

## **‘The Invisible Blood Pours Forth’**

Trauma in Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin* and Maria Padian’s *Wrecked*

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and Maria Padian's *Wrecked* (2016), and examine how the characters are affected by sexual trauma and rape culture. The novels depict a society that creates an environment for female trauma victims which causes them more pain and suffering. This thesis analyzes the books through a lens of trauma theory. The use of different narrations and narrators in the two novels provide new perspectives and understanding of trauma and how it can affect the people around the initial trauma victim. This thesis will examine how the selected novels are used to explore the connection between memory and trauma.

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## Introduction

The rise of women's empowerment and anti-sexual assault movements such as #MeToo and Time's Up opened the conversation on women's issues and the struggles that women face in their everyday lives. These different movements deal with sexual violence, sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination, both in the workplace and at home. For a victim of sexual violence or harassment, there can be a profound emotional, physical and psychological impact. These types of crime disproportionately affect young women. Many are too afraid to report it, often due to the myths and stereotypes that society have that victims have to face when coming forward with their story. It is essential to speak up about it and debunk the harmful myths and stereotypes in order for victims to come forward and be able to start healing from their trauma. Many writers have explored these issues in an effort to add to the conversation.

*The Blind Assassin* (2000) by Margaret Atwood and *Wrecked* (2016) by Maria Padian are two novels that attempt to capture the consequences of trauma on the initial trauma victim but also the people around. *The Blind Assassin* focuses on two sisters growing up in the early- and mid-twentieth century and the trauma they encounter throughout their formative years; they experience the death of their mother, neglect from their father and sexual trauma. The novel is written as a memoir from one of the two sisters. *Wrecked* focus on a college campus rape and the repercussions it creates for the entire student body. The interest in exploring the selected novels arises from the way these two authors have chosen to narrate their novels and the characters search for the truth. They are two novels with different audiences, and they explore two separate times in history. Despite these differences, they share some similarities when it comes to the trauma aspect. Both novels explore how women are viewed in society and how this affects the way they experience and process trauma. Over the years, the trauma symptoms displayed by sexual abuse victims have gained more recognition. Compared to a soldier coming back from war, sexual abuse victims do not get as much recognition for the trauma they have been through, even though they display similar symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Herman, 67).

In this thesis, I will investigate how society's attitude towards women affects the main characters' experience of trauma in the light of oppression and rape culture. Sexual trauma and secondary trauma play an important part in the experiences the characters go through and their development throughout the novels. A way the characters address and try to overcome

their respective traumas is through navigating their memory in an effort to find the truth and reach closure. The analysis will be conducted through a close reading of *The Blind Assassin* and *Wrecked* within the framework of trauma theory. In what follows, I will first provide theory and background information to help create a foundation, before commencing my analysis of the two novels. I will discuss and compare the novels, and lastly, I will offer a conclusion.

## Theory and Background

Trauma is when an individual is exposed to one or more events that are outside the range of normal experience, creating imprints on the mind or physical scars. Trauma can be either physical, such as wars, accidents and domestic abuse, or it can be psychological, verbal abuse or threats of physical harm (Luckhurst, 1). Luckhurst describes a traumatic event as “a piercing or breach of border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication. Trauma violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound” (Luckhurst, 3). There are many different ways to distinguish between different types of trauma, one being categorizing the traumatic event as either interpersonal or non-interpersonal. Interpersonal trauma can be defined as when someone inflicts trauma on another person; this can be emotional abuse or neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse. The person who is exposed to this type of trauma often knows or trusts the perpetrator, and the victim is highly likely to blame themselves. This feeling of being at fault is often reinforced by others who blame the victim. Non-interpersonal trauma is events such as accidents, illness or natural disasters (Yoo et al., 2018). This thesis will have a greater focus on interpersonal trauma.

People who experience a traumatic event often have difficulty coping with it afterwards, and some experience symptoms that can lead to different diagnoses. When Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was first introduced as an illness in 1980, it helped create a new understanding of trauma victims and their symptoms. The precursor of PTSD was Shell Shock, which was a diagnosis given to soldiers in the war that experienced events, such as shells exploding, without withstanding any physical injury but displayed symptoms that included involuntary shivering, blurred vision, and amnesia (Luckhurst, 50). People who have gone through other types of trauma, such as physical abuse or sexual abuse, share a lot of similar symptoms as soldiers.

Trauma can create many different reactions and symptoms, but it can also affect people around the initial trauma victim via either transference or having overwhelming sympathy. This is called secondary or vicarious traumatization, and it is categorized as when “an individual or group experiences traumatic symptoms after having been exposed to a representation of an event that they have not themselves lived through” (Bond and Craps, 149). There were cases of this type of trauma after 9/11, where people had seen media footage of the event.

Women have been seen as less than men, and traditional gender roles cast men as “rational, strong, protective, and decisive” while they cast women as “emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive” (Tyson, 81). It is these gender roles that are used to justify the inequities that are still happening today; women are excluded from access to leadership positions, and men are paid higher wages than a woman for the same job. There have been laws put in place to make sure that women receive equal pay for equal work. However, it is easy to bypass these laws simply by changing the job title, even if the job task remain the same (Tyson, 81). Several social changes have occurred over the decades regarding women; one of the most significant changes has been the increase of women in the labor force. In 1951 only 22% of married women made their own money, but in 1987 that number increased to 68% (Newell, 1993). Still, today women in the United States are paid between 55 and 77 cents for every dollar a man earns (Tyson, 81). That is a significant gap. It is also common that research is done with the males being the reference point, meaning that, for example, men are more frequently used to gather data on things such as medications. As a result, women experience more side effects (Tyson, 81). Long before PTSD was an actual diagnosis, people still suffered from it, only it was under the catch-all term known as hysteria. Hysteria was considered to be “a strange disease with incoherent and incomprehensible symptoms” that only women had – the word originates from the Greek word *hystera*, meaning ‘womb’ or ‘uterus’, since they believed that it originated from the uterus (Herman, 10). Hysteria was a term used for a wide range of mental disorders. It was not until French neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot identified the same symptoms in working-class men who had been in accidents at work, that it became linked to traumatic events (Bond and Craps, 144).

Rape culture is a term that was first used by feminists in the United States in the 1970s. It is used to describe how society normalizes sexual violence and inappropriate sexual behavior (Brandonu.ca). The term is not only used about rape itself; it is also used to describe other behaviors in society such as victim-blaming, catcalling, rape-jokes and the fact that we have to teach girls how not to get raped. Even though the term has been around since the 1970s, there are several prominent public figures who deny rape culture as a term and argue that it is dangerous (Stiebert, 2018). In 1992, Helen Benedict published a book that discussed the different factors that cause the press and the public to blame the victim for the rape (Harding, 141). What she found was that if the victim was privileged and the assailant less privileged, the more likely it was that the victim would be perceived as credible. The toxic opinions about rape victims become evident in a 2014 article, “Drunk Female Guests Are the Gravest Threat to Fraternities,” written by Bill Frezza, a former Forbes.com columnist. In this



article, he talks about “personal responsibility,” in short terms, he is blaming female students for getting too drunk (Harding, 145). In her book, *Asking for It*, Kate Harding addresses Frezza’s article but also a comment made by Andrea Tantaros, a panelist on a Fox New’s show, when they discussed Frezza’s article. Tantaros said: “If we say personal responsibility for women, the feminists go berserk! They’re like, ‘No, we should be able to wear whatever we want, and drink as much as we want, and pass out in the streets.’” (qtd in Harding, 145) She is showing a common rape myth, that a drunk woman who dresses in minimal clothing is “asking for it.” A court in Peru threw out a rape case because the victim was wearing red underwear, with the red underwear being a sign that the woman was ready and willing to have sex (Fernandez and Ibrahim, 2020). There was a similar case in Ireland when the alleged rapist was acquitted after his lawyer asked the jury to consider the underwear the victim was wearing, insinuating that because she was wearing a thong with a lace front, she was “open to meeting someone and being with someone” (Safronova, 2018). What a victim was wearing or how drunk the victim was, is never an excuse to rape someone. However, society has created these rape myths, which leads to victim-blaming, rape-jokes and thinking that rape is a deviant act and does not happen as often as it actually does.

There are several cases that have gotten a lot of media attention in recent years regarding sexual assaults on campus. One of these is the case against Brock Allen Turner, who was convicted of three counts of rape in 2016 (Collins & Dunn, 2018). In this case, the evidence was very clear, they even had several witnesses. The possible sentencing for the guilty verdict ranged from a minimum incarceration of two years up to a maximum of 14 years. However, the judge only sentenced him to six months in prison and probation, and he ended up only serving three of those six months. Therefore, this case is often used as an example when arguing for greater legal and regulatory protections for women on college and university campuses in the US (Collins & Dunn, 2018).

One way that student activists have demanded that colleges take responsibility for the safety of their students, particularly regarding sexual violence, was through Title IX and the Clery Act. There are several organizations that work to pass laws to protect victims of sexual assault, and they are typically founded and run by former victims or their families. A reason for this is that some survivors use it as a way of coping with their trauma. They “recognize a political or religious dimension in their misfortune and discover that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action” (Herman, 207). The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act or Clery Act was signed in 1990 and named after Jeanne Clery, who, in 1986, was raped and

murdered in her residence hall. Her parents filed a lawsuit against Lehigh University after learning that the campus crime rate was unusually high and that the security system was not adequate. Jeanne's parents won the lawsuit and used the money to found Security on Campus, whose purpose was to inform the public about crime on campuses. The Clery Act requires that every college and university must publish their Annual Campus Security Report, which includes crime statistics over the past three years, campus crime prevention program, their campus policy statement regarding safety measures and procedures to follow when investigating sex offenses. This report has to be distributed to all students and employees (Harding, 212).

Title IX has been in place since 1972 and is a federal civil rights law that prohibits sex-based discrimination in schools or education programs that receive federal funding. In 2011 the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights issued a guidance document explaining the schools' responsibilities under Title IX. What it said was that "colleges are to employ the standards of a civil court rather than a criminal court in determining whether a report of sexual harassment or violence is actionable," and that "[i]f a school knows or reasonably should know about student-on-student harassment that creates a hostile environment, Title IX requires the school to take immediate action to eliminate the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and address its effects" (Harding, 213).

Before I start my analysis of the two novels I have chosen for my thesis, I believe it will be beneficial to have a brief summary of the novels and their characters to create an understanding of the plotlines.

The *Blind Assassin* has several narratives. The main narrative connects them all and follows Iris Chase Griffen, an old lady who has lost most of her family, either by death or family conflict. Iris is writing her memoir, looking back at her life and family history, specifically focusing on the story of her sister, Laura, and herself growing up. The second narrative is Laura's novel, also named *The Blind Assassin*, which is revealed at the end actually to have been written by Iris. This narrative follows two unnamed lovers who have a secret affair and the struggles they face. There is also a third narrative that unfolds within Laura's novel, following a love story between a blind assassin and a mute girl. In the main narrative, the Chase family struggle with the death of Liliana, Iris and Laura's mother, and their financial struggles during the Great Depression. Due to the financial situation, Iris, then eighteen years old, is married away to Richard Griffen. He is abusive and controlling, both when it comes to his wife Iris, but also her sister Laura. Richard and his sister Winifred have Laura committed to a mental institution to hide the fact that she is pregnant with Richard's

child. Iris has an affair with Alex Thomas, with whom both sisters are in love with. Several years later, when Laura is released from the mental institution and learns about Iris' affair with Alex, Laura takes Iris' car and commits suicide. There are a lot of deaths that happen in the novel, Richard also commits suicide after Iris exposes him for what he did to Laura, and Iris' daughter dies young from a drug overdose. What Iris wants to accomplish with writing her memoir is to reconnect with her granddaughter Sabrina, hoping that she will finally know the truth about her life.

*Wrecked* is a young adult novel that focuses on the surroundings and aftermath of a campus rape allegation. The novel opens with a college freshman named Hailey, who just got her third concussion which ended her soccer career. While struggling with accepting that her days as an athlete are over, she discovers that her roommate, Jenny, was raped at a college party. The college starts an investigation led by the dean. Hailey then meets Richard, who lives with the perpetrator of the rape, Jordan. Hailey and Richard are the two main characters, and the readers follow their journey navigating the rape case. They struck up a relationship without knowing each other's involvement in the investigation. Hailey is chosen as Jenny's advisor, while Richard is Jordan's advisor. Although there is a romance developing between Hailey and Richard, the novel's primary focus is how the investigation comes along and the social consequences that follow. Jenny is being harassed by other students online, and Hailey and Richard try to find out who it was, hoping that by revealing who it is will help Jenny's case. The dean has trouble with finding the truth, as Jenny was too intoxicated to remember all the details and Jordan is refusing to talk. The dean knows that the school will most likely not expel Jordan, so in an effort to help Jenny, he manages to get Jordan to withdraw. Despite Jordan withdrawing, Jenny does not feel any better because what Jordan did to her will not have any consequences for him in the future.

## Exploring Trauma and Memory in *The Blind Assassin*

*The Blind Assassin* is a very complex and intriguing novel that tackles many different issues regarding women, trauma and memory. It was published in 2000 and is written as a memoir, looking back at the life of Iris and the various traumatic experiences she has lived through. The novel was written by Canadian author, Margaret Atwood, who is known for her feminist perspective. Her most famous work is *The Handmaid's Tale* from 1985, which gained new attention when a TV series that Atwood co-wrote, based on the novel, came out in 2017. Just as *The Blind Assassin*, it brings up issues regarding the role of women in society (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021). In *The Blind Assassin*, there is a lot of focus on memory and public perception. Actions have consequences, and the actions in this novel cause a great amount of trauma. It shows the consequences that the trauma has on several of the characters.

This chapter will focus on how the characters are affected by violence and oppression of women and the trauma that follows. The main characters of the novel represent women who grew up in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, how they experienced oppression and trauma, and the repercussions. The novel explores the themes of trauma and memory, and the need for a person to be seen and heard. The relationship between the two sisters plays a significant role in the development of the novel, and the narrator is tainted by the feelings of both jealousy and remorse that she feels towards her sister. The book is quite intricate, and there are a lot of different layers and topics that would be interesting to look further into, however, due to the limitations of a master thesis, I have selected the topics that I believe will be the most relevant for my line of argument. Through my analysis, I will show how trauma is displayed in the two sisters and how varied the reactions can be.

How does trauma affect memory, and how can memory be used to cope with trauma? This chapter has three sections: the first section will focus on the upbringing of the two sisters and their relationship; the second section will explore how women and the sisters, in particular, are viewed in society; in the final section, I will turn to the idea of memory and trauma and how trauma can affect a person's memory.

## The Bond Between Two Sisters

The novel follows two sisters, Iris and Laura, who grew up together and had to lean on each other for most of their childhood. Iris is the oldest and has therefore gotten the most responsibility out of the two. Iris is the protagonist of the novel, and she is also the narrator. She tells the story as an elderly woman at the end of her life, trying to right some wrongs from her past. Iris seems to be preoccupied with living in the past, and the only way she can try to work through her life is by writing about it. As an old woman, Iris is living a lonely life and has had a long time to reflect on her life. Working through, according to Freud, consists of “fill[ing] in the gaps in memory” and “overcome resistance due to repression” (p.148, 1958). For Iris, writing the book might have been a way for her to remember and process what she has been through in her life. As the oldest of the two sisters, Iris is given a lot of responsibility, especially after their mother passed away from childbirth.

The secrets of Iris' life that are gradually revealed through the course of the novel drastically alter the reader's understanding of her as an individual. At the beginning of the novel, Iris is portrayed as someone who does what others expect from her and lives her life for others. Her passivity in her youth causes Iris to lose parts of herself in her marriage. On her honeymoon she reflects on how Richard was making her into the wife he wanted: “I myself however was taking shape – the shape intended for me, by him. Each time I looked in the mirror a little more of me had been coloured in” (370). Iris grew up with little independence which is why she is easily controlled in her marriage, and Richard even had his sister pick out Iris' clothes. As an elderly woman, Iris does not reveal much emotion, which could be a sign of disassociation. Disassociation is when a person who have experienced trauma show symptoms such as “amnesia, emotional detachment, feeling of depersonalization, out-of-body experiences, dreamlike recall of events, feelings of estrangement, flashbacks, and abreaction” (Foa and Hearst-Ikeda, 1996). Not only did Richard try to make Iris into the wife he wanted, Iris recalls having anxiety, particularly about the “part of [marriage] that took place in the dark and could not be spoken about” (366). She started to take “frequent baths” and felt like she was “becoming addled inside, like an egg” (366). The only thing Iris knew about sex before her wedding night was what Reenie had told her, and that was that it would be “unpleasant and most likely painful” (294). Richard found Iris' “distaste” and “suffering” during sex “desirable” (294-95). Iris was suffering under Richard's abuse during their marriage, which could be one of the reasons

why Iris became emotionally detached in her older age. Despite the abuse and the controlling behavior of Richard and Winifred, Iris has a secret affair with Alex Thomas. Towards the end, it is revealed that her affair led to her getting pregnant, but she managed to conceal it for everyone and made everyone believe that it was Richard's child. This shows that she was more sly, intelligent and independent than what Atwood first made the reader believe. Alex Thomas is the love interest for both sisters, and they fight silently over him throughout the novel.

Laura is quite different from her sister, so they clash at times due to a lack of understanding of each other. "*It took Laura a long time to get herself born into this world, said Reenie. It was like she couldn't decide whether or not it was really such a smart idea*" (104, emphasis in original). Reenie is the housekeeper for the Chase family. She helps out with the kids, and she becomes kind of the surrogate mother to the girls after their mother passes away. Reenie represents a long line of housemaids; Reenie's mother was brought in to work for Adelia Chase, Iris' grandmother, and Reenie had followed her at the age of thirteen, and she worked for the Chase family until she got married. Later, it is Reenie's daughter Myra who ends up taking care of Iris as an old lady. Iris explains how Reenie believes that people decide for themselves if they want to be born or not, and also when they are going to die. When Laura was born, she was sickly and they did not know if she would survive or not. She was an anxious child and worried about a lot of things. However, it seemed as though she was more worried about other beings than herself. She did not cry if she hurt herself, but it was "the ill will of the universe, that distressed her" (106). Laura took everything that was said literally, so when Reenie told her to bite her tongue, she actually bit her tongue (106). During a conversation with Mrs. Hillcoate, Laura asked about why soldiers gave their lives to protect others. Mrs. Hillcoate explained that this was what God wanted. A week after this conversation, Laura threw herself in the river in the hopes that if she sacrificed her life, God would bring her mother back to life. Iris was able to save her, but this could have been a foreshadowing of what Laura was going to do later in life. One could argue that due to her actions as a young child, Laura did not have the same view on life and death as others and that her apparent suicide might have been for other reasons that one might initially think. When Laura found bloodstains on Iris' bedsheets, she started to cry. She did not understand that it was Iris' period that had started, and she was afraid that Iris would die just like their mother had died. This part of the novel is a clear sign of the trauma that Laura suffered when her mother died. Laura did not cry when her mother died, possibly because she did not understand the situation. When Iris bled, Laura was afraid she would die "without telling her

first” (194). By the way she reacts, it seems like Laura believes that their mother should have told her that she would die, and therefore she feels abandoned by her.

Even though the two sisters have gone through similar traumas during their childhood, their reactions are quite different. That might be due to the age difference or their personality types. When Laura was born, she was sick, and they were not sure if she would survive. A child that is sick during their formative years can be highly affected by it, and it can also affect the other members of the family. When Laura was born, Liliana was tired and lost “altitude” and “resilience” (105). For Iris, seeing her mother like this was hard, and she felt like she lost her; “It was as if my former mother had been stolen away by the elves, and this other mother – this older greyer and saggier and more discouraged one – had been left in her place” (105). Iris was four years old when Laura was born, and she still needed comforting and reassurance from her parents. However, her mother was not able to give her the attention that she craved. Iris had to take care of Laura in order for her to be allowed to stay in the same room as her mother, or else she would be sent away, so she stayed silent and helpful. Not only was Laura, in Iris’ mind at least, the reason for why her mother had become a different person, but she also had to take care of her, which caused a weird dynamic between the two sisters. Laura was an anxious child and very uneasy, both as a newborn and as a toddler. Experiencing trauma is more harmful for a child than for an adult. Children who have suffered trauma may show similar symptoms to an adult, but since they are not fully developed, they might have trouble with differentiating between what is harmful and what is not. This inability to separate what is harmful and what is not can lead them to distance themselves from both dangers and also pleasures and connections (J Brooks Bouson, 52). As the novel develops, it is made evident that Laura has a different way of looking at the world than others.

One incident that can be quite traumatizing to any human being, not least a child, is seeing someone have a miscarriage. “Then all of a sudden the teacup shattered and Mother was down on the floor” (112). Both Iris and Laura were under the table when their mother, Liliana, fell to the floor. Iris had to try to find her father, Norval, but he was nowhere around. Children seek comfort in their parents when they are experiencing something scary, but when their mom is passed out and their father is nowhere to be found, they have to find comfort in themselves or each other. They had Reenie there, but she was busy trying to help their mother. The way Iris describes this situation when she returns after looking for their father is kind of interesting due to her stoic way of describing the situation:

I went back into the kitchen and crept under the table, where Laura sat hugging her knees. She wasn't crying. There was something on the floor that looked like blood, a trail of it, dark-red spots on the white tiles. I put a finger down, licked it – it was blood. I got a cloth and wiped it up. "Don't look," I told Laura (112).

First of all, Laura is sitting hugging her knees, which is usually a sign of either one try to make oneself smaller and less noticeable, or one is simulating someone hugging oneself, which activate the feeling of getting comforted. However, she was not crying, possibly because she wasn't scared, or it could be that she was too young to understand. Then Iris starts to describe the situation in a very direct and emotionless manner and seems very detached from it. The reason for this might be either that when Iris is writing about this, she is old and her memory of what happened might not be accurate, or it could be that when she was put in that situation, she had to block everything out in order to cope with the situation. The signs Iris is displaying could be linked to disassociation. If one believes that something is blood, one's first instinct would most likely not be to taste it. However, for a toddler, a normal instinct is to put things in their mouth as it is a way for them to explore new things. Iris is quite vulnerable in this situation, and she might have tasted it because she did not know what it was. When someone experiences something both visually and with the sense of taste, it creates a stronger imprint on the mind. Therefore, they are more likely to remember the situation or the image the situation created.

There is a stark contrast between the white tiles and the red blood that has dripped on them. When Laura and Iris had this experience, they were young children. While the white tiles could be a symbol of the purity and innocence of a child's mind before anything has corrupted it, the blood that drips on the tiles could be seen as a symbol for the tainted minds of Iris and Laura after seeing their dead sibling. When Iris tells Laura not to look, that might be a sign that Iris went into a protector mode, which is why she just went through the motions. Reenie and Mrs. Hillcoate discussed what just happened to Iris and Laura's mother, and they compared the fetus to a kitten. When Iris and Laura hear what Reenie and her friend, Mrs. Hillcoate, talk about the thing that "slipped out just like a kitten" from their mother, they wanted to see it. The image of a dead fetus can create imprints on the child's mind that they do not have the tools to cope with. An adult has developed more tools and coping skills to process the intrusive image better. An intrusive image can be described as "unbidden flashbacks" that takes one back to "the inaugurating traumatic instant" (Luckhurst, 147).



According to Roger Luckhurst, “the visual intrusion recurs because linguistic and memorial machineries completely fail to integrate or process the traumatic image” (Luckhurst, p.147). Exposure to traumatic events can create intrusive images for the child that can cause recurring dreams, nightmares and flashbacks because the mind is not fully able to process the traumatic experience. Iris described what she thought would happen when they saw it: “[...] I knew this creature was forbidden to us; I knew we shouldn’t have seen it. Especially not Laura – it was the kind of sight, like a squashed animal, that as a rule would make her scream, and then I would get blamed” (114). Iris knew that it was not a good idea for them to see the fetus, but she did it anyway. This is the first time we see that Iris can break the rules and not be as good as her parents expect her to. It seems as though Iris does not care that Laura sees it, she is just worried if it would get her in trouble or not. However, Laura does not have the reaction that one would expect her to have. “‘It’s a baby,’ said Laura. ‘It’s not finished.’ She was surprisingly calm. ‘The poor thing. It didn’t want to get. Itself born’” (114). It seems as if Laura, being a person who takes everything she is told literally, remembered what Reenie had said about how people decide themselves if they want to be born or not. She did understand that it wasn’t a kitten, showing that Laura’s level of intelligence might be high, given the fact that she is still very young.

### ‘Some Women Shouldn’t Marry’

Reenie’s ideas of what is appropriate behavior for young women are made very clear, and she is very protective of Iris and Laura. She seems to have a very strong idea of how the world is: “[T]he world was full of criminals and anarchists and sinister Orientals with opium pipes, thin moustaches like twisted rope and long pointed fingernails, and dope fiends and white slavers, waiting to snatch us away and hold us ransom for Father’s money” (185). Reenie clearly has a dark and depressing worldview, or her parenting technique is to scare the girls into obedience. She is also one of the tattletales of the town, and she frequently shares gossip with Mrs. Hillcoate. Throughout the novel, Reenie’s thoughts and sayings appear as commentary to the stories Iris tell. “As Reenie would say” or “Reenie used to say” are frequently used throughout the whole book.

There are several statements in the book that tell a story of how women were treated at the time, and they help to create an understanding of the conditions Iris and Laura were brought up in. Being a woman in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century meant that one’s freedom

was restricted by men and that there were certain expectations that one had to live up to in order to be seen as a valuable part of society. These were related to being a wife and a mother; “Some women shouldn’t marry” (113). This is a quote from the novel that says a lot about the time when this part of the novel is set and how women were viewed during this time. It was shortly after World War I, and women had barely started their long fight for equal rights. In Canada women were not seen as “persons” under the British North America Act of 1867, until 1929, when a group of women petitioned the court to define if “persons” included women (Heritage, 2017). In 1969, the *Bowe v Colgate-Palmolive* case ruled that in the U.S., physical labor cannot be limited to men (“*Bow v. Colgate-Palmolive Company*, 272 F. Supp. 332 (S.D. Ind. 1967)”). We see this type of mindset on page 240 in the novel, where Norval is taking Iris to his factory so that she will “learn the ins and outs of the button business.” However, Iris notes that if she had “been a boy he would have started [her] working at the assembly line,” instead he set her to take “inventory and balancing shipping accounts” (241), which was considered to be more appropriate work for women. The comment that “some women shouldn’t marry” came during a conversation between Reenie and Mrs. Hillcoate, right after Liliana had lost her child:

Oh dear, well, she can always have another,” said Mrs. Hillcoate. “It must have been meant. There must have been something wrong with it.”

“Not from what I’ve heard, she can’t,” said Reenie. “Doctor says that better be the end of that, because another one would kill her and this one almost did.”

“Some women shouldn’t marry,” said Mrs. Hillcoate (113).

They treat the fact that she just lost a child as if it was nothing. Women have miscarriages all the time, but it is still something that many people experience as traumatizing on some level, especially when it is oneself who have the miscarriage on the kitchen floor. At the time, it was customary to have many children. There were many reasons for that, one being that birth control was not common, another one being that children more often died before they reached adolescence, but one major factor would be that women did not work and therefore had more time to take care of more children. With Liliana only having two children, it was not adequate enough, according to Reenie and Mrs. Hillcoate. It was not necessarily the number of children that was the issue, but about Lilliana’s body not being sufficiently sturdy to carry children. Mrs. Hillcoate’s statement basically says that a woman’s job is to give birth to as

many children as one possibly can, and if one are not able to do that, then one are weak and should never have gotten married.

Another quote in the novel creates an image of how young women were viewed in the 1930s: “He knew we were up for auction, or soon would be” (227). This sentence describes how Iris, Laura, and women in general were treated like at this time in history. Richard is looking at the girls and considering them for marriage because he knows that they will soon be married off. The business that Iris’ father owned was not doing particularly well due to the Great Depression and the crack in the stock market, and therefore, he was struggling to make ends meet. Richard knew this and saw his opportunity to both get a young wife and a business deal, all at the same time. “He knew we were up for auction” says a lot about Richard’s view on women, and it paints a good picture of the situation that the young girls will eventually be put in. Usually, in an auction, the most common items that are to be auctioned off are paintings, cars and other items that the winner of the auction now owns. This type of “auction,” however, can be compared to the slave auctions that took place earlier in the previous century. Meaning, Richard saw Iris and Laura as objects to be owned, but they were not aware of that at the time. Iris even says, when she describes the situation, that “it didn’t occur to [her] that he was taken inventory.” When Richard was a guest at a dinner party, he was there to see what were of value in the house, and that included Iris and Laura. With Richard entering the relationship on the premise that Iris is his property, it is highly unlikely that the relationship has any kind of chance of it being a healthy one. Iris had to endure a lot of physical abuse in her marriage, a marriage that was in total lack of any type of love. Iris has very little say in matters regarding her own life, Richard and Winifred treat her as a child and makes every decision for her. Not only does Iris have to live with Richard, but after Norval dies, Richard decides that Laura is moving in with them. This is the start of Richard’s abuse of Laura.

### Abuse and Trauma

The two sisters first encounter with physical violence came at a young age, when their father hired a new teacher, Mr. Erskine. He used physical violence as a punishment for not knowing the answer to his questions or not doing what he told them to do. Back in the days, it was normal for teachers to punish children with a smack with a ruler over their fingers. Mr. Erskine did this too, but he also pulled their hair, twisted their ears and hurled books at them

(197). He was particularly vicious with Laura. As mentioned previously, Laura's mind worked a bit different from others. She did not understand sarcasm, which Mr. Erskine used on a daily basis, and it angered him profusely when she took his sarcasm literally. Laura then revealed to Iris that Mr. Erskine liked to put his hands up her blouse or under her skirt. "What he likes is panties," (200) Laura said to Iris, but she did not seem to believe her. This portrays a particularly normal narrative when it comes to sexual misconduct or abuse, people do not believe in the victim's story. Laura tells Iris about the inappropriate touching in such a calm manner, and Iris uses this as a reason for not believing what she says. One might have a picture of how a victim should behave, possibly crying or acting out in some way, but in child abuse there are methods that are used to make the child believe that the abuse is not abuse. Child grooming is used by predators to make the child more compliant. Grooming is when "someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them" (NSPCC, 2016). Mr. Erskine used his power as a teacher to control Laura, and to touch her inappropriately. When Laura and Iris told Reenie about it, she knew that if they told Norval it would be Laura's word against Mr. Erskine and that Laura would be worse off for it. Therefore, Reenie handed sexual photographs of women to Norval, and told him she found them under Mr. Erskine's bed. This situation in the novel also brings up the very likely reality that victims of sexual abuse are not believed when they come forward with their story. Even Iris questioned whether or not Laura was telling the truth. If no one else believes one's story, one wants at least one's own family to believe one and when they do not, that can be particularly rough. If a victim receives negative social reactions from the people they disclose their abuse to, they are more likely to develop PTSD symptoms "both directly and indirectly through maladaptive coping and marginally through lower perceived control over recovery" (Ullman and Peter-Hagene, 2014). The abused Laura suffered under Mr. Erskine can be seen as a foreshadowing of what happens to her later in the novel, by her sister's husband, Richard.

After Norval died, Laura was forced to move in with Iris and Richard. She was not happy about it, so she was overtly rude to Richard. Eventually she would just leave the room whenever he entered. Laura had a mind of her own, and strong opinions, she did not follow everything Richard said to her and that made him upset. In an effort to control Laura, he forced himself on her, and told her that if she did not do what he said, he would have Alex Thomas arrested. She believed that she had to "take the pain and suffering" (594), in order to save Alex. Richard was very controlling over both sisters and "he preferred conquest to cooperation, in every area of life" (454). The first time Richard raped Laura was on her late

father's boat, the *Water Nixie*. The boat can be seen as a symbol of patriarchal power and authority. Benjamin Chase, Iris and Laura's grandfather, bought the boat with the money he earned from his button factory business and used to take his sons with him on it. When Norval later inherited it, he used it as a form of escape from everything else in his life. Richard later inherits it and become a part of the patriarchal lineage that has control over the Chase girls. As mentioned, he first raped Laura on the boat, but later the boat is the place where his body is found after he apparently took his own life. His death on the boat symbolizes the end of the masculine authority that controlled the lives of Iris and Laura.

As well as the sexual abuse Laura had to endure by Richard, she also becomes pregnant with his child. Scared of their own reputation, Richard and Winifred put Laura in an institution where they, as Laura describes it:

They conk you out with ether, like the dentist. Then they take out the babies. Then they tell you you've made the whole thing up. Then when you accuse them of it, they say you're a danger to yourself and others (593).

To be locked up against one's will and be robbed of one's freedom is traumatizing in itself, but Laura was also forced to have an abortion and denied control over her own body.

Reproductive coercion is defined as:

male partners' attempts to promote pregnancy in their female partners through verbal pressure and threats to become pregnant (pregnancy coercion), direct interference with contraception (birth-control sabotage), and threats and coercion related to pregnancy continuation or termination (control of pregnancy outcomes) (Miller and Silverman, 2010).

The latter being what Laura became victim to. She had already experienced trauma regarding her mother's miscarriage, therefore it is likely she herself feared for her own life when she was forced to abort her baby. Laura experienced several traumatic events in her short life and "severity, frequency, and the co-occurrence of more than one type of abuse is associated with a greater number of PTSD symptoms," and abuse by in-laws create "higher rates of depression" among the victims (McCauley et al.). It took Laura a long time to tell Iris about the abuse she had to endure. She did not tell anyone, even though Iris tried on occasion to try to understand what was going on with her. When Laura asked Iris again, about the situation

with Mr. Erskine, she said “[y]ou never really believed me, about Mr. Erskine [...] did you?” (481) This past experience caused Laura to be more apprehensive about telling her sister, because she already knew that it would be hard for Iris to believe her again. This time she was also under the impression that she did it to protect someone else. After years, Laura herself explained to Iris that she believed she had to make the sacrifice and endure Richard’s abuse, in order to save Alex’s life. The man who both sisters were in love with. When Iris then told her that he had died in the war, she realized that the abuse she had suffered was not worth it since it did not save Alex after all. She then precedes to drive a car off the bridge, killing herself. In the light of what she did when she was young, throwing herself in the water believing that if she sacrificed herself God would bring her mother back to life, she could have taught the same this time as well. That if she sacrificed her life, God would bring Alex back. If she was suffering from PTSD and depression from her abuse, this scenario becomes more likely, as one acts more irrationally.

It is shown through the way Iris tells the story of her life in fragmented pieces and not in a linear timeline, that this is the way she has to sort through her own trauma and memory. “[P]eople live out their existence in two different stages of the life cycle, the traumatic past, and the bleached present” (Van der Kolk and van der Hart, 177). Iris hopes to reconcile with her granddaughter through her memoir, but first she needs to reconcile herself with her past. She does this while writing about different events in her life, and often times she questions her own memory. Particularly towards the end of the novel, she questions herself often: “Where was I? *It was winter*. No, I’ve done that. It was spring” (451). Throughout her life she has actively taken part in hiding the truth, which is the reason why the memoir also includes other sources of information, such as newspaper articles or Reenie’s anecdotes, because Iris does not trust her own memory alone. While writing about past events, she often questions herself and her memory. A good example of this doubt comes when Iris and Alex share a kiss in the attic:

I hadn’t expected this. Had I expected this? Was it so sudden, or were there preliminaries: a touch, a gaze? Did I do anything to provoke him? Nothing I can recall, but is what I remember the same thing as what actually happened? (266)

Iris wants to find the truth, but she is aware of her own unreliability. However, the next sentence she answers her own question about what actually happened: “It is now: I am the only survivor” (266). Meaning that this now has to be the truth since there is no other version

of the event that exist anymore. Iris is aware of the power the words she writes has; she displays this on page 93 where she writes: “But on this page [...] I will cause the war to end – I alone, with a stroke of my black plastic pen.” In this passage she refers to the First World War, but later in the novel she will use the power of her words to end the “war” against Richard. The novel-within-the-novel also named *The Blind Assassin* and the memoir are both used as a way of getting revenge on the Griffen family. The former to hurt Richard and his career, and the latter to retaliate against Winifred who took her child and granddaughter away from her. Atwood creates a feeling that even though the book Iris published under Laura’s name helped avenge Laura’s death, it also represents some type resentment towards Laura for receiving all the attention posthumously. Iris then recognizes the want to memorialize oneself.

We wish to assert our existence, like dogs peeing on fire-hydrants. We put on display our framed photographs, our parchment diplomas, our silver-plated cups; we monogram our linen, we carve our names on trees, we scrawl them on washroom walls. It’s all the same impulse. What do we hope from it? Applause, envy, respect? Or simply attention, of any kind we can get? (118)

Here she explains our needs to memorialize ourselves, and particularly, her own need for it. She proceeds with: “At the very least we want a witness. We can’t stand the idea of our own voices falling silent finally, like a radio running down” (118). She wants a “witness”, her granddaughter Sabrina. Cathy Caruth said that “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures,” (11) in this case, Iris uses the trauma in her past as a way of connecting with her granddaughter. Iris wants to be “seen and heard” like her sister has been, she wants to leave a legacy. In her memoir, Iris reflects on how she sees things differently now looking back and how she could have done things differently.

## Trauma and Rape Culture in *Wrecked*

*Wrecked* is a contemporary novel, published in 2016, about finding the truth regarding a college campus rape case. In the last few years, rape on college campus statistics have grown exponentially, inspiring many novelists. Maria Padian is an American author who writes mainly young-adult novels. *Wrecked* brings attention to the topic of rape, a topic that for many is seen as taboo due to the intimate and personal aspects.

In this chapter I will draw attention to the trauma of rape, and how the consequences can affect people around and potentially lead to secondary traumatization. The novel brings forward many questions about rape culture and what it means to give consent. As the novel retraces these questions, I will look into what kind of attitude society has towards rape cases and rape victims and to see if there is a precedence to not believe a rape victim. In this novel, Jenny, the rape victim, is exposed to ridicule after coming forward with her story. Could this be a reason why so few victims come forward?

### The Different Characters and How They Are Affected

The novel has two narrators who provide different points of view on the story and give room for the reader to reflect and draw their own conclusions. The way the novel is written amplifies the quote by film producer Robert Evans, who said, “there are three sides to every story – yours, mine and the truth.” What this means is that the truth often lies somewhere in the middle, and that it is hard to find the truth. The novel follows the students who live on campus at MacCallum College, through the narratives of Hailey and Richard in third-person limited omniscient. It is written from two perspectives, with a rendition of the actual event in-between chapters, giving it more depth and help to create a wider picture of what happened. The two main narratives discuss the surroundings of a rape case on college campus and the aftermath. While the narration in-between the chapters try to clarify what actually happened right before and during the rape. The narrator in-between the chapters is third-person omniscient, while the chapters with Hailey and Richard are written in third person limited omniscient. The two types of narration is quite similar, the only difference is that the narration in-between the chapters does not follow one particular person. In many rape cases there is usually no hard evidence to support the story on either side. Padian uses the different narrators to highlight the difficulty of identifying the truth in these cases, and to show how



the different characters that are not directly involved offer different perspectives on the surroundings of the case.

Hailey is introduced as the narrator in the first chapter. Even though she is not directly involved in the rape case, she is the roommate of the victim, meaning can see everything that happens to Jenny in the aftermath of the rape. A week goes by before Hailey is let in on what happened to Jenny, but Jenny showed signs that something traumatic had happened to her. Hailey had just gone through trauma herself, physical trauma in the form of a concussion. Therefore, she was not as perceptive to the signs that Jenny portrayed. The day following the rape, Jenny was sitting on her bed in the fetal position rocking back and forth. Body language expert Joe Navarro tributes this as signs of extreme stress and an attempt to self-soothe (Navarro). Hailey questions Jenny about the previous night, but she rejects her inquiries and proceeds to take a shower. Sexual assault victims are “particularly likely to elicit disgust responses” (Badour et al.), such as an urge to wash due to a feeling of contamination. After the rape is revealed to Hailey, she tells Jenny that she believes she is “really brave” (48). However, Jenny disagrees: “I don’t know. If I’m so brave, how come I did not fight him off? How come I let this happen to me?” (49) These are typical feelings and questions, as many people have preconceived notions of how a victim should respond in the moment of trauma. The feeling of doubt often come as a result of the gap between their actual experience and the common beliefs on rape (Herman, 67). People who are sexually assaulted often report “an inability to move” (Heidt et al., 2005). This inability to move was previously referred to as rape-induced paralysis but has since been linked to tonic immobility (TI), which has been seen in animals in reaction to mortal threat or physical restraint (Heidt et al., 2005). Even though there is knowledge about TI, there are still laws around the world that require the use of violence and presence of physical marks, such as bruises and cuts, in order to get a rape conviction.

Recovering from a concussion and having to deal with the fact that she has to quit soccer, the sport that her whole life has revolved around takes a toll on Hailey. She has had three concussion and is therefore at extreme risk of permanent brain damage if it happens again, as a result she has to quit her soccer team. This means that Hailey has to totally restructure her life, at the same time as she gets dragged into the college rape case to help Jenny and be her advisor. Even though she lacks the experience needed to do this task, she accepts the job but feels like “she doesn’t really have a choice” (Padian, 76). Hailey starts to show symptoms of fatigue and feels like she is an “observer rather than a participant in her own life” (92). While it is easy to contribute these symptoms to her concussion, it can also be

a sign of secondary traumatic stress. Jenny frequently talks to Hailey about her own trauma since they share a room and Hailey is her advisor, and this could be the stressor for Hailey. Secondary traumatic stress has been defined by Figley (qtd. in Bride et.al) as “the natural, consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other. It is the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person” (Bride et.al, 2004). Hailey really wants to help Jenny, and when she feels like she fails, it takes a toll on her.

Since the novel is told from other perspectives than from the person who suffers the sexual assault, the readers do not get a clear sense of what Jenny thinks and feels. However, she is one of the most important characters and the whole novel centers around her rape. The readers get to know Jenny mostly through the lens of Hailey, who describes her as shy, quiet and studious which gained her the nickname “Jenny-Mouse” behind her back (8). Even though the readers do not learn this until towards the end of the novel, right after Jordan raped Jenny she started to distance herself from what happened and denies it: “These are not her clothes, and she isn’t this girl. No. Not her. She begins to run [...] She imagines she can run from this night” (353). This behavior is not uncommon for a rape survivor and is often caused by the shame that society has brought on rape survivors and the meaning of victimhood in a cultural sense. In society today there are several “rape myths” that circle around which help substantiate “rape culture.” In the 2015 book *Asking for It*, Kate Harding notes how researchers Amy Grubb and Emily Turner explain the four characteristic functions of rape myths: “[B]lame the victim for their rape, express a disbelief in claims of rape, exonerate the perpetrator, and allude that only certain types of women are raped” (qtd. in Harding, 22, emphasis in original). Harding further notes how a group of University of Illinois psychologists further expanded on these categories that rape myths fall under, identifying seven categories:

1. She asked for it.
2. It wasn’t really rape
3. He didn’t mean to.
4. She wanted it.
5. She lied.
6. Rape is a trivial event.
7. Rape is a deviant event (qtd. in Harding, 22).

All of these myths are represented at some point in the novel. The reason why people are so quick to resort to a rape myth is because believing in a myth is comforting, and as Grubb and Turner put it:

To believe that rape victims are innocent and not deserving of their fate is incongruous with the general belief in a just world; therefore, in order to avoid cognitive dissonance, rape myths serve to protect an individual's belief in a just world (qtd. in Harding, 23).

Jenny reexperience several elements of her trauma throughout the course of the novel. After the initial trauma, she is continuously victimized by the cruelty of others, and the reason for their cruelty often stem from a belief in one or multiple of these rape myths. The most frequent myth in this novel is "She lied." It is a common problem for victims of rape to not be believed, and that is one of the reasons why it is so hard to come forward and tell one's story. Even though only an estimated 2-8 percent of rape reports are false, people tend to think that women report rape falsely to get revenge or because they are ashamed they said yes (Harding, 25). The first encounter Jenny has with this myth is when she receives Jordan's response to her claim of sexual assault, he states that he is innocent which indirectly means "she's lying." This upsets Jenny because she had written in detail of what happened and he just responded with one sentence, as if what she claims does not even "deserve an answer" (110). The second time Jenny faces accusations that she is lying, is when someone writes "Lying Bitch" on the whiteboard outside their dorm room (167). This event makes Jenny feel extremely uneasy, and she displays some of the same symptoms she had after she was raped, such as sitting with her knees up to her chest with an "agonized expression" on her face (166). Prior to this, her room has been a place where she had been comforted and felt safe. Now, her safe space had been intruded.

One conversation between Hailey and her teammate Madison creates a good picture of how people sometimes have trouble figuring out how to act around a victim of sexual assault, and how they choose to act can affect the victim. It starts with Madison telling Hailey that she needs to visit Jenny, only after she told Hailey about a "hot" guy that lives in the same house as Jenny. Hailey calls her out saying she is "pretending to care about Jenny so [she] can scope out boys at Out House" and that she has never ask about how Jenny is doing (231). Madison then feels awful about it, but Hailey continues: "You're not awful. You're typical. No one asks her. I get that it's awkward, but it just makes her feel...shamed. As if

she's done something wrong, or she is stained in some way" (232). Often times when people feel awkward and do not know how to approach a situation, they decide that it is better to do nothing. However, this makes the victim feel like an outcast, when what they want is to feel like nothing has changed in order for them to have some sense of normalcy.

At the beginning of the novel, Jenny displays the typical signs for someone who has gone through a trauma, however, as the novel develops, she starts to show a lot of post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth is when "individuals experience positive effects following traumatic events" (Bond and Craps, 147). At first, the image that is created about Jenny tells a story of a girl who stayed in the background and did what she was supposed to do. After her assault, she is faced with the challenge of standing up for herself. She has people telling her what she should do regarding the case, especially by her parents. They tell her she should go to the police, she says no, but they do not listen to her. Finally, she has had enough and yells: "LISTEN TO ME! [...] What part of 'No!' 'Don't!' 'Stop!' do people not *get*?" (261, emphasis in original). This is the moment where Jenny takes ownership of her own life. When she was raped, the control she had of her own body was taken away from her, but by going through this process she tries to regain that control.

Richard lives in the same house as Jordan, the guy who is accused of raping Jenny. He, similarly to Hailey, is dragged into the rape case unwillingly by being appointed as Jordan's advisor. The circumstances for this however, are different than with Hailey and Jenny. Jordan told Richard that he had sex with a freshman on the night in question, and it is because of this Jordan's attorney wants Richard to be Jordan's advisor. Jordan wants Richard to lie for him but Richard refuses. If Richard is the advisor than he would not have to answer questions and lie about that night and would therefore not implicate Jordan. Richard goes through a major change during the course of the novel, he starts off as being ignorant and do not understand how language can be harmful. Towards the end, Richards acquires a more nuanced way of looking at consent and understands the impact of the toxic attitudes of some of the other male characters.

Jordan is the character in the novel who raped Jenny. He is entitled and objectifies women. Jordan told Richard he had sex with a freshman, and then proceeded to say that "[s]he was great. But this is college. It's a freakin' buffet!" (42) He is using the word "buffet" as a metaphor on how easy it is to get sex from college girls. With this type of mindset, it is clear that he objectifies women and that this type of thinking can lead to inappropriate behavior towards the opposite sex. In another conversation with Richard, he tells him that he "don't need to roffie some girl to get a little action," again, showing that he believes that he

could go out and “get some” at any time (88). Throughout the novel, Jordan firmly believes that he did nothing wrong, this could possibly be linked to his upbringing. Jordan comes from a wealthy family, and has grown up with parents who fix everything for him and have not taught him about consequences. This could be applied to many real-life college rape cases, such as the previously mentioned Brock Turner case. People tend to have a picture in their head about what a rapist looks and acts like, this is because of rape myth number seven; that rape is a deviant event. Jordan is not the only character in the novel who has disturbing thoughts and attitudes towards women. Even though Brandon Exley does not have a major role in the novel, he contributes to the message of the novel, by representing toxic attitudes and the pressure to drink alcohol in college. He was the person who mixed the drinks the night in question, and when he shows the alcohol to the other boys, he says: “Let the games begin, gentlemen” (39). At the party there is “[n]o entry without a freshman female” (149). These two statements help to create a picture of the attitudes and the intentions that the boys have throughout the night.

What the author of this novel does so well, is that she is able to show how the different people in different situations can be affected by a rape case. The book does address and talk about the rape, but the focus is on how the individual characters try to navigate the cultural landscape of college campus. It is not an attempt to anatomize the truth, but instead it tries to shine a light on how college students handle being put in an uncomfortable and unfamiliar situation and how the process of the college inquiry affects them.

### College Rape Cases, Sanction vs No Sanction

Statistically, one in five women experience sexual assault in college (Krebs et al., 2016). College rape cases, such as the people v. Turner case, bring attention to faults in the system and shows how difficult it is to prosecute perpetrators. Campus rape is a part of the rape culture that we see in society, and some have even called campus rape and sexual violence an epidemic (Brodsky, 2013). In this novel, the victim of the assault chooses not to go to the police. Mainly because she knows that she waited too long and that there would not be enough physical evidence to convict the perpetrator, and therefore filing a report to the police would take more energy than what she could handle. Jenny’s father and the lawyer he attained for her both try to push Jenny to go to the police, but she feels like they do not listen to her needs and feelings and instead believe that they know what is best for her.

When a crime happens, usually there are witnesses or physical evidence, this is where rape differs from other crimes. In most rape cases there are no witnesses, so the only people that know the truth are standing on opposite sides in a case and most of the evidence are circumstantial. This is also the case in this novel, when the report is filed to the school there is only Jenny on one side who says that she got raped, and Jordan on the other side who says nothing happened. As little as 310 out of every 1000 sexual assaults are reported to the police, and out of those 310 only 25 will be incarcerated. A total of 13% of victims who did not report, believed that the police would not do anything to help (RAINN, 2020). Many victims are afraid of the social consequences reporting it will have, as “[c]onventional social attitudes not only fail to recognize most rapes as violations but also construe them as consensual sexual relations for which the victim is responsible” (Herman, 67).

Since Jenny does not go to the police, but rather goes to the college authorities, the novel follows how a college would handle these types of situations. Colleges are not typically prepared or equipped to properly handle rape cases. Most of the time they do not have a people who are trained or have the knowledge to lead an investigation, and therefore, the investigations are lacking and do not reveal the full picture (Cohn, 2015). With rape cases being extremely difficult to prosecute, on the account of insufficient evidence, the task for a college can turn out to be particularly challenging. As mentioned in a previous chapter, colleges are often critiqued for the way they handle such cases. However, due to Title IX, colleges and universities that receive federal funding are required to respond to instances of sexual discrimination and prevent it from reoccurring. In this novel, there are two employees at the college who are involved in the case. There is Carole Patterson, who is the first person that Jenny and Hailey talk to, and the person who coordinates everything related to the case. Then there is Dean Hunt; he is the one who interrogates everyone and ultimately makes the decision on whether or not Jordan is guilty. Dean Hunt does not have the qualifications to make an informed decision, especially since the outcome can have a major impact on the future for the accused. A college would not need as much evidence as a criminal courts case would have and is therefore more likely to come to a wrong conclusion in some cases. However, as mentioned before, only a few percent make false rape allegations. Title IX’s purpose is to eliminate discrimination, while the criminal justice system aims to punish the guilty. Title IX is there to help the victims who are failed by the criminal justice system, but colleges lack the tools to conduct a thorough investigation. This is also the case in *Wrecked*, Dean Hunt tries to navigate the different statements that the people involved have given him but he is not left with any evidence to actually be able to convict and expel Jordan.

## 'No Means No:' The Issue of Consent

The issue with the need for consent before engaging in any sexual activity is one of the most repetitive topics in the novel. Many questions arise throughout the novel regarding consent and what it means to give consent. These questions create a sense of urgency and show how little knowledge there is in society about this topic, especially when it comes to young adults.

Before Jenny was raped, she was at a party and she was drinking, which she normally does not do. In some states in the U.S., whether or not the person who was raped got intoxicated voluntarily or not plays a part in convicting the rapist or even classifying the case as rape. In this case, the alcohol was a major factor in the events that followed that night. Due to the circumstances around the rape and the involvement of alcohol and partying, there are several different characters in the novel who either feel guilty or are accused of contributing to putting Jenny in a compromising situation. Joe, one of Richard's housemates, has a hard time thinking about his role in it and says that he feels "like shit thinking I might have served the girl who then went off and got hurt" (227). He is not the only one who thinks about their part that night, as the girl who went out with Jenny faces backlash for leaving her there. Women have been subjugated to violence from men and women have been told not to go anywhere alone, especially at night. The girls left Jenny at the party, even though she was visibly drunk, and thereby breaking one of the most established "girl code" rules. "Girl code" is a set of unwritten rules in female friendships that girls follow in order to protect each other (Urban Dictionary, 2019). One important rule is that one must never leave a friend with a random guy when she is drunk, in which these girls did. Tamra, one of Jenny's friends who were at the party, is confronted about leaving Jenny by Hailey, but Tamra seems more concerned about if she herself would get in trouble for underage drinking (154).

When Jenny tells Dean Hunt about that night, she has a lacking memory due to the amount of alcohol that she had consumed. There are certain details that are missing, which makes Dean Hunt question her a bit more. She tells him that she kissed Jordan and that she enjoyed it so she kissed him back. She then told Jordan that she felt "swirly," before she fell asleep (241). Even though consent can be withdrawn at any moment and that giving consent to one thing does not mean one has given consent to anything more, one can only assume that Jordan took the reciprocated kiss as a sign of her consent in some way. Jenny is unconscious at some point, but Jordan continues to advance on her. During the rape, Jenny's mind is

“frenzied” while her body is “unresponsive,” she is experiencing TI, as previously mentioned (331). She tries to tell him to stop and to push him off, but she is unable to. Even though a victim is not kicking or screaming does not mean that they give consent. After Jordan finished, he said to her that she is “so sweet,” showing that he does not seem to understand that what he just did was wrong.

A while after Jenny reported the rape, the whole college campus has heard about it, or at least some version of the story. The case has created a need for the students and faculty to talk about consent in a new way. Therefore, the school arranges a seminar with a counselor who is also a stand-up comedian, in the hopes that it will open up a space to talk about consent in order to understand the concept of consent better. The man who is holding the seminar, Matt Trainor, is the one who address the problem with “no means no.” This is how he explains the problem with it:

It sets up this dynamic that basically says, ‘I’m going to keep pushing until you say stop.’ Well, what does that tell us? That silence means yes? That it’s okay to go for it until someone draws the line? I want to suggest something more positive. More affirmative. More sexy, even. How about ‘Yes Means Yes’? (298)

Here he brings up one of the problems of the line between consent and rape. Society has created an issue in the way people look at rape, they see it as a violent act. However, a lot of the time violence is not used to rape someone, mostly due to the fact that many victims freeze just like Jenny did. In a 2008 anthology named *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World Without Rape*, Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti addressed this issue of “No Means No” versus “Yes Means Yes,” where they argued for moving to a more affirmative way of giving consent (Harding, 215). Six years after this anthology was released, a governor in California signed a bill that required that colleges to include “an affirmative consent standard in the determination of whether consent was given by a complainant (Harding, 216). This standard means that both parties need to give “affirmative consent” to engage in any sexual activity, and both parties are responsible for ensuring that they have the other persons consent throughout the act. The standard also states that even though the people involved either have an existing dating relationship or have previously had sexual relations, does not indicate consent, by itself (Harding, 216). Continuing with the seminar in the novel, Hailey volunteers herself and Richard to come up on stage and act out what consent might look like. Matt Trainor asks Richard how he knows when it is the right time to “make [a]



move” (300). Richard responds that it “depends on the situation” and that one can tell by “body language” (300). When Trainor asks Richard why he does not just ask for a kiss, Richard says that it “messes with the mood” (300). This encounter between Trainor and Richard shows the mentality of the majority of young people, who believes that asking for a kiss is awkward and a mood killer. Trainor then wants to know if it is more awkward to go in for the kiss and then get rejected, and why it would not be better to just ask. Richard and Hailey then proceed to show what consent might look like when Hailey says to Richard: “[...] I have never had a boyfriend [...] I know you have, had girlfriends, that is. But for now, for us? For starters? Can we just...kiss?” (303) This is to show and possibly encourage a positive shift in the way society look at consent.

### Unhealthy Attitudes Towards Women

There is a lot to be said about the attitudes some of the characters display towards women in the novel. In society, there is a deep-rooted issue regarding how women are viewed and how they should act and dress. Many people are ignorant to the fact that women are abused and that these unhealthy attitudes condone the act of abuse, both verbal and physical. Richard is a character who shows some of the preconceived notions that people have, but also that the reason behind is not cruelty but a mere lack of knowledge. He starts off with criticizing the rape crisis hotline and Carrie who works there:

Her all-important, saving-the-world-one-hysterical-girl-at-a-time shift, answering the phone at the college`s just-created helpline. Which is supposed to be a rape crisis line, but has turned out to be where freshmen females call when their underage roommates barf uncontrollably after drinking too many vodka shots (25-26).

His tone here is very critical and condescending towards both the women who calls but also towards the people who answer them. He continues his uninformed ways later in the novel, when he questions why it took Jenny so long to report the rape, and if it was Carrie who convinced Jenny it was rape (144). He does not understand the human condition that follows a trauma. Rape is a crime that affects the victim on more than just a physical level and not every rape case is the same, and the way people handle it will differ accordingly. Richard is also clouded by his emotions towards Carrie and may therefore have preconceived ideas of

the situation that does not allow him to see other possible truths. Richard displays a belief and thought process that can represent many people. He believes that because it took Jenny a week to report it, that it might have been a case of a “yes the night before [that turned] into no the morning after” (146). In his mind, he is being reasonable and putting things into perspective, however he has not seen things from where Hailey has. She even tells him that he does not know Jenny and that “[s]omething bad happened to her. She was okey and now she’s...wrecked. People don’t act like this unless something awful happened to them” (145). Richard’s snarky or rude comments are in part microaggressions. Microaggressions are “[e]veryday and often unintentional verbal or behavioral slights, insults, and indignities that reveal biases against marginalized groups such as people of color, women, or LGBTQ individuals and leave their victims feeling uncomfortable or distressed” (Bond and Craps, 145). The reason for his microaggressions could possibly be insidious trauma that he experiences due to the fact that he is around many spoiled and privileged people, while he comes from a family that do not have as much. Insidious trauma is the “psychological effects of experiences of normative, everyday forms of oppression,” which in Richard’s case was classism (Bonds and Craps, 145). There are several times in the novel that Richard shows disdain for the people he lives with. In the beginning of the novel Richard mentions the time where him and his roommates were fined for damage they caused during a party, neither him nor his parents could afford the fines, while his roommates seemed unbothered and went on with the same behavior (21). Richard was mocked for being a math tutor and not participating in their drinking activities, because they did not understand that he had to tutor in order to have some money (44).

Earlier in the novel, Richard made a crude joke about rape. He told Carrie that “[she] pretty much raped [him] last night,” which speaks of his immaturity and how he often does not think before he speaks (23). He does not understand how powerful words can be, and he accused Carrie of not having a sense of humor after he made his joke. Carrie then responds with: “A lot of things make me laugh. Here’s what doesn’t: hate speech. Words that promote violence against women” (25). By using the word rape in jokes, one undermines the severity of the act of rape, trivializing it. People need to be educated, in order to stop or at least limit the unhealthy attitudes. Jordan often objectifies women in the way he talks about them. Such as the comment he made about how college is a “buffet” of girls that he can have sex with. When Richard told Jordan about the stupid and uneducated comments and jokes that he had made to Carrie, Jordan made it seem like Carrie was the problem and “[t]here are more fish in the sea, and they are way easier to hook” (41). Here he is basically saying that Richard

should rather find a girl that does not call him out when he says something that is hurtful towards women.

## Discussion

### Truth

The search for truth can often be a difficult one. There are always different sides to the same story, and it is not always easy to keep oneself objective. Truth is not fixed, as it can be interpreted in different directions. Both Atwood and Padian use several narrators or stories to highlight the difficulties of identifying the truth. The way Atwood does it in *The Blind Assassin* is by using a structure called *mise-en-abyme*, which refers to a story within a story that has mirroring patterns (Merriam-Webster, 2019). This way of writing gives complexity to the main narrative and says something about storytelling. It shows how stories can be told in many different ways and that the act of storytelling can be a way of manipulating and altering the truth to fit one's own agenda. There are many examples of this in the novel, especially in the beginning but also throughout the novel, there are several newspaper articles that talk about many different situations and events in Iris' life. The first newspaper article that appears in the novel is one that discusses Laura's death. Laura died after her car crashed into the ravine below a bridge, and the article suggests that the crash was merely an accident. The police suggested that "a tire caught in an exposed streetcar track was a contributing factor," and according to the article, Iris made a statement saying that Laura "suffered from severe headaches affecting her vision" (6). However, on the first page of the novel, Iris made a comment about Laura's death and said that "It wasn't the brakes [...] [Laura] had her reasons," indicating that it was suicide. Here, the reader is given several options for the truth, but since Iris is Laura's sister, the reader would be more inclined to believe Iris' version as the truth. However, it is impossible to know what exactly went through Laura's mind in that moment, and therefore making it difficult to get the entire truth of what happened. Suicide has been and still is taboo, which could be the reason why Iris decided not to tell anyone about her suspicions. "[M]any traumatized people feel that a part of themselves has died" even long after experiencing the trauma, and those who are the "most profoundly afflicted wish that they were dead" (Herman, 49). Laura was a victim of sexual abuse, including rape, and one community study of crime victims reported that rape survivors had more suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts than any other group (Herman, 50).

The truth can also be a double-edged sword. Most of the time, one is encouraged to tell the truth but that might not always be the best option. As previously mentioned, it is

highly suggested that Laura committed suicide. The whole novel starts off with Laura's death, but it is not until the end of the novel that reader finds out what happened in the moments before her passing. Laura and Iris had not seen each other for some time, and Iris did not know the truth about what Laura had been through by the hands of Richard. Laura tells Iris that she actually was pregnant, even though Richard had told Iris that was only imagining it, this time Iris believed Laura was telling the truth. All this time, Richard had been manipulating Laura into believing that if she did not do what he said, he would have Alex killed. Alex had been killed in the war, but Laura did not know that, so she came back to Iris in the hopes that Alex would find her there. In the novel Iris reference back to their childhood, when their mother had died but Laura was not upset about it because she had made a pact with God, the same way Laura thought everything was fine now with Alex. Iris then recalls what she did: "My fingers itched with spite. I knew what had happened next. I'd pushed her off" (595). Iris had pushed Laura off the edge and into their pool. After looking back at this moment, Iris then says:

"Now I'm coming to the part that still haunts me. Now I should have bitten my tongue, now I should have kept my mouth shut. Out of love, I should have lied, or said anything else: *Never interrupt a sleepwalker*, Reenie used to say. *The shock can kill them* (595, emphasis in original).

What Iris then told Laura was that Alex had died in the war and that she was the one who was notified because they had been lovers. When Laura heard this, it upset her, so she stole Iris' car keys and ran off. This is when Laura drove off the bridge and killed herself. Iris believed that Laura lived in some sort of dream world, basically "sleepwalking" and by telling her that Alex had died, Iris woke her up and "the shock killed her." In retrospect, Iris believe that she should not have told her the truth and that the truth is what killed her. Just like when they were younger and Iris had pushed Laura off the edge, she had done the same thing now, only this time it was metaphorically.

Throughout the novel, the reader is led to believe that Laura is the one who wrote the novel within Atwood's novel. This helps to create an image of Laura and interpret who she is as a person. However, when the reader finds out that it was in fact Iris who wrote it, it alters the way the reader view both sisters. Finding out that Iris lied about the authorship of the novel, also makes one question if there are other times where Iris have not told the truth.

Atwood creates the notion that a narrative can provide clues and hints about the truth, but they can often be misleading.

The way Padian addresses the topic of truth is a bit different from Atwood, but it still makes a great impact. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the way the novel is written is by the use of three different narrative tracks, the first two being the main characters Hailey and Richard taking turns narrating the chapters, while the third narrative comes in-between the chapters. This third narration is a rendition of what actually happened the night of the Jenny's rape, and it is used to show how difficult it can be to figure out the truth and how much each the stories from the people involved can differ. Jenny is very focused on telling the truth. At first, she is very hesitant to tell anybody about what happened to her, but she starts by calling the rape crisis hotline at the college, where Carrie answers her call and helps her when she decides to report it to the school. It is hard for Jenny to tell Hailey about what happened to her, so she makes Carrie do it. When Jenny reports it, she has to write a statement, as detailed as she can, about what actually happened to her that night. When it is time for Dean Hunt to investigate, he wants to hear about what happened directly from Jenny, she says that it is already in her statement, but he wants to make sure he got his facts straight. Hailey, who sits in on this meeting, reflects on why he wants to hear it again: "*The same story. Told the same way. That's how he'll know it's the truth*" (233, emphasis in original). Jenny then starts to tell what happened to her. Dean Hunt asks several questions, asking if Jenny is absolutely sure about some of the things she says. Jenny gets upset about his questions, because she feels like he is asking them because he does not believe what she says. The Dean proceeds to tell Jenny that he does not think she is lying, but that there is a problem with her statement. Some of the details does not fit. For one, she said that she climbed the stairs to get to his room, but Jordan's room was on the first floor. She also mentioned a picture of a dog, but Jordan does not have any pets (246). Jenny truly believes that she is telling the truth, and it is very important for her that everyone else believes her, especially the dean. The reason why her story does not add up, is because she only remembers fragments of the night. This is revealed to the reader through the narration in-between the chapters. Jenny does recall drinking a lot and also passing out, so the gaps in her story can be linked to her intoxication, however, it may also be caused due to the trauma she suffered. "The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness [...] People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility" (Herman, 1). Jenny seems to have a hard time accepting that there are things in her story that are not necessarily the truth, because "[d]enial of reality

makes [victims] feel crazy,” and she just wants people to believe her when she says she was raped (Herman, 181).

It is hard for victims to accept the truth, because the mind works hard to prevent the intrusive images in their memory to present themselves. However, it is believed that “[w]hen the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery” (Herman, 1). Iris have experienced several traumatic events in her life, and by telling her story and writing it down, she is able to process these events and hopefully relieve some of the burdens she has carried throughout her life. Although, she questions her own reliability, she also notes that her truth has become the truth because she is the only one left to tell the stories.

### The Meaning Behind the Titles

In both novels the titles bear a symbolic meaning. The purpose of a title is to identify or described the book, and in these two novels the titles are also mentioned either directly or metaphorically throughout.

*The Blind Assassin* is the title for both Atwood’s novel, but also the novel-within-the-novel. One can argue that Iris is the “blind assassin” of the novel. Iris is also the name for a part of the eye that decides how much light should be let in, giving Iris a fitting name as a “blind assassin.” Even though she is not directly responsible for Laura’s death, she made some decisions that affected Laura, one of them being telling Laura about her affair with Alex when Laura was already in a vulnerable state. At the time, Iris was blind to the consequences of her actions. The sisters had already had a long, silent fight over Alex, and Iris was also resentful because she was left to take care of Laura. This responsibility to her family was the reason why she entered the abusive marriage to Richard. Laura had been through a lot when it came to Iris’ husband, he sexually abused her and after getting her pregnant he put her in an institution, which Iris did nothing to prevent. When Iris then decided to inform Laura of Alex’s death and her own affair with him, she did it out of jealousy. Iris thought that Laura had become pregnant with Alex’s child and that made her mad. Iris turned a blind eye to how Richard treated Laura for years, even though Laura was showing signs of trauma. Iris had her own problems with Richard, so it is possible that in the back of her mind she did not want to see what was happening with Laura because then she herself would be the person Richard would focus on. There were a couple of major factors as to why Laura decided to commit suicide; first of all, it was the abuse that she had suffered

during her childhood that continued when she moved in with Iris and Richard. Secondly, and possibly most importantly, the timing of Iris telling Laura about Alex's death in the war and revealing their affair. Laura was under the impression that all the suffering she had gone through by the hands of Richard was all worth it because it kept Alex safe. When Laura found out that it did not keep him safe and that he had been killed, there was no longer a "reason" for her suffering. Laura had used this thought that she kept Alex safe as a coping mechanism and when she no longer had it, she felt like she did not have a purpose anymore. The fact that Iris had an affair with Alex, who Laura was in love with, Laura saw it as an act of betrayal. It is not until after Laura's death that Iris then, to some extent, understands her role in it and tries to make it up to Laura. The only way Iris can think of to make it up to Laura was by making her famous posthumously. Iris' "blindness" causes a domino effect and leads to several deaths within her family. The newfound attention that Laura gets after Iris published a book under her name leads to Richard taking his own life. It also leads Iris' daughter to draw the false conclusion that Laura is her real mom, and due to the suicides of Richard and Laura, and also having to live with Winifred pushes her into a drug and alcohol addiction that eventually takes her life. People are not able to foresee the consequences of their actions and can therefore be seen as living their lives blindly.

In *Wrecked*, the word "wrecked" is used to describe the characters in the novel. The word itself can mean a couple of different things. For one, it can be used to describe something that is "very badly damaged", secondly, it can also be used as slang for being "very drunk" (Cambridge University Press, 2021). The first time the word is used is when Jordan describes to Richard what happened over the weekend, at the party where Jordan raped Jenny. Here he says: "God, we were wrecked. Exley mixed an entire trash can of Skippy," and in this context it means that they were very drunk due to the cocktail that Exley mixed named Skippy. Jordan uses the word as something positive and associated with having fun. However, the next time the word is used it has a more negative connotation. Hailey used it to describe how Jenny has been affected by the rape: "Something bad happened to her. She was okay and now she's...wrecked. People don't act like this unless something awful happened to them" (145). Jenny has begun to care less about personal hygiene and withdrawing emotionally, which are normal chances for someone who has been through a traumatic event, but Hailey does not have the knowledge about it so she describes these changes as best as she can. "Wrecked" is used again to describe Jenny, after she learns that Jordan has withdrawn from school and will not face any consequences. The girls who have supported Jenny throughout the college's investigation are all gathered to talk about what



happened to Jordan and the investigation. They discuss the surrounding of why Jenny's claim has been dropped, but Hailey is confused as to why Jenny is not relieved to know that Jordan is no longer a student at the college, instead "Jenny looks wrecked" (340). Jenny is "wrecked" because she does not get any closure by Jordan leaving without having to face any consequences or making him accountable. Instead, he is free to do it again at a new school since there is nothing on his record, while Jenny experiences the consequences such as people calling her a "slut", an "attention-seeker" and "lying bitch," and since he was never found guilty, she will be seen as "the girl who cried rape" (343). There are two more times "wrecked" is used, both in reference to the amount of alcohol that was consumed. Tamra, one of the girls Jenny went to the party with, used it to explain why they left Jenny at the party; "But we honestly didn't know anything bad had happened to her. We were all pretty wrecked" (155). Tamra used it as an excuse after she is called in to talk to the dean about what happened at the night of the party, because she does not want to get in trouble. Joe, who lives with Jordan and Richard, is also called in to speak to the dean, but unlike Tamra, he feels guilty about the part he might have played. Joe tells Richard that "[t]here was one girl that night who was really wrecked [...] I feel like shit thinking I might have served the girl who then went off and got hurt" (227), here again "wrecked" is used to describe someone who is very drunk. Alcohol is very central to the novel, as it highlights the consequences of drinking. The characters offer different perspectives on alcohol, and how alcohol caused some of the characters to play a part in how Jenny ended up getting raped. At the end of the novel, the people living in the house with Richard seem to understand the consequences of excessive drinking and want a change. They wanted Richard to take over as the house social chair, after the Exley, who had been the social chair before he left. Exley was always one of the people who pushed alcohol on everyone, bringing with him a lot of unhealthy attitudes. In the aftermath of the rape case, Richard and his roommates finally seemed to understand that "a new direction might be good" (347).

The way the titles are used help create an understanding of some of the deeper issues the characters have, and through the experiences the characters go through, the reader is able to see how these issues exist in society as well. Iris can be seen as the "blind assassin" of the novel due to the way she turns a blind eye to Laura and how she is indirectly responsible for the deaths of people close to her. Jenny is described as "wrecked" multiple times, mostly for how she acts in the aftermath of her rape. The word "wrecked" reflects on both the social issues of alcohol and the consequences of sexual assault.

## Conclusion

Throughout this MA thesis, I have focused on trauma and its consequences for the people affected. I have analyzed Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* and Maria Padian's *Wrecked*, looking at the way the characters experience and cope with trauma and secondary traumatization. Although the two novels are very different, they share similarities when it comes to the impact that trauma can have. My goal has been to highlight how trauma can affect more than just the original trauma victim, and how society's view on women and rape affects the victim's responses and symptoms.

In the two novels I chose to study in this MA thesis, the main characters are not the ones who suffer the most trauma, however, that is not to say they did not suffer any. The narration in both novels is done by people who are close to or live with the person who suffer from the most impactful trauma. *The Blind Assassin* does have more complexity to it, and the characters suffer from severe and prolonged traumatic events. Iris and Laura grew up in a time with inequality and sexism, and they both suffered under gender-based oppression; this is most clear from Richard's treatment of Laura. Iris married Richard to protect Laura, instead Laura ended up being raped repeatedly over several years by Richard. Iris uses her memoir as a way of coping with the trauma she has suffered throughout her life. By remembering the traumatic incidents that has shaped her life, she is able to work-through them and find closure.

*Wrecked* is a contemporary novel, illuminating the difficulty of navigating college life. The plotline of the novel describes the reality for many students, and this type of novel can help gain awareness to a heavy, yet important topic. Rape is something that, unfortunately, many women will experience in their life. The way society talks about rape contributes to the myths and stereotypes that leave the victims with feelings of shame and guilt. That is why it is extremely important that society change their perception of rape. Rape is never the victim's fault, no matter what they were wearing or how drunk they were. If society is able to make this change, then it will create a safe space for victims to come forward, in order for them to begin their healing process. Jenny is able to start her healing because she is forced to stand up for herself, and she has people around her that supports her in her quest for closure.

The exploration of the connection between memory and trauma, led to a conclusion that traumatic experiences are highly affected by memory. Sometimes memory can be haunting, through intrusive images, flashbacks and reoccurring nightmares. Other times,

memory can help a victim heal. There are many examples where trauma victims suppress their memories in the hopes that it will eventually go away. However, this is rarely the case; the memories lie in the back of the victims' mind, making it almost impossible to recover and move on. Through remembering, a victim can learn to have the authority over their memories and control when to remember the trauma and when to put it aside. A person who has suffered trauma will always have the memories with them, but by working-through they are able to focus on their daily life instead of being stuck in the past.

In the two novels, the trauma that the characters go through seems to leave the biggest imprint on the mind. They experience both physical and psychological trauma, but it does not leave them with physical scars or impairments. One is not able to see any imprints on their bodies, but they have scars on their minds. In *The Blind Assassin*, one quote says: "But the old wound has split open, the invisible blood pours forth. Soon I'll be emptied" (51). This quote is a drawing a comparison between physical wounds and wounds that one cannot see, but it is still equally, if not more, important to tend to the wounds on the mind. Mental health issues have been a topic that many have feared to address, due to the low status mental health has in society today. Society's view on women affects the main characters greatly and they experience more obstacles on their way towards healing because of it. By highlighting these topics in books, movies and media one is able to start a conversation that can help victims come forward with their story and find strength in the unity it can create.

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