

Validity

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Little Red Riding Hood walks into the woods wearing a red coat, intended to keep her warm and as to not be mistaken for game by hunters. A wolf spots that coat from feet away and assumes it to be a target for him to come over to her. The wolf lures her in but then leaves suddenly as Red is not fooled by his charm or manipulation. The wolf secretly goes to Red's grandmother's house and kills her before Red arrives. The wolf threatens Red's already dead grandmother to coax Red into bed and convinces her to consume her grandmother alongside him and then in some versions, she too is killed by the wolf and in some, is insinuated as the wolf's lover.¹ This behavior can be translated as the mental process of a sexual predator targeting their victim as opposed to an actual wolf. It is not common for a predator to convince their victim to devour their grandmother however, pressure is involved to commit acts the victim is uninclined to do.

My interest in Little Red Riding Hood lies in how it brings up two questions that are relevant to sexual assault; why Red was targeted by her clothing and the predator and why the wolf chose Red and the nature behind grooming a victim. Through literary devices, media depictions and gender normative roles defined over time, rape culture has been constructed and in turn tailored predators, fears and victims. By drawing from personal memoirs, I have found commonalities in the victims as well as those who target them. A common thread in assault cases is that the assaulter is known by the victim, I focus on this specific dynamic as in little red riding hood, the wolf is a familiar character to her which is a common thread in sexual assault cases. Although rooted in fairy tales, sexual assault is pieced together by the mentality of an abuser and a victim; why the person targeted someone, in this case, someone they knew and why the victim in most cases stayed quiet. Relating a children's tale to a person's nightmare is a direct parallel to how the world has dealt with assault and has created a culture of abuse and fear. My thesis contrasts this behavior of staying quiet by explicitly showing the story on the body and being blatantly honest instead of blurring or sugarcoating portions of the story.

¹ Magda Origjanska, "The Dark Original Story of Little Red Riding Hood Is Illicit and Decadent," The Vintage News, July 10, 2019, <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/03/09/little-red-riding-hood-2-2/>

In Red Riding Hood the wolf happens to represent a man; it is common in the media to relate male behavior with animalistic tendencies similar to the way fairytales use metaphors for characters to reflect real life scenarios. This abuse and fear are dictated around the roles posed for each gender. Fairy tales have male/female archetypes; having the man acting as either heroic or a beast and the woman either wicked or in distress. Although fiction, this is a gender dynamic and has defined male and female reaction and behavior. Male is defined as dominant, with the same hierarchies as seen in animal kingdom, thus terms like predator and other animal terms are used to describe males in literature and folk tales. Even in modern day culture, comparisons are drawn between male behavior and animals. In New York, a string of serial rapists known as “wildings,” by the media, took advantage of females who were out at night in central park.² Even more commonly known, predator is used in assault cases which is another word used to describe hunters in the animal world. In using an animal term to describe male habit, this insinuates that this behavior is out of their control and is instinctual. In “Youth Violence and Race in the media,” this relationship the media has with criminal behavior is further expanded, “Popular notions of crime are shaped greatly by the media, a social institution that also possesses a unique ability to perpetuate criminal stereotypes,” whether it be a man or specific demographic, this is how animal terms became popularly used to describe a rape or assault. Evidently, these terms created an interest in rape culture because without associating a monstrous descriptive word with a rapist, the crime was “considered too mundane.”³

The term “wilding,” alongside women being victims of these rape crimes created a fear among women living in New York City at the time. There was a fear of being attacked along with a fear to come forward, creating this submissive nature; in many cases of assault women keep quiet out of fear that it was their fault. The media had defined rapists as animals, reinforcing the idea these acts are animalistic. This fear was created but along with being afraid of these criminals came protection for the same people. In the case of Ladarius Jackson, a school athlete who had knowingly assaulted two women and other women at his past school, remained allowed to continue playing through his season. The NCAA prohibits players to play “for bad

² Welch, Michael, Eric Price, and Nana Yankey. "YOUTH VIOLENCE AND RACE IN THE MEDIA: THE EMERGENCE OF "WILDING" AS AN INVENTION OF THE PRESS." *Race, Gender & Class* 11, no. 2 (Apr 30, 2004): 36_Pg.1

³ Welch, Michael, Eric Price, and Nana Yankey. "YOUTH VIOLENCE AND RACE IN THE MEDIA: THE EMERGENCE OF "WILDING" AS AN INVENTION OF THE PRESS." *Race, Gender & Class* 11, no. 2 (Apr 30, 2004): 36_Pg.2

grades, smoking marijuana or accepting money and free meals. But nowhere in its 440-page Division 1 rulebook does it cite penalties for sexual, violent or criminal misconduct.”⁴ There is a higher value of other crimes over sexual assault, to go as far to label a group of rapists “wildings,” to make a woman being raped more “newsworthy,” added to this fear of victims coming forward.

The media has created a larger fear of the assault being pinned on the victim by regularly using appearance of a woman as a reason for the assault and along with media outlets, court systems and defense teams have followed. A Jane Doe from Cleveland, Texas is blamed for being gang raped at eleven years old. Red Riding Hood was targeted for the color of her hood, and this girl was targeted because of her clothing, appearance and her existing reputation in her hometown. The media used criminal stereotypes to label men as animals and used racial stereotypes to conclude the intent of this girl. She is a Latina and the media used language such as “hot and spicy,” hinting that her demeanor was the reason for her rape. When in trial, one of her abusers, Jared Len Cruz, a teen at the time, had a lawyer who repeatedly stated “he is just a kid,” but changed his values when it came to the eleven year old “temptress.”⁵ This defense was not seen as malicious by the town, it was a common reaction to wonder what the girl had done to tempt these boys to be “drawn into the acts...somehow suckered to do it.”⁶The media had shifted blame onto the one person taken advantage of and the town went along with it. In “Policing Rape Complainants: When Reporting Rape becomes a Crime,” Avalos explains that similar to the media, the cops act as if the victim is falsely accusing someone of raping them. The victims are treated as suspects and “also found that NOPD routinely treated victims in ways that heightened ‘victims’ feeling of shame and self-blame’ and their ‘fear of not being believed.’”⁷ By downplaying accounts, a misrepresentation is created of what people see, hear, think and feel

⁴ Jacoby, Kenny. “NCAA Looks the Other Way as College Athletes Punished for Sex Offenses Play On.” USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, December 16, 2019. <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2019/12/12/ncaa-looks-other-way-athletes-punished-sex-offenses-play/4360460002/>.

⁵ Harding, Kate. *Asking for It the Alarming Rise of Rape Culture - and What We Can Do about It*. Boston, MA: Da Capo Lifelong, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2015.pg.20

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Avalos, Lisa R. "Policing Rape Complainants: When Reporting Rape Becomes a Crime." *The Journal of Gender, Race, and Justice* 20, no. 3 (Summer, 2017): 469. <https://login.libproxy.newschool.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.newschool.edu/docview/2347690928?accountid=12261>

about rape culture. These sensory deprivations are carried onto victims of assault out of fear that they too will be to blame. In both of my interviews this was a common fear; that their assault is their fault, and the awareness in how they express themselves; what they wear, how they speak and who they speak to, grows and every sexual instance that they feel discomfort in, they take full responsibility of. Going back to the instance with the eleven-year-old girl, clothing worn during the assault was mentioned as a defense for her rapists. Like many cases, the first argument refuting the victim is what they wore.

No matter what is being worn, the media has defined a woman as “asking for it.” However, clothing is not the only appearance that attracts predators. An exhibit titled “What they wore,” displays a range of clothing from “sexy,” to “conservative,” to children’s clothing making the point that sexual predators are going to paint a target on their victim regardless of the clothes they wear. The exhibit consists of twelve looks and effectively puts the viewer into the perspective of the victim by plainly hanging the garments on the wall.⁸ The normalcy of the clothing expresses that women are not asking for it in their daily wear or their uniform; it is the nature of the predator. The immediate question of “what were you wearing,” is an implication of the opposite. A sexual predator may have a fetish what their victim is wearing but ultimately targets them for their vulnerability and manipulates them. The predator is going to act regardless of what their target is wearing simply because they commonly have psychopathic tendencies and are desensitized to the victim’s personality. An article in psychology today dissects the personality traits of a predator and expresses that it is much more than what the victim wears; it is a psychological game called grooming, “Clever predators create an uneven playing field right out of the gate. During the grooming process, social predators use more than strategies of seduction. They also use strategies of reduction—casting aspersions on the victim's credibility.”⁹ Grooming is something that can happen over the span of weeks, months even years, it is an act which trust is built up in order to reach the point of sexual activity.

⁸ “Myths of Rape Culture Confronted in This Powerful Art Exhibit.” Global Citizen. Accessed April 20, 2020. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/art-installation-rape-clothing-victim-blaming/>.

⁹ Wendy L. Patrick, JD. “The Stealthiest Predator.” Psychology Today. Sussex Publishers, May 1, 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201805/the-stealthiest-predator>.

Grooming is commonly associated with someone familiar to the victim. This is known as “acquaintance rape,” a rape committed by a date or friend. In “I Never Called it Rape,” Robin Warshaw begins by stating, “It’s hard to believe when a rape happens to you, especially when the rapist is a man you know...Even if you have never heard of such a thing before, you’ve just survived the most common type of rape that occurs to women.”¹⁰ The act of grooming in combination with a friend doing the grooming, causes blurred lines; whether or not the act was rape. There was no psyche analysis on Red Riding Hood but in modern rape culture, the argument would be made that she wore the red and led the wolf right to her grandmothers to commit sexual acts, cannibalism and eventually led to her own death when in reality the wolf had groomed her. Both of my interviews contain a different situation of grooming; one of which happens in a romantic relationship and one which happens involving a child and an authority figure to further expand how grooming is built up. Grooming not only builds trust but also humanizes the predator in the process; the victim now has an attachment to their abuser.

This attachment leads to the victim wondering why someone they trusted would have assault them in the first place. “Denial,” by Jessica Stern shows examples of different traumas including a woman trying to find closure in her assault after her abuser Brian Beat, passes away, “I still need to understand him. If I can understand him, I can put him away.” She interviews a woman named Abby who was another victim of Brian’s, she was exposed to emotional abuse from him, “I was thin,’ she adds. ‘One hundred and fifteen pounds, but he thought I was heavy. He thought I was supposed to look like Twiggy. I’m five foot five, that is my normal weight. But he made me feel like I was fat.’” This is a result of being attached to the abuser, Abby was convinced she was too big and felt it was her fault. Even then, she went on to say. “I was in love with Brian,’ she says, ‘I really wanted to be with him.’”¹¹ Stern goes on to explore victims exposed to Brian Beat, all which were similar accounts; he had made them feel bad but continued to want his affection and attention. Brian was an attractive man, Abby said she had felt special getting noticed by someone like him. Predators make their victims feel special and this is how the outline of rape culture is created; a victim feels special and feels like they have to do everything in their power to keep this person around. Manipulative tactics make it seem like the

¹⁰ Stern, Jessica. *Denial a Memoir of Terror*. New York: Ecco, 2011.pg102-103

¹¹ *ibid*

victim is nothing without this abuser in their lives and in the media, this is why they've made women feel like they were asking for it. This special attention, the predator made them feel like they needed it in order to feel special.

This special attention is an early stage of grooming, which does not begin as outwardly sexual. In the case of Brian Beat, he was involved in a romantic relationship and defined that immediately. Jeannie Vanasco recounts a similar situation she experienced with her friend, Mark. She introduces her memoir with a warm moment her and Mark had in her car, they were close friends and nothing more. This outlines the nature of the relationship but also heightens the shock Vanasco felt when the assault occurs five years later. Mark did not abuse her outwardly but did communicate to Vanasco in a way that made her feel inadequate, ten years after the assault she calls Mark who discusses her book, "I didn't know you were that much more talented than me than I was at anything. You should be very proud."¹² The way he complimented her was demeaning and little actions like this led up to him taking advantage of her. The structure of their relationship is truly highlighted in the transcripts of their phone calls and Vanasco realizes that when listening, "what happened felt less like force and more like a consequence of an uneven distribution of power. I was passed out."¹³ Jeannie Vanasco is attempting to understand why he did what he did which ties into humanizing and understanding the abuser in order to achieve closure. When they are talking on the phone, reminiscing the past and also dissecting the assault, Jeannie constantly assures him that he was a good person and practically praising him, which relates to how Abby saw Brian. There is a common behavior with the victim wanting the attention because the abuser made them feel like they needed it.

I've been focusing on outside works dealing with assault, these were the conversations I had when conducting interviews. My first interview falls under a similar category, the woman was eighteen at the time and began dating someone twelve years older than her. She had no intention of sleeping with him nor did she want things to move too fast as it was a new relationship. She dressed in a form fitted dress with more makeup than usual and he spent a lot at dinner, seemingly flaunting his funds. In the car ride home, she said she wanted to go home as it

¹² Vanasco, Jeannie. *Things We Didn't Talk About When I Was a Girl*. London: Duckworth, 2019.pg.109

¹³ *Ibid*.pg.165

was already eleven and she had work in the morning. She was wearing a form fitted dress yet it still covered up most of her body and he made comments the entire ride home that “his roommate will wonder why the date ended so early,” and he “spent so much money and did not even get a proper night,” and “you wore that and expected to just go home?” The woman paused after this and said, “He said all of this with a smile which made me feel like the mood was lighter than it was.” A predator does not directly attempt a sexual move but instead grooms their victim to make any situation fall onto them. This was the instance with this relationship, because they were in a relationship there was trust built and she felt some kind of obligation to him since he spent all that money and since she dressed a certain way. Ultimately, she did go home that night, but she was in for weeks of manipulative behavior and forced sexual occurrences. The woman had felt an obligation to the man she was dating, and she claims, “I felt uneasy talking about that, but I knew I shouldn’t cry every time I thought of being alone with him.” She continues, “I felt like I was on autopilot in a lot of my relationships and I missed red flags until after the relationships were over. I thought I was supposed to do things for him because we were dating. I remember him pulling my hand to where he wanted me to touch and he would laugh when I pulled away and made a face. He continued to do this forcefully until I had no energy left to fight back and I just complied.” She looks uncomfortable and proceeds, “I knew I felt uncomfortable and I did not realize something was wrong until months later. He had taken me to dinners, and we laughed together, I genuinely did not think of him as a bad guy. I opened up to my friend for the first time and she immediately dismissed me by saying, ‘you liked him, you can’t say this just because it didn’t work out,’ and I kept it to myself.” These were a few occurrences before the event that traumatized her the most. The woman was sexually assaulted by her boyfriend when he was drunk however, she was afraid to label it that way. She collected all of the events that happened in her relationships and recognized how he tested his boundaries before fully assaulting her. He had penetrated her mouth, blocking off both of her airways while she was actively pushing him away because it had been almost forty seconds and she had no source of air. He passed out drunk after this and she went into the bathroom and cried until she felt tired enough to go back to sleep. She felt like she had realized it was an assault too late and found closure by discussing it in therapy and with friends who experienced similar situations.

My second interview experienced an assault with someone she trusted, an authority figure, the owner of her daycare. She begins by telling me that he did not outwardly pursue her,

“He was nice to me and I didn’t see anything wrong with that because he seemed to be nice to everyone. But then he started to give me special treatment where he would give me the snacks I liked or access to the best toys before anyone else. As a kid, I just thought this was awesome because I had it better than anyone. I did not understand what he was doing or even the concept of sex let alone grooming.” He was actively giving her special treatment which is a way of testing boundaries. These acts began to happen frequently, “He started taking me into the closet and we would talk. I am an only child and was very shy for a while, so it was rare that I was speaking so much to someone that wasn’t my mom or dad. The talks turned into light physical contact like him touching my arm or leg to him attempting to touch me inappropriately.” He had put his fingers inside of her and attempted to have sex with her on multiple occasions, but she was just a child and it was too painful for her. She pauses and collects herself, “I would scream because it hurt so bad and I didn’t understand why he would tell me to be quiet. He would take breaks from seeing me after I screamed and then try having sex with me a few days later.” Even when she was talking, it seemed like there was an emotional block. She went on to say, “I blocked it out and slowly began to realize what had happened when I learned about sex. I hesitantly shared it with my parents because I was afraid, I had done something to provoke it. My relationship with sex was tainted because of this but I found that outlets such as art and therapy helped me move on and share my story.”

Although Little Red Riding Hood is a fairytale, it touches on a very common relationship dynamic in an assault and the process of grooming/predatory responses. It showcases a dynamic presented in a lot of close relationships where both parties seemingly trust one another. The gratified casing demeans the darker story being hidden which is how the media initially acted. Red Riding Hood was filtered to a children’s tale and in doing so, covered up a powerful story. The treatment of women in an assault roots in historical gender dynamics and has been carried on to media outlets and transferred to those who have been assaulted. Although there are movements such as the #MeToo, authors like Vanasco claims that she “supports it but feels conflicted,” because it defines closure of rape with hate and seems more political.¹⁴ In both of my interviews,

¹⁴ Ohlheiser, Abby. *The Woman Behind ‘Me Too’ Knew the Power of the Phrase when She Created it — 10 Years Ago: 10 Years before #MeToo Went Viral, Tarana Burke was using “me Too” to Reach Women of Color Who Survived Sexual Violence.* Washington: WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post, 2017.
<https://login.libproxy.newschool.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest->

they did not respond with hate instead they found artistic outlets to find closure. My thesis acts as an outlet of awareness and closure by acting opposite to the media and public. I want to interrupt this fear and deprivation of senses by explicitly posting and publishing stories of assault onto garments in an artful way. Because clothing is a center of debate in an assault, I found garments an appropriate expression; by creating a seasonless collection, I am not focusing on a specific style, weight or cut of garment, I pose a range of garments to be worn in vastly different settings and seasons. By doing so, this furthers the notion that it is beyond what a victim is wearing or the setting or style they are wearing but rather a psychological fixation a predator develops. My final photo shoot of my garments take place in a suburban setting, while some photos are off guard, others are more polished, both expressing the idea that assault can happen in even the most familiar setting. I balance pain and delicacy in my photos to emphasize the shock when experiencing an assault. This will enlighten the public of rape culture and how we as a society can learn more, reshape and restructure it. Through my clothing and presentation, I want to bring closure to those who have been wronged and feel as though it was their fault. I not only want to bring validity to blurred stories but bring closure to those who have faced an assault.

com.libproxy.newschool.edu/docview/1953014009?accountid=12261 Vanasco, Jeannie. *Things We Didnt Talk about When I Was a Girl*. London: Duckworth, 2019.pg.197