This belief that women's morality is inextricably linked to her sexual "purity" often allows individuals to excuse violence against women who deviate from codes of conservative sexuality and blame her for bringing violence upon herself. Valenti argues, echoing other feminist scholars, like Brownmiller, Bourke, and Buchwald, that once a woman is no longer a virgin, not only does society not care what happens to her, but also uses her sexual history to excuse rape and violence committed against her (300-01). This rape myth renders astronomical numbers of rapes invisible and excusable. By subtly conforming to this ideal of the virgin rape victim, *Speak* and *CRANK* unwittingly silence the voices of many rape victims and perpetuate the belief that one must be a virgin to have experienced a "true" rape.

Another similarity that both *Speak* and *CRANK* share is that both novels describe Andy's rape of Melinda and Brendan's rape of Kristina/Bree as requiring physical force to be completed. Both Melinda and Kristina/Bree describe being held down and having their rapists' hands held over their mouths to silence their screams. While this description has a metaphoric quality, by recognizing that rape silences women's agency, voice, and control over their own lives and bodies, this also ignores that many rapes do not occur as a result of physical force or violence—13% of rapes are completed by verbal coercion and another 8% are facilitated by drugs and alcohol, according to the CDC (18). The nearly instantaneous action of the rapes in *Speak* and *CRANK* glances over the amount of verbal coercion that is typical in date-rape situations. Jill Filipovic writes that current cultural instruction on sex trains young men to think that “no” is merely a pretense and that they must push to “get” sex from young women (20). Brad Perry and Cara Kulwicki agree that all too often “no” for young men means, “try harder” (Perry 202) and that sex is often something attained through coercion rather than freely given (Kulwicki 309). Further, the inclusion of physical force in these descriptions conforms to the myth that rape must include physical force or violence to be rape (Bourke 41). The underlying belief here is that if there are no wounds or physical signs of struggle that the woman accusing the man must have actually wanted sex. This subtle affirmation of the rape myth that rapes are instances of extreme violence only, may make it difficult for readers to believe victims who do not experience forcible assault or victims who do not fight back or struggle as the main characters, Melinda and Kristina/Bree, attempt to do.

Perhaps the most significant similarity between the two novels is that both Melinda and Kristina/Bree are raped while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The CDC estimates that drugs or alcohol contribute to a 8% of rapes (18) and that of these drug or alcohol related raped,

more than 50% of these rapes were committed by an acquaintance and 43% by an intimate partner (21). Rape myths regarding drug or alcohol intoxication illustrates the gendered double-standard that is used to excuse the rapist as not responsible for his actions and to blame the victim for their choice to drink or get high (Qi 2). In *Speak*, Melinda does not describe Andy's state of mind, though she does say that he smells like beer, so the reader cannot know for certain if Andy is drunk. However, Melinda does tell the reader that she had three beers (134) and describes being slightly intoxicated. Later, when disclosing the rape to Rachel, she admits to being drunk (183). This is the only moment in the narrative that Melinda places blame on herself. She conforms to victim blaming beliefs in suggesting that her drinking played a role in her assault. Though Melinda says at other moments in the narrative that the assault was not her fault, by conforming to the rape myth that women who drink are at least partially responsible for their assault (Burt 57; Qi 10) she reinforces its validity. Blaming herself in this moment suggests to the reader that perhaps Melinda would not have been raped had she chosen not to drink, or that perhaps she would not have been raped had she not chosen to go to the party, or not chosen to go into the woods, etc. This string of "what if" thinking ignores the responsibility of the rapist for his actions. "What if" thinking also allows the believer of these particular rape myths to falsely assume that if they do not make "risky" choices, such as drinking, they will be safe from sexual assault. This is a major function of victim blaming rape myths, to reaffirm the imperviousness of those who are "good" and do not make the "bad" choices that lead to rape (flirting, wearing revealing clothing, drinking, etc.) (Bourke 73, 401; Lonsway 136-37). Victim blaming rape myths also ignore the seriousness of rape by suggesting that the victim's actions led to their assault and that a different choice in actions would have prevented said assault (Lonsway 137). Though Melinda does not attempt to excuse Andy's behavior, the focus on her drinking rather

than on his responsibility for his actions, creates a similar effect as if she would have excused him.

In a similar way, Kristina/Bree reinforces the rape myth that young women who drink, or in her instance, get high, are responsible for their assaults. When reflecting on the rape toward the end of the novel, Kristina/Bree thinks “[...] I was raped because I would have done / *anything* / for just one more taste of the monster?” (Hopkins 502). By blaming herself and her addiction for the rape, she draws a very clear line of conclusion for the reader. Again, this leads the reader to think if she had not gone with Brendan, or if she had not gotten high she would not have been raped. Much like *Speak*, *CRANK* in this instance places the blame on Kristina/Bree for her choices to engage in “risky” behavior and ignores the responsibility of the rapist for his actions (Friedman 314). Also, like Melinda, Kristina/Bree never tries to forgive or excuse Brendan’s actions because he was high on meth, but by blaming herself and her actions the effect is the same as if she had excused him.

The overall effect of having both rape narratives occur while the protagonists are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, in addition to reinforcing the rape myth that women who drink (or do drugs) are at least partially responsible for their actions, is that it communicates to the reader that young women need to police their behavior to avoid rape. Jaclyn Friedman argues, “rape is *not* a risk inherent in unregulated partying” (314) and that culture needs to stop asking women to act out of fear. Friedman goes on to say that “when you force women to choose safety over pleasure in ways men never have to (and when you shame them for choosing ‘wrong’), you teach women that their pleasure is not as important as men’s” (315). Valuing men’s pleasure over women’s and policing women’s behavior rather than men’s again places the responsibility of sexual assault on the woman *and* ignores that even women who are “good” and do not engage

in the behaviors prohibited by rape myth are raped. Friedman suggests that rather than blaming and shaming victims of sexual assault society must hold men responsible for their drinking and their actions (316). This is a way in which both *Speak* and *CRANK* fail to support victims of sexual assault. By presenting both rapes (and the tertiary assaults in *CRANK*) as a result of drugs and alcohol the narrative reinforces victim blaming rape myths and encourages the reader to question the main characters' actions, rather than question the conduct of the rapists.

Another significant similarity between *CRANK* and *Speak* is that neither novel offers any legal (or school-related) retribution for the perpetrators. This similarity is not directly related to rape myths, for there is no rape myth that says that men are punished for raping women. In fact, it is quite the opposite. While both Melinda and Kristina/Bree are firm in their convictions of Andy and Brendan's guilt, neither *Speak* nor *CRANK* offers any real consequences for the perpetrators. These aspects of the respective plots are unfortunately realistic. It is estimated that only one out of every six rapes are reported to the police (Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 8). Only one out of five rape cases go to trial, and of those less than 6% are convicted (Bourke 397). It is also estimated that only 1% of convicted rapists serve more than one year in prison and that 25% of convicted rapists are not sentenced to prison at all, but instead released on probation (9). While the lack of punishment for Andy and Brendan is accurate when considering the statistics regarding reporting and convictions, the narratives fail to offer any reflection on this tragedy. Neither narrative offers any significant justice for the victims, nor do the narratives offer any punishment or sense of responsibility for the rapist. In *Speak*, Melinda gains some retribution for her rape in the form of her regained reputation and her ability to speak at the end of the novel. Melinda's triumph over Andy during their struggle in the janitor's closet, and the surreptitious arrival of the lacrosse team to witness said triumph, does offer a sense of catharsis for both

Melinda and the reader. However, this is an unrealistic portrayal of what the average victim may experience and may give readers a sense of false hope about what our current justice system actually accomplishes on behalf of victims. There is no mention of any sanction Andy may face, and there is no reflection on this injustice. Andy finishes the novel seemingly “caught in the act” and yet he is not suspended, expelled, arrested, charged in court, or otherwise. While one could perhaps imagine that this happens somewhere outside the narrative, Anderson’s choice to exclude this recognition of Andy’s guilt from outside of Melinda’s consciousness suggests to readers that not only is there nothing victims can do to gain justice but also that there is in truth no consequence for men who rape.

Similarly, Kristina/Bree receives no retribution for her assault aside from the money she takes from Brendan to pay for an abortion (which she does not complete). Kristina/Bree thinks to herself immediately after her rape that she will “plot future revenge” (Hopkins 344) but never thinks about this again. Brendan is never punished for his actions. Furthermore, because Kristina/Bree seems to care little for any justice or retribution on her part, it is suggested that Brendan continues to rape with impunity (Hopkins 400). Unlike Andy, whose reputation is ruined with his schoolmates and the reader is meant to assume that girls know to “stay away” from him, Brendan is never named as a rapist nor recognized for his crimes. Again this choice by Hopkins to deny Kristina/Bree justice and allow Brendan to continue with no punishment sends the message to readers that victims must be satisfied with no justice and that men have no consequences for rape. The narratives of *Speak* and *CRANK* have missed a profound opportunity to reflect on the failures of our culture for victims of sexual assault and rape. Especially when considering the amount of questioning of gendered double standards that Melinda does in *Speak*, the narrative misses an opportunity to investigate of the lack of justice for victims. Future authors

who seek to combat rape via their fiction may consider the effects of refusing to punish perpetrators without allowing characters to reflect on this injustice. Like the call to action at the closing of *Speak*, offering a moment for readers to question the current state of justice for rape victims may act as a catalyst for the readers to seek cultural change.

The similarities between *Speak* and *CRANK* may illuminate which rape myths are more deeply held and which are more summarily dismissed. Both *Speak* and *CRANK* resist the rape myths that deny the existence or seriousness of rape and both narratives recognize the responsibility of the perpetrator for their actions. However, both narratives also adhere to victim blaming rape myths that attempt to silence victims' experiences by reinforcing what qualifies as "true" rape. It is impossible to say how aware the authors, Anderson and Hopkins, were of their adherence to rape myths, but this may be an indication of contemporary society's blindness to rape myths that blame the victim. Many readers, including teachers, librarians, scholars, and book critics, had read each of these novels and lauded them for their accuracy and ability to reach readers. None have yet come forward to question the novels' aptitude for victim blaming. This may be an indication of the state of our society's understanding of rape and illuminates the areas in which our understanding needs to grow.

CONCLUSION

The previous sections analyzed the ways in which the narratives of *Speak* and *CRANK* both resist and conform to rape myths to determine not only whether these texts would be suitable for reducing rape-myth acceptance in young adult readers, but also to identify ways in which future texts that aim to reduce rape-myth acceptance can be more effective. Both *Speak* and *CRANK* have done invaluable cultural work in reaching a huge number of teenage readers and educating them on difficult issues like rape and drug addiction. These narratives also do important cultural work in creating empathy for victims of rape in young adult readers. However, the narratives of *Speak* and *CRANK* still reinforce cultural norms, which blame the victim for the assault.

Criticism that analyzes the refutation or affirmation of rape myths has worth beyond an aesthetic criticism of a literary work. Rape myths, and works of literature that both combat and reinforce them, have concrete effects on the lives of victims, would-be perpetrators, and peers of both. Reducing rape-myth acceptance as well as creating a sense of empathy for the humanity of victims could over time have a significant impact on the number of rapes perpetrated in the future. Several scholars have written on the links between rape-myth acceptance and rape proclivity, as well as the need for recognition of female sexuality and female personhood. In order to make this change, we must be willing to confront the rape myths present in our cultural works. It is heartening that our country has begun to recognize the epidemic of rape, as evidenced by Vice President Joe Biden's Oscar speech following Lady Gaga's performance of "Til It Happens To You" as well as many other popular media campaigns against gendered violence. However, more can be done. Refusing to accept the rape myths that rape is not real or a serious problem is certainly a good start, but working to remove victim blaming rape myths from

current cultural milieu would add to such work already being done. Criticisms, like mine, may be the beginning of such work. Future criticisms of our cultural texts are necessary; television shows, films, and songs, as well as political speeches, laws, and educational texts must be analyzed to discover where these rape myths are being reinforced. By confronting them and addressing their falsehoods the future of our society may be able to change into an environment that is not only safe for victims of sexual assault and rape, but perhaps a place in which rape is no longer an epidemic.

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