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She Touched Me: Five Snapshots of Adult Sexual Violations of Black Boys

ABSTRACT. Too often the idea of young Black boys as sexually aggressive or criminally assaultive displaces the idea that they can be victims at all. As such, Black boys are not theorized or researched as victims of sexual violations in current gender literatures. Instead they are almost exclusively represented as perpetrators of sexual violence, not victims of it. This study examines five snapshots of Black men who were victims of sexual violations as young boys. Our findings indicate that Black males are uniquely at risk for sexual impropriety and statutory rape, primarily via older women and teenage girl female-perpetrators (although risk also includes same-sex violations). This study, the first of its kind, argues that Black boys must be understood as a population at risk to be victims of sexual violations and require an earlier sex education emphasizing their sexual vulnerability.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine: A 15-year-old girl has sex with a 20-year-old man. It is her first sexual experience. Her first time having intercourse. She remembers that “he basically took it from me,” but feels an affection for the person and the event. She was not at the age of consent, but describes the experience as “just pleasure.” Was this rape or simply a man ushering a young girl into womanhood? Now imagine *her* as a 15-year-old boy and *him* to be a 20-year-old woman. She “took it from him,” but he recalls it was pleasurable. Was he forced into sexual relations with an adult before the age of consent? Was he raped? Can he actually be raped?

It is often difficult to conceptualize male bodies as being victims of sexual violence, and even more so when the perpetrator of that sexual violence is female. Recent research has commented on male victims’ invisibility in the public’s perception of sexual initiation and exploitation. When the perpetrator is female and the victim is male, society is much more likely to

view the sexual relationship between these two as one of mutual pleasure and sexual initiation (Duncan 2010; Boroughs 2004; Bolton, Morris, and MacEachron 1989). Male victimization, even when suffered by a child, is often overlooked or rationalized as something different and less violent than what would happen to a young girl.

In Matthew P. Mendel's *The Male Survivor: The Impact of Sexual Abuse*, he argues that the visibility of male victims rarely is seen through their actual suffering or the symptoms manifesting because of the event. Often male victims are identified by the threat they pose to others. Mendel (1995) explains:

It is easier to recognize a male perpetrator than a male victim. This simple proposition has, I believe, profound ramifications for abused men, for the psychotherapeutic community, and for the field of criminal justice. The cultural stereotype of men as active, violent, and aggressive rather than passive, helpless, or victimized makes it easy to recognize behaviors that fit the former pattern and difficult to perceive the latter. Moreover, if we expect abused boys or male survivors of child sexual abuse to behave just like their female counterparts, we will miss a lot of abused males. The victimization of males is, unfortunately, only likely to come to light through their later sexual offenses, if at all. (20)

While various studies have established that male victims of child sexual abuse suffer from an increased propensity towards self-harm, alcoholism, guilt, shame, emasculation, anxiety, and depression (Hlavka 2016; Hines and Finkelhor 2007; Coxell and King 2010), there is a seemingly unshakable belief that as males, young boys are unaffected by sexual victimization—that they do not personally suffer and that sex with an older woman is pleasurable rather than traumatic (Rush 1980). This silent suffering, the product of males' inability to disclose their victimization because the world simply does not believe men and boys are victims of sexual violence, can be socially and psychologically debilitating (Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, and Grossman 2008).

Female perpetrators of child sexual abuse, commonly referred to as female sex offenders, remain an understudied and somewhat invisible population in the academic literature (Becker, Hall, and Stinson 2001; Hislop 2001; Grayston and De Luca 1999). Despite the documenting of a growing demographic of female sex offenders in the child sex abuse literature (Pittaro 2016), cases reported to child protective services (McLeod 2015), and victimization surveys (Cortoni, Babchishin and Rat 2017), there is no recognition of female sexual offenders and male victims

of child sexual abuse within gender and race theory literatures regarding masculinity. As Katrina Williams and David Bierie (2015) write, “Sexual offenses committed by females are perceived to be uncommon and when they do occur, harmless or less harmful than offenses committed by males” (235–236). While there has been some recognition of the gap between the seemingly intuitive assertion that women do not sexually violate minors and the cases of minors sexually violated by females in the scientific literature (Denov 2016; Wijkman and Sandler 2018), gender theory within liberal arts disciplines have continued to resist such acknowledgments. At the center of this failure is the (a priori) assumption that women, suppressed by patriarchy, are only the victims of violence—never perpetrators.

In *Female Sexual Predators: Understanding and Identifying Them to Protect Our Children and Youth*, Karen A. Duncan (2010) argues that the radical feminist perspective has fixed in the minds of scholars and policy-makers the view that all sexual violence is unidirectional male-to-female violence. Duncan explains:

the view of females as victims of dominant males was developed in the historical context and sociopolitical view arising from radical feminist scholarship. This particular feminist framework has been a significant influence in the literature on child sexual abuse and adult rape for several years. It may be that this traditional framework, even with its apparent limitations and possible bias, continues to have an influence on how female violence is viewed and child sexual abuse in particular is framed (i.e., coercion of a female by a dominant male). This sociopolitical framework of violence may influence some groups of the public, law enforcement, and professional opinions in spite of the evidence indicating that females are capable and willing to exert violence against others without the influence or presence of a male. (14)

Similar to previous works criticizing feminist theory for its erroneous accounts of male victimization that have argued the sexual abuse of men by adult females is in fact harmless (Rush 1980), the harm from sexual violation or rape only occurs from penile penetration (Mathis 1972; Langston 1999), or that men cannot be raped (Maxwell and Scott 2014), Duncan suggests that the inability to see male victims of female perpetrated sexual violence is largely ideological. As Claire Cohen explains in her recent book, *Male Rape Is a Feminist Issue: Feminism, Governmentality and Male Rape* (2014), “the reluctance to embrace male rape within the feminist rape model, as popularly conceived, is a result of the reluctance to adapt it, not an inability to do so. But this reluctance is understandable

when the model itself is presented as so enmeshed with the legitimacy of the theoretical stance. One cannot revisit the feminist rape model without supposedly impinging on the feminist paradigm as a whole” (157–158). The theory of rape offered by feminism often focuses on women as victims, particularly the sexual vulnerability the female body has to the physical violence of men. The situating of the woman as victim *a priori* overdetermines maleness as the cause of violence and men the perpetrators of violence against women. When dealing with rape and the problem of sexual violence against men, feminist gender analysis has continued to assert that males are perpetrators of violence in their relation to women, not victims of sexual violence from women.

Despite the growing evidence of female-perpetrated sexual violence, female perpetration of child sexual abuse and the statutory rape of minors are not part of the West’s social construction of the woman, nor thought to be worthy of reporting by various law enforcement agencies (Hislop 2001). Myriam Denov (2003), a noted scholar of child violence, explains “Societal perceptions of females as sexually passive and innocent appear to have an important influence on the criminal law, on victim reporting practices, and on professional attitudes, reflecting an implicit negation of women as potential sexual aggressors” (313). The stereotypical, and by effect theoretically centered, perpetrator of the various kinds of sexual abuse and childhood rape are imagined to be male. Psychologist Jacqui Saradjian (2010) explains, “Sexual offending has long been viewed within society as a male-only crime. Males are perceived as controlling all sexual encounters and females as passive and submissive recipients, even when the male is a child and the female is an adult” (13). Affording innocence to women and girls perpetuates an invisibility that perpetrators benefit from. Because female perpetrators of sexual violence are seemingly impossible to imagine, they are cloaked from the eyes of social scientists and theorists alike. As Deborah S. Boroughs (2004) remarks: “Sexual abuse of children by women is a crime that seems so unnatural that it offends society’s moral instincts, causing the issue to be relatively unexplored by social scientists. Like many abhorrent characteristics of human behavior, people often ignore or deny that which they are unwilling to accept or acknowledge” (481).

Female perpetrators of sexual violence do not need to be able to physically overpower—or physically dominate—male victims to commit sexual assault or rape. In some cases, adult female perpetrators use extreme force to coerce adult males into sex. In these cases, weapons like guns and knives were used to make men submit as in the cases documented by Sarrel

and Masters (1982). However, such cases need not be the basis from which sexual violations are conceptualized. Duncan (2010) emphasizes that female perpetrators of sexual violence or statutory rape can be females at any stage of sexual development. The abuse of siblings, bullying, and dating violence are all possible scenarios where peer relationships can enable female perpetrators. Regardless of prevalence, the presence of female perpetrators in any number of relationships with minors does not worry society at large. As such, female perpetration of sexual violence against children and adolescents remains ever present throughout American society but ignored within the (gender) scholarship that claims to develop theories to explain the causalities of sexual violence.

It has been long documented that Black Americans report having their first sexual experiences at younger ages than their white American counterparts. Black males have the earliest sexual debut of any group in the United States. Black boys often report first intercourse between 12 and 14 years of age. The sexual debut of their peer girl group is much later, so their first intercourse is likely with older women (Staples 1982; Cavazos-Rehg et al. 2009; Biello et al. 2013). The earliest studies conducted by white social scientists in the mid-twentieth century interpreted the earlier age of sexual debut amongst Blacks as evidence of their racial inferiority, lack of morality, and hyper-sexuality (Reiss 1964; Rainwater 1966a; Rainwater 1966b). These mid-twentieth century studies observed that Black males were the group most likely to have the earliest first sexual intercourse when compared to white males and females as well as Black females. These studies were often used as evidence of the hyper-sexuality of Black men and boys, and attributed the early sexual debut of Negro boys to promiscuity, the cultural delinquency of Black families, and the innate hypersexual nature of the Negro race. Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey's *The Mark of Oppression* (1951) made the early age of Black male's first sexual experience a lynchpin of Black sexuality studies for decades to come, and inadvertently published what may be the first account of the rape of Black boys in Black communities. Kardiner and Ovesey argue that unlike their white middle-class counterparts who learn about sex from their mothers and fathers, Black boys

learn about sex in the streets, masturbation generally begins early six to eight. On the whole, masturbation does not play much of a role in the growing lower-class boy. This is due to the early opportunities for relations with women. First intercourse at seven or nine is not uncommon, and very frequent in early adolescence usually with girls much older. (68)

This pathological framing of Black boys' early sexual experience, which takes the earlier sexual debut of Black boys as evidence of their innate hyper-sexuality by social scientists and psychologists, is ever-present in theoretical accounts of Black male sexuality. Over a decade into the twenty-first century, scholars and theorists interested in race and Black masculinity have not yet attempted to interpret or analyze the early child sexual experiences of Black boys in the United States as a particular and peculiar sexual vulnerability.

Tommy J. Curry has argued that the history of sexual victimization experienced by Black men and boys has been erased in theory and ignored by scholars because of racism and anti-Black misogyny. To correct this erasure, Curry has argued that a new field, Black male studies, is needed to examine the peculiar interactions between racialization and maleness under neocolonial patriarchal states. A Black male studies paradigm contends that the empirical and historical evidence of Black male rape, intimate partner abuse, and death requires new theories to account for the particular vulnerability of Black males beyond the language of hyper-masculinity. Regarding the sexual abuse and rape of young Black boys, Curry (2017) writes: "The hyper-masculinity of the Black male brute resonates in the minds of observers and theories as a denial of his sexual victimization and rape by women. The idea many hold is that a Black male could never be overpowered or abused by any woman—he is a lil' Buck. . . . This overdetermined envisioning of the Black boy makes even his empirical suffering (his stories, the actual facts of the matter) imperceptible to the general public and academic audiences alike" (125). This article explores the sexuality of young Black males in the United States as it contributes to Black Male Studies. Currently there is no scholarship that explains or documents sexual victimization or statutory rape by adult women as an early sexual experience of Black boys in the United States. While there has been some attention to increased sexual risk of this population (Duncan 2010; NPR 2009), most knowledge concerning the sexual victimization of Black boys is anecdotal and often catches the attention of the public because they are celebrity confessions. Through interviews and a summary of present findings, this article is an exploratory study of the occurrence and consequence of sexual victimization amongst this population.

THE SEXUAL VIOLATION OF BLACK BOYS: A GENRE-D ANALYSIS OF BLACK MALE SEXUAL VULNERABILITY IN CHILDHOOD

The literature concerning the sexual violation of young Black males is practically non-existent. Among the most well-known sources is an NPR interview—“Sexual Abuse Is Often Taboo for Black Boys” (2009). This interview begins with a discussion of the rapper Lil Wayne’s sexual history. According to Lil Wayne, he lost his virginity at the age of 11 to a 14-year-old girl. Amongst Black male rappers, Lil Wayne’s story is not unfamiliar. Chris Brown claims he lost his virginity at the age of eight (Aitkenhead 2013). Atlanta rapper and producer T. I. told Tyra Banks he lost his virginity at 11. Hip-Hop singer T-Pain claims he was only ten (Sellers 2008), while Flava-Flav confessed in his memoir to first having sex at the age of six (Steinman 2011). Over the last year, more Black male celebrities have come forward with their stories of being victimized as children by older women. The comedian Deray Davis told DJ Vlad, a well known Hip-Hop journalist, that he was sexually assaulted by “two ugly horrible looking women in their 30s” when we was only 11 years old. “I was 11 going on 12, I had no hair on my. It was disgusting,” recounts Davis (Helm 2017). The Hip Hop artist Peter Gunz had a similar experience, admitting recently that he was sexually assaulted by an older woman as a child. Gunz said “She made me scared to tell. When I got older, 14, 15 – the girlfriends I had; I was pressuring them into have sex. I feel like I took the abuse that I got and put it on other people. I always will regret that” (Thorpe 2017). These men recounted stories of their first sexual experience taking place before they were teenagers. The lives of some of the aforementioned victims have often been surrounded by turmoil, depression, domestic abuse, and sexual promiscuity. While it has been noted in previous literature that Black males are freer with their sexuality and do not hold on to the same Puritanical ideas as the majority white culture (Staples 2006; 1982), further research into the consequences of pre-teen sexual events amongst Black males is warranted.

The sexual abuse of Black boys is often seen as a (humorous) rite of passage into manhood (NPR 2009). Dr. Nathan Hare stated in an *Ebony* magazine interview over a decade ago that “Although a boy’s early experimentation with a woman has often been referred to as a ‘rite of passage,’ it can complicate his psychological perception of impotence if he is unable to perform” (Foston 2003, 130). Male abuse is also a worry for young Black boys as incarceration, foster care, and social un-wantedness uniquely put Black boys at risk for sexual coercion (Foston 2003). In

a recent study on the prevalence of sexual coercion among racialized males in high school and college, French, Tilghman, and Malebranche (2015) found that Black males reported the highest incidents of sexual coercion, manipulation, and statutory rape when compared to their white, Latino, Asian, and multi-racial male peers. In heterosexual events of sexual coercion, young males often reinterpret their abuse as consensual with them being knowledgeable and somewhat in control. According to psychiatrist, Dr. Carl Bell, “The way that you protect yourself against a horrible incident [of sexual abuse] is to develop a sense of mastery or a sense of power around the incident” (NPR 2009). For Black boys whose concepts of masculinity are built on independence and coping with racism by being cool, “the sense of powerlessness or loss of personal control that accompanies sexual abuse has potentially significant and damaging implications” (Davis and Salmon-Davis 1999, 17).

Lauren E. Duncan’s and Linda M. Williams’s “Gender Role Socialization and Male on Male vs. Female on Male Child Sexual Abuse” provides the most authoritative longitudinal study of the effects sexual abuse has on young Black boys to date. Written two decades ago, Duncan’s and Williams’s study revealed that young Black boys suffered multiple traumas and a higher risk of future violence when adolescent events of sexual victimization occurred. The Duncan and Williams study is useful because it offers case studies of male and female perpetrators of sexual violence against young Black boys and analyzes the corresponding effects of coerced and non-coerced sexual events within those gender categories. This approach however does not document the specific experiences or violations of the Black male victims. Instead, through a series of questions, the study by Duncan and Williams tried to ascertain the effects of child sexual trauma and “examine the impact on gender role related outcomes of childhood sexual abuse perpetrated on boys by males and females” (1998, 770). The consequences of child sexual abuse such as compulsive masturbation, intimate partner violence, homophobia, and the likelihood of marriage were central concerns of Duncan and Williams’s study. The stories of the Black male victims, however, were not.

While the consequences of female perpetrated sexual abuse may be more pronounced in the future heterosexual relationships Black males participate in, “it is likely that the same-sex nature of sexual abuse perpetrated by males has long-term effects on the boy victims’ sexual beliefs and gender role identity, and perhaps on sexual orientation” (Duncan and Williams 1998, 768). These authors posited that homophobia and sexual confusion were

the product of coerced male sexual victimization since victims may come to believe that “they were selected because they were viewed as homosexual by the perpetrator” (768). Female-perpetrated sexual abuse, however, is thought to carry the greater risk for future violence by Black male victims against others. According to Duncan and Williams (1998), “the male victim of abuse by a female may become more aggressive and dominant, especially in intimate relations with females. This might lead to more sex offending and higher levels of physical violence in heterosexual intimate relationships” (769). Summarizing the findings of Duncan’s and Williams’s study, Karen Duncan (2010) argues that “boys sexually coerced by females were more likely than non-abused males to have committed sexual offenses as teens and as adults have significant implications in our understanding of a pathway from male victimization to later male offending for males victimized in childhood by females” (33). Ultimately, all sexual abuse led to an increase for intimate partner violence regardless of the gender of the perpetrator, or as Duncan and Williams (1998) state: “physical aggression and violence are modeled for boys who are victims of sexual coercion, regardless of whether the perpetrator is male or female” (780).

The effects of sexual violations are dire for young Black boys. While studies have generally noted the increased psychological stress, anxiety, depression, and self-harm of male victims, Black males who are precariously situated in a white supremacist and white patriarchal society are much more likely to be criminalized and thereby victims of fatal force by law enforcement if they display any of the symptoms common to sexually abused victims. Marked by a societal stigma of hyper-masculinity, criminality, and violence, Black men and boys are rarely thought of as victims of sexual violence. To many, Black males are solely perpetrators of violence. When Black men or boys are discussed regarding sexual violence, far too often they are cast as the rapist, never the victim of rape or sexual exploitation by the men and women in their communities. Whereas previous research has shown the difficulty of recognizing males as anything more than perpetrators of sexual violence, for Black men, their recognition as victims is practically impossible.

Contrary to current intersectionality theory, which understands maleness as a privilege, Black Male Studies understands *racialized masculinity* as a category of historical (sexual) vulnerability. As Tommy J. Curry (2016) explains, Black maleness “is never a process leading to an ontogenic end, and recognized in codified social identity; rather the masculinity impressed upon these bodies is known through its uncontrollable excess, its lack of

maturation, demonstrations of the more primitive and uncivilized aspects of a not yet evolved savagery” (482–83). While post-intersectionality theorists like Darren Hutchinson (2001), Angela Harris (2000), and most recently Athena Mutua (2013) have challenged the idea of Black male privilege and consequently their invulnerability to gendered violence, there remains an insistence that Black male disadvantage is primarily due to racism not their precarious position as racialized and male in the United States. Largely derived from ahistorical accounts of gender which seem to insulate Black males from the sexual violence of rape (Foster 2011; Curry 2016), intersectionality suggests that patriarchal societies not only privilege maleness over femaleness, but socialize all males, even racially disadvantaged male groups, into domination. As evidence of the Black male’s will to dominate, intersectionality theorists often point to intimate partner violence and the rate of perpetration amongst Black men against Black women. This thesis however has been seriously undercut by clinical studies of Black domestic violence victims, the role bi-directionality plays in Black communities at large, and the realization by one of the founders of the Duluth model that patriarchy is not causally responsible for intimate partner violence (Pence 1999).

Unlike the Duncan and Williams (1998) study, which utilizes “the arguments of Black feminist scholars to examine how gender dominant group membership intersects with race and class subordinate group memberships in trying to understand the effects of sexual abuse on African American males” (766), our study theorizes racialized maleness as a synergistic whole—vulnerable, subordinate, and distinct from that of white maleness. Taking the unique vulnerabilities of Black men and boys seriously, we believe research in Black Male Studies must involve the peculiar situating of Black men and boys as disadvantaged because they are racialized as Black and sexualized male within American society (Franklin 1984; Lemelle 2010). The recent critique Curry (2017) has launched against contemporary gender scholarship concerning Black masculinity studies demands a new formulation of presumed gender hierarchies. Curry (2017; 2014) suggests Black males require a new genre study which includes the rethinking of sexual violence as well as the concomitant roles of perpetrator and victim which accompany these analyses. Such reformulations should be informed by empirical analysis and actual findings based in the real world experience of Black men and boys in the United States. Curry (2017; 2014) insists this genre-d group has been empirically neglected and caricatured within present gender theory.

The case for Black males made by Curry is not without warrant. Robert Staples's "Masculinity and Race: The Dual Dilemma of Black Men" (1978) understood: "In the case of black men, their subordination as a racial minority has more than cancelled out their advantages as males in the larger society. Any understanding of their experience will have to come from an analysis of the complex problems they face as blacks and as men" (169–70). For Curry (2016), however, a genre study of Black males requires more than simply understanding the (white) masculinity denied to Black men. A genre study recognizes that "the relationship between anti-Black racism and the sexuality of Black maleness is not simply describing a cultural pattern of anti-Blackness imposed on the lives of the Black male by the larger white supremacist society, where the Black [male] is prevented from being capable of structurally asserting and ideally emulating the historical identity presented as white male patriarchy" (483). Because "the Black male is not born a patriarchal male . . . [and] is raced and sexed peculiarly, configured as barbaric and savage, imagined to be a violent animal, not a human being" (Curry, 2014, 1), there is an unreliability in the theories that focus on male perpetration and males' invulnerability to female violence. Such conceptualizations of masculinity depend on a history and societal position defined by patriarchal power, the socio-cultural realities of Black men and boys in the United States simply do not afford Black males such masculine privileges. The authors felt the stories of Black male victims are valuable in research attempting to reorient previous theoretical framings of Black men and boys, especially given their over-representation as sexual deviants and perpetrators of sexual violence in the United States.

METHOD

The data for this study include five snapshots of Black men's recollections of sexual interactions with adults during their childhood. The narratives emerged from a larger collection of 60-minute semi-structured phone interviews with 27 black men over the age of 18 who were asked to define a sexual experience, describe their early sexual experiences, and discuss how those sexual experiences impacted them as adults. Instead of interpreting memory as a liability, participants were not asked to detach from the here and now. Interpreting the past from their present position is, in fact, the crux of the study. When potential participants heard about the study they texted the Google number 323.553.1376 for more information and were provided a link to the informed consent approved by the California State

University Long Beach Institutional Review Board (IRB), which required the investigator to inform each potential participant that all incidents of illegal conduct be reported irrespective of their state's statute of limitations or their personal desire. This pre-criminalization of black male participants likely explained the lack of follow up after receiving the informed consent. This unreasonable institutional requirement further substantiates the theoretical and methodological gender bias against studying black males' sexual victimization.

The interviewer felt it disingenuous to specifically discuss their childhood sexual interactions with adults abstracted from their childhood sexual experiences in general. As such we chose a snapshot approach that would account for a broader spectrum of their stories. We analyze these snapshots through the methodological framework of interpretive description. Interpretive description is an applied methodology that originates from the nursing field. Its detailed descriptions of specific cases are used to enhance clinical understanding.

Interpretive description "is a coherent conceptual description that taps thematic patterns and commonalities believed to characterize the phenomenon that is being studied and also accounts for the inevitable individual variations within them" (Thorne, Kirkham, and O'Flynn-Magee 2004, 4). Thorne (2008) explains that the specifics of a case are not described "simply for the documentary value of having recorded it, but because of the inherent assumption that there may be other cases out there that bear some relevant similarity, and that by making this one accessible, we move one step closer to general knowledge" (50). Interpretive description is an appropriate method for this study because a snapshot of each man's recounting of his sexualized boyhood allows for the emergence of broad themes while emphasizing the uniqueness of each story and allowing readers to find multiple points of personal connection.

Despite its touted goals of sincerity, credibility, critical subjectivity, and reciprocity, Packer (2011) argues that qualitative interview research is an asymmetrical and artificial experience, hence terminology and narrative structure are deliberately framing the assimilation of information by the reader. As Packer (2011) explains, "The research interviewer uses the resources of everyday conversation to fashion an interaction in which their involvement is rendered invisible, while the interviewee is encouraged to talk of personal tastes, feelings, and opinions in a manner detached from the here and now" (55–56). Packer (2011) further elaborates, "We interview people to discover their personal experiences, but then we

compare the interviews, divide what has been said into many pieces, search for common words and phrases, label each common phrase with a category we have invented, and finally we replace the interviewees' words with our own" (69). Entirely avoiding these accounts of asymmetry, artificiality, and analysis are impossible, but we invite transparency in the following ways.

Because these data were co-constructed between the interviewees and the second author, we elected to include her presence in the snapshots. Interviewee responses were based on their perceptions of and their comfort with her presence—the researcher empowered to ask (and not be asked) the questions (Packer, 2011, 48). In analyzing the stories, we frequently include the transcript of the conversation to depict the exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee. Quotes have been edited only for readability. In terms of our analysis, these interpretive description snapshots are united by a common experience, not an imposed construction of common codes. Instead of prioritizing the interviewer's understanding of their experience, every attempt was made to emphasize the rich, thick description and interpretive sufficiency defined as "depth, detail, emotionality, nuance, and coherence" (Denzin 2010, 26) in the interviewee's experience.

After presenting each snapshot, we summarize the interpretation of the themes within each boy's childhood sexual experiences including their adult interactions. We discuss the implications of the emergent themes across narratives based on the words of the interviewee and how his experience reflects ongoing research and larger male victimization patterns. Although each boy's experience is unique, there are patterns. The ages and years of their experiences are similar, for example. The average age of the men at the time of the interview was 42 years. The average age of their first sexual experience was 9.2 years. The average age of their first sexual interaction with an adult was 13. All of the initial sexual experiences occurred between 1981 and 1984. All of the men have some college education or post-baccalaureate education. The five men selected all identify as heterosexual. Four of the men are fathers.

Interpretive description that embraces the subjectivity of qualitative research can acknowledge patterns without primarily organizing the presentation of the data around them. The goals of these interpretive description snapshots are to describe: a) these boys' sexual experiences, b) these boys' sexual interactions with adults, c) how these childhood sexual interactions with adults are perceived by their adult selves, and d) why these perceptions are the way they are. This study addresses how, why,

and perhaps most importantly for this severely understudied population “what it was like” (Tracy 2012, 118). What follows is a snapshot of five sexualized childhoods that include sexual interactions with adults.

SNAPSHOTS

Scott (38, heterosexual, 3 children, college graduate)

Scott’s stories about his earliest sexual experiences start with hide and go get it around age six in 1982. Hide and go get it is a derivative of hide and go seek except when a boy finds a girl he is supposed to dry hump her or initiate some other sexually charged interaction. Girls would also find boys, but it happened less frequently. Scott said, “everyone was doing it and so it kind of made it easier to do it.” Scott fondly remembered the first time he received oral sex at six.

I’m in this closet with Anne and like holy shit Anne is—I’m a little guy, I’m a little kid, she’s sucking my dick and it’s like wow okay and I remember feeling like she’s sucking my dick and she’s like “Okay it’s my turn” and I remember thinking, “What, you get a turn, like, what am I supposed to do?”

Scott and I laughed about this story as well as when he told me he put on a condom 30 minutes before the first time he had sex because “I remember thinking to myself that gosh it must be awkward to have to put a condom on when the girl shows up, like, what do they think, how do you handle that? So I put the condom on before she came to the house.” Scott lost his virginity that night with his male cousin and his brother. They had brokered a deal with the girl who really liked Scott but agreed she would have sex with everyone if Scott participated too. They all ended up with crabs.

Scott described his panic about the persistent itching and how he sprayed bug spray on his crotch to get rid of it before he finally had to tell his mother. We laughed about this story too, but I noted a pattern of utter confusion about sex and asked about it.

Interviewer: I wanted to ask what kind of messages you got from your parents about sex.

Scott: My folks were split, like my dad was really off the scene, so there’s no message from my father around sex or anything like it. My mom was super conservative, very quiet, from the South, didn’t have anything to say and by that I mean she chose to not talk about it and so in not talking about it, it doesn’t exist.

Interviewer: So where did you get your messages about sex?

Scott: From just the people around me—my brother, my friends.

Interviewer: So definitely peers?

Scott: Absolutely.

Scott described a sexualized childhood without guidance from adults. This may have also contributed to his confusion about the sexual advances of a 35–40-year-old family friend who was older than his mother.

I used to wear those shorts with that elastic band. I remember she had me come over to her and she pulled it and looked at my dick and it was like really weird. It was just weird. I had to be five or six. And this other time—she was a big woman. She'd wear these like moo-moo dresses all the time, big, big woman but she wouldn't wear like underwear and so one time she's sitting across from me, I kid you not it was a total *Basic Instinct* moment, where she had like spread it and you can see and it was just really weird like I was a little kid. It didn't seem sexual to me. It just seemed weird to me, like okay.

Scott said, “there was never a moment where I felt like I was being sexually abused by her, but I definitely remember as a kid she always wanted to see my private area.”

Unlike Scott, when he told me I felt horrified, disgusted, and angry at a very grown woman who would violate a child in this way, but Scott grew up in a neighborhood where children exposed their private parts to each other as a game. The woman's behavior was “weird” but not a violation because Scott seemed to situate it along a familiar continuum of sexual behavior. Scott described it as weird likely because she was older, but he does not describe it as wrong perhaps because it was familiar.

Ron (42, heterosexual, no children, graduate degree)

Ron's first sexual experience occurred when his mother's friend and her daughters came to stay with them after their house caught fire. The children were all around eight-years-old in 1981. Ron was fascinated by them. He described them to me. “They were from New York so they had an edge you know, and I had never seen girls who were seven, eight, nine-years-old who had the type of edge they had. They were highly, highly, highly sexualized from the way they danced to the language that they used to their engagement with me and with other boys.” When one of the girls said, “I want you to feel something and I want you to rub something,” Ron was

aroused and willing to participate in his first explicit sexual encounter. He also noted that interaction taught him that girls and women should be the sexual initiators.

When Ron was 15, another family friend in her 20s came to stay. Ron remembered their sexually charged encounter.

Older women were sexually curious about me and very kind of vocal and sometimes very direct and aggressive about it. But I remember going into her room one day and she was laying down and she had on pretty much nothing and she had something that was covering her up and she just said—her terminology was “I really want to see you natural,” but that’s a Grenadian expression for “I want to look at your body, and I want you essentially.” She kept on saying “I just really want to see you natural. Just really, really want you. Want to see you natural.” She kept on saying it in a very like seductive way. I never told my mother that but my mother I think found out—got a sense, you know mothers, she got a sense. That woman who stayed with us was gone the next week, like she was gone.

Ron’s answers to my follow up questions suggest he was not disturbed by the incident.

Ron: I wasn’t going to say nothing, and I was going to let it happen. If it would’ve happened, I would’ve let it happen. I wasn’t going to say nothing.

Interviewer: Yeah so again for you no trauma, just pleasure?

Ron: Just pleasure. Just pleasure and that aggressiveness was internal because it was like wow because for me that’s what women do; women were the pursuers. It was that narrative was stuck in me, ingrained in me, until I lost my virginity.

Ron lost his virginity when he was 16 and she was 21 or 22. He began the story by declaring, “when I lost my virginity she took it from me basically. She had to force herself on me. It wasn’t something I pursued. I was scared actually.”

A woman who worked near his job frequently stopped by to flirt. One day she demanded a kiss. Soon after they went on a date to the movies and afterwards she initiated sex in the car and made Ron remove the condom. Ron described the encounter,

And the whole time it wasn’t necessarily an enjoyable experience for me, it was more “Wow I can’t believe I’m actually having sex, like, I don’t have to lie about this shit no more. Around my boys. I can say finally I got some

ass.” But she was the aggressor the whole time. I never told her I was a virgin, I never told her my real age, and I don’t think we ever had sex after that.

Noting his discomfort this time, I asked Ron about potential trauma.

Interviewer: But you wouldn’t categorize any of those experiences as traumatic in any way would you?

Ron: I wouldn’t say that I experienced any sexual trauma. I think what I experienced was being a highly sexualized kid, and I was always around some type of sexual encounter or experience whether it was myself or whether it was something that I saw or something that I heard, but no, nothing traumatic then in my childhood.

Like Steve, Ron did not see childhood sexual interactions with adult women as traumatic or violations. In the interview he did mention, “We always had people over our house, always, and so it’s just one of the reasons why if I ever were to have children I would police who came in our door big time because my parents were so free; dropping us off over people’s homes and allowing us to spend—they had very little boundaries because they had this perspective that they trusted adults like the adults that they knew they trusted.” Ron acknowledged that even adult friends cannot and should not always be trusted around one’s children. But that rule would be for his future children. It does not apply retrospectively to his boy self. From his early interaction with a sexually aggressive eight year old, Ron normalized aggressive sexual behavior from girls and women irrespective of their age.

Michael (48, heterosexual, 11 children, some college)

Michael’s first sexual experience was initiated by a 16-year-old girl when he was 14 in 1981. Michael felt like “a stud” when she approached him. He did not feel nervous and thoroughly enjoyed his first time without protection although he admitted, “Really didn’t know much, just did what I saw on TV.” Michael explained to me how his environment influenced his decisions about sex.

Michael: When you grow up and when you’re that age you don’t think about an STD especially when you was never told about it, and you didn’t have a man to sit down and talk to you about sex and STDs and learned everything off the TV. You don’t worry about STDs.

Interviewer: Is it fair to say that your mom didn’t talk to you much about sex?

Michael: No. No. No.

Interviewer: Why would you say that was?

Michael: The only thing my mom said, “You better not get a girl pregnant” and I guess because no one never talked to her about sex and use of protection, but there wasn’t an educational discussion where why I shouldn’t have sex or why I should wait. It was just a demand, but it wasn’t a serious demand so I laughed it off because my older brothers was doing it, and I’m the baby boy, and I wanted to fall into their footsteps, but I did. They taught me how to do it.

Interviewer: And how did your brothers teach you? Did they just tell you?

Michael: It was girl after girl coming to our house and every day they were just having sex with different girls and different guys would come over and they’d bring the girls and everybody was having sex. It was a sexual lifestyle.

Interviewer: So at 14 could you say that it was a thing that you really wanted or you felt like you should want it because your brothers were into it?

Michael: I was just doing it. I thought it was the right thing to do. If you’re not a homosexual you just have sex. Everybody was saying to be a man: have sex. You got to have sex, sex was it, sex was everything—money and sex.

As a 48-year-old married man, Michael is the father of 11 children and has paid over \$100,000 in child support.

In addition to his first sexual experience, his other impactful sexual experience occurred when he was 17 with a 30-year-old woman. Michael spoke fondly of her and her family. He was friends with her daughters and her husband. Michael was grateful for all the “sexual things” she taught him like “how to touch a lady, how to make a woman feel good, where to touch them, and that type of stuff.” I was concerned about the age difference and asked about it.

Interviewer: Did she know you were only 17?

Michael: Oh yeah. She didn’t care.

Interviewer: Did you ever feel like she violated you because you were so much younger?

Michael: I didn’t think about it that much because it felt good. . . .

No one knew about their clandestine relationship. Michael said, “My mother didn’t know. Thank God she didn’t find out, she would’ve went

crazy, but I did that for about a year.” The relationship ended when Michael moved on to someone else. He explained, “We stayed real close friends. She was like a big, big, big sister or auntie or whatever you want to call it. We just weren’t blood related.”

What I considered an adult violation of a child under 18, Michael remembered as a nurturing learning experience. The only time he implied that the relationship was inappropriate was when he described what his mother’s reaction would have been if she knew. Perhaps, the sexual environment into which Michael was introduced made this relationship not only appropriate to him but also coveted. In a world where no one talked to him about sex and what he knew, he learned from watching television or his brothers, this older “big sister/auntie” finally provided the sexual education that he had always been missing and longed for.

Steve (43, heterosexual, 2 children, some college)

Steve had his first sexual experience when he was 12 in 1984. He told me that his 16-year-old cousin “basically brought a girl into the room and told me to go ahead and that she was a part of it. He basically, I don’t want to use the word forced, but I kinda did it because he told me to do it and that was the first time.” Steve described an awkward encounter between him and a 12-year-old girl he had never met before but afterwards he said, “12-year-old boy you’re sticking your chest out like yeah. I kind of felt like I did something I guess.” Having sex with other people in the room became normal for Steve.

His next sexual experience was with himself, his brother, and the babysitter.

Steve: The second time I used to—well, myself and my brother we had a neighborhood girl who would babysit us, and she was only 18 years old. She was babysitting us. So my mother would go to work and we were here and it started off with other guys around her age and she would let those guys come over our house after mother went to work. She would get with the other older guys and these were guys that we knew from the neighborhood as well. Our house became like the party house, so my mother would go to work, didn’t even know what was going on, and here it is the girl got guys over and eventually I crept in the room as well, and I ended up doing it too.

Interviewer: And were you 12 still or a little bit older?

Steve: I was probably about 13 then.

Interviewer: And did you feel a little bit more experienced since you had done it already?

Steve: Yeah, still definitely new I'd say.

Interviewer: And then what was your relationship like with the babysitter after that?

Steve: Well actually I ended up doing it several times even to the point where when it wouldn't even be like the neighborhood guys over and just be me and her, so did it a few times.

Interviewer: And was your brother also in the house when it was just you and her?

Steve: Yeah he ended up doing it too.

Interviewer: Okay. And how old was your brother?

Steve: He's a year older; he was 14.

Interviewer: And the babysitter was she an initiator, was she an aggressor, was she kind of passive? What was her attitude towards it?

Steve: She was definitely real passive with it. I think after maybe the first or second time after I had already done it, it kind of like broke the ice, so after a while and I guess I could probably say I had somewhat of a crush on her so when I would be like alone or something with her I kind of messed around with her or something and it wasn't like she wasn't hesitating. It wasn't an everyday thing but it definitely happened a couple times.

Interviewer: And for those experiences with the babysitter was there anything that came out of that, other than the group thing, that shaped your idea of sex when you became an adult?

Steve: Nah, no. It lasted maybe a year or so.

Interviewer: Even though you were initiating and willing to participate when you got older did you feel like you were taken advantage of because you were still just a kid and she was 18?

Steve: Honestly no. When I see stories about that and whatever 'cause I kinda I guess didn't mind. I never felt like that.

Not only was group sex becoming the norm for Steve, but child/adult sexual experiences were too.

The New Year's Eve Steve turned 15, he had sex with a 20-year-old woman he met at a party who was a friend of the woman who was with his older cousin. I asked about the age difference.

Interviewer: Did she know you were only 15?

Steve: Yeah, she probably did. I'm sure she did because . . . it was a New Year's Eve party and that's where we met her so I'm pretty sure I probably said it's my birthday or something like that.

Interviewer: And as an adult does that seem odd to you that she didn't care that you were so much younger, like illegally younger?

Steve: I've kind of had some crazy nights so no. [Laughter] Nah, I met people who probably just don't care.

After the one and only time they had sex, she became pregnant. During the pregnancy she said it was his but when the baby was born she said it was someone else's. At the time, he admitted to not caring but about ten years later, he looked for her to confirm paternity but was never able to find her.

The other boys and men in Steve's world encouraged him to have sex. His first sexual experience was initiated by a cousin, the next was with a brother, and the next was with another cousin. He recalled, "You got to try to get out there and get with somebody so you can look cool." But he also admitted, "I would say I've never had when people say the birds and the bees talk. I don't recall ever having one from my mother or father. I just don't really recall anyone sitting down and really saying this is what you should do, this is what you shouldn't do, so it was just kind of just going with the flow." Steve said sex was about peer pressure.

Steve: Yeah. For me I would say it was the peer pressure thing because everybody else around you, at least they're telling you they're doing it, so you want to be cool and at the time that was one of the things to be cool so didn't want to be around everybody else and they telling you stories about that and you can't tell a story. It wasn't anything that had to do with emotional attachment or I like this girl, anything like that, it was nothing. It was just how many can I get? This guy has got three or four, he's got five, I need to get six. So that's just really what it was.

Interviewer: Is it fair to say that it was more peer pressure than it was pleasure?

Steve: More peer pressure definitely.

As of 2001/2002 when he stopped keeping calendars, Steve estimated that he had had sex with at least 150 women. In an environment where sex was about proving something to other men, the women, including their ages, were irrelevant. Steve does not see his younger self as a victim of adult violations because these adult women helped him with his stories, his numbers, and his bragging rights with other boys and men.

Andre (43, heterosexual, one child, graduate degree)

When Andre was nine in 1981, he recalled that for a year his 15- or 16-year-old babysitter “would encourage me I guess to fondle her breasts and to actually suck on them and that was my first kind of experience.” I asked how his adult self interpreted that interaction.

Interviewer: So once you were 18–19 as becoming an adult, did you see that year with her as a sexual violation?

Andre: Not really. Not really, not until, you know, some of the others that happened in my life, and I realized what that was. But during that time I didn’t see it as a violation at all.

Another instance occurred when a family friend who was in her early twenties initiated sexual interaction with a 13-year-old Andre for two to three years. Andre described it as “a long, long relationship.” He remembered,

She would ask me to do oral sex between her legs, and I never knew nothing about that until she kind of convinced me to do that. And clearly at first I didn’t like it at all and then it was a matter of. . . . It was actually compensation because like I said, her mom and my mom were co-workers but in essence my mom worked for her mom. And so she kind of had some money. You know not—you know I was seventh–eighth grade but there was periodic compensation involved you know for me doing all of that. And that went on not every time I saw her but every time we were in positions like that where it was able to happen. And then maybe—I don’t know exactly when, but there was a point at which I began to know that my body, that I began to have a reaction to doing the very thing that I was doing. . . .

He described how she used pornography to create a sexual atmosphere.

Andre: The atmosphere, if you will, was created vis a vis her introduction of pornography and watching, you know, videos sometimes and then she’d be like Andre, “Get out of here,” and then I’d be like “I wanna to see too.”

And then she'll, you know, either joke around, "You don't know nothing about that" and then I would say, "Yeah I do. I know how to suck this" and stuff like that.

Interviewer: So as a grown man now, do you see those interactions that you just described as manipulative?

Andre: Oh certainly. Certainly. Certainly.

Interviewer: But at the time you didn't?

Andre: No. No, not at all. At the time I just—I just—I knew it was pleasing. I knew it was pleasing others and I knew that was part of my character, you know. And so it was about, you know, pleasing other people, so I knew that was what I was doing. But as far as. . . . You know, as far as uh. . . . I mean I don't think I received anything—in both those situations with those two—I didn't receive anything from it in terms of my self-gratification or even knowing what gratification would be.

Although the experiences were four years apart and with an older girl teenager and an adult woman, Andre disassociated them both from manipulation or sexual violation at the time because he was a curious boy who had received no messages about sex from his parents, peers, or parochial Catholic school.

Andre described the daughter of his mother's close friend as "not a social girl," "lonely," and "probably self-conscious about her weight." He never described her as a predator, but I did. When he told me that she manipulated his mother into sending him over to the house under the auspices of errands, used pornography to incite his curiosity about sex, and periodically offered him \$20 to \$25 for sexual favors, I asked him if it were child prostitution. He agreed that childhood curiosity coupled with compensation obliterates any context for consent, but he also said, "I think that the first girl had put me in such a curiosity mode and then the introduction of the pornography just made me more curious. And so I think my curiosity probably outweighed the manipulation."

During this childhood sexual experience, Andre never received oral sex because he thought, ironically, "she didn't want to consider herself a child molester" if she did more than receive sexual pleasure. But at 14, Andre convinced a 19-year-old friend of his mother to perform oral sex on him during his second sexual encounter with an adult. The combined effect of these experiences was Andre became conditioned to pleasuring women, desiring oral sex, and feeling self-conscious about women who

were ready to receive sexual pleasure from him but reluctant to return the favor. He admitted to potentially having an oral sex addiction because his oral sex preference significantly outweighed his desire for intercourse. Andre approximated that he had sexual intercourse with 40 women, but sexual interaction with many more. “I engaged in some type of other sexual activity with, either sucking on breasts, them giving me oral sex, me giving them oral sex, easily easily 200 different women, maybe even as many as 300 to 400 in my lifetime.”

I followed up with a question about his sexual preferences.

Interviewer: Do you think that these early experiences with older women skewed your sexual preferences before you got a chance to pick them yourself?

Andre: Interesting question. Um. . . . [Pause] I mean I think it certainly acclimated me to the female body faster than I should have. It certainly. . . . I don’t know if this is negative or not. It certainly sort of created behavior in me that I want to please a woman and generally my only way of pleasing them is through some type of oral arousal. I think it did give me some type of self-consciousness especially given the fact that in most of those situations where I had repeated youthful engagements or—with these older women, none of them wanted to do anything to me. You know it wasn’t until later on when I was able to convince a girl you know when she was about 18, 19 and I was about 13 or so to actually do it to me. So for me, I think it’s just knowing that, you know. Maybe it’s shaming. Maybe I’m not good enough.

Unlike Steve and Michael where sex was a marker for manhood, oral sexual stimulation created an early desire in Andre to please women. This conditioning to give as opposed to receive also created a self-consciousness and fear of intercourse that he still reckons with years later as an adult father of his own child. Andre’s early sexual interactions with adult women shaped his sexual preferences in ways he is still trying to understand.

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the greatest challenge in analyzing these data is choosing language to describe these events. For the last two decades, Lanning’s (2005) idea of the *compliant victim* has been used to describe youth who in some sense consent—though they are unable to legally—to a relationship with an adult. Lanning (2005) explains that the use of the word compliant is meant to “describe those children who cooperate in or ‘consent’ to their sexual victimization” (2). However, he is well aware that such consent

does not occlude the recognition of a sexual crime from being committed. He continues, “Because children cannot legally consent to having sex with adults, this compliance should not in any way alter the fact that they are victims of serious crimes” (Lanning 2005, 2). Lanning’s use demystifies the reality of childhood sexual abuse for the American public. He explains:

In theory, the law recognizes the developmental limitations of children and affords them with special protection. The repeated use, however, of terms such as rape, sexual violence, assault, attack, sexually violent predator, and unwanted sexual activity, when discussing or inquiring about the sexual exploitation of children, assumes or implies in the minds of many that all child victims resist sexual advances by adults and are then overpowered by coercion, trickery, threats, weapons, or physical force. Although cases with these elements certainly exist, when adults and children have sex, lack of “consent” can exist simply because the child is legally incapable of giving it. Whether or not the child resisted, said no, and was overpowered are, therefore, not necessarily elements in determining if a crime has occurred. (Lanning 2005, 3)

While we understand the distinction Lanning insisted upon and agree with his attempt to nuance the multiple dimensions of childhood sexual victimization and the various relationships which constitute perpetration, something was still lacking.

Responding to Lanning, Denise Hines and David Finkelhor (2007) introduced the idea of *statutory relationships* “meaning a relationship between a juvenile and an adult that is illegal under age-of-consent statutes, but that does not involve the degree of coercion or manipulation sufficient to qualify under criminal statutes as a forcible sex crime” (302), but here again we were confronted with how to convey victimhood, be it coerced or not while distinguishing the force used to initiate or consummate such relationships. There is something not captured by compliant victim or statutory relationship that exceeds both concern over the asymmetry of power between adult and child and the legalistic language of consent. To appropriately address the issue and convey victimhood, we decided upon the terminology of sexual abuse and sexual violation to convey the transgressive nature of adult relationships with Black boys. As explained earlier, the societal position and obstacles to disclosing sexual abuse and statutory rape make consent or compliance precarious in this population.

According to the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), statutory rape is “a general term used to describe an offense that takes place when an individual (regardless of age) has consensual sexual relations with an individual not old

enough to legally consent to the behavior. Stated another way, “statutory rape is sexual relations between individuals that would be legal if not for their ages” (Troup-Leisure and Snyder 2005, 2). Rape, on the other hand, is defined by the 2013 Uniform Crime Reporting Program as “Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.” In an effort to situate the violence and vulnerability of adult sexual relationships within these debates, we use sexual violations and only reference rape or sexual abuse in clearly coercive events.

Although we have our reasons for using the language of sexual violation, these men do not because they hailed from incredibly sexualized childhoods. Each man describes a childhood sexual environment where the adults responsible for him provided no information or instruction about sex. Black boys are not socialized to fear that they could be victims of sexual violation, abuse, or forcible rape. These boys learned about sex through peers and their resulting experimentation often came at a cost. The stigma of hyper-sexualization obscures to perception of and sympathy towards Black male victims. The stereotype that Black males, even young boys, want sex and are responsible for the sex acts that occur (especially with women) while they are children is nonsensical. Such stigmas about Black male sexuality highlight the peculiar vulnerability young Black males endure in situations which present no language or priming knowledge about adult sexual violation or female-perpetrated rape. Black male hyper-sexualization further blurs the boundaries of sexual encounters, since the Black males interviewed seem to possess a knowledge about sexual abuse and the proper physical proximity in Black boyhoods, a concern which requires more education and attention to the specific experiences of young black males given the previously reported ages of sexual debut. Black males are often thought to have no vulnerability to their female counterparts. Despite the research documenting the deleterious effects of child sexual abuse on predominately white male victims, the myth of a Black male hyper-sexuality blinds researchers to the impact of statutory rape and sexual coercion on Black men and boys. As such, the sexual violation of Black boys is thought to be inconsequential to the socialization and psychological development of young Black boys into adulthood.

Consistent with previous clinical findings, Andre’s case exemplifies fetish behavior and obsession because of a childhood incident of abuse. While Andre appears to be a high functioning individual who obtained a graduate education and typical family situation, the effects of forced cunnilingus are

nevertheless apparent. Previous research has noted that forced oral sex is common in female-to-male rape (Curra 2011, 189). Andre still deals with the ramifications of his childhood sexual violations as he battles a possible addiction to oral sex inherited from sexual encounters with adult women who required it of him as a boy. His behavior pattern is common amongst child sexual abuse survivors. According to Christiane Sanderson (2006), one of the effects of child sexual abuse is that “Sexual parts of the body may become fetishized . . . some adult survivors of child sexual abuse become oversexualized and develop sexual preoccupations and compulsions” (62). Andre’s sexual violation socialized him into craving female pleasure—pleasing them—as the foundation of his own sexual identity.

Steve’s case raises provocative questions for how one views statutory rape and consent when victims are male. In both sexual violations, Steve was 13 and 15. He was compliant in both cases, but seemed to exhibit hyper-sexuality and promiscuity as a result of these events. If such a sexual event happened to a 13- or 15-year-old girl would one be as willing to suggest that Steve merely had an early sexual experience? In the case of girls, the age of consent is often presented as a litmus test for abuse. Rape is easier to see because even in willing sexual partnerships, many would perceive her as a victim of statutory rape because she could not consent. If one applies a similar logic to Steve, one would have to conclude that he was a victim because the women he had sexual relations with were well beyond any Romeo and Juliet laws even if they were retroactively applied to his case. Steve was victimized in both cases by women of legal adult age. They were both legally responsible for their actions and of the age of consent in all states. As such, their relationship to Steve both as a 13-year-old and 15-year-old was one of asymmetrical power and knowledge of sexual activity.

A longstanding finding in cases of child sexual abuse by female perpetrators is increased promiscuity, and riskier and compulsive sexual behavior among male victims (Denov 2004; Browne and Finkelhor 1986). Similar to the findings by Davis and Petretic-Jackson (2000), child sexual abuse often leads to an over-sexualization of the young victim’s worldview in which the child’s interactions with other children are sexually motivated and riskier. The propensities for riskier sexual activity are evident in Scott’s and Michael’s stories and consistently reported effects of child sexual abuse (Senn et al. 2007). They were very open about their history of sexually transmitted infections and multiple re-infections. Unprotected sex exacted a hefty financial toll for Michael who literally paid the price of over

\$100,000 in child support. Homma et al. (2012) found that adolescent male victims of child sexual abuse “were more likely than non-abused boys to have engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse, to have had multiple sexual partners, and to have caused a pregnancy” (22).

Adult sexual violations of Black male children may not always be seen as sexual violations by young boys because no one is instructing them about sex or male sexual victimization. Absent sexual education, boys cannot identify healthy sexual behaviors or predatory ones. They do not know how to use condoms, how to identify STIs or how to recognize when the family friend, babysitter, or neighbor is sexually manipulating them. It is a contradiction of extreme consequences for a young Black boy to receive no sexual education while growing up in a sexualized environment where girls and older women alike are sexually aggressive and men on the block declare that having sex makes a boy a man. According to these snapshots, sexual education for young Black boys should begin around the age of six years old.

On the other hand, adult sexual violations of children may not always be seen as sexual violations by the adult men who survived the encounters because of the values they attributed to the experience, their revision of the event to make them appear powerful and deliberate, or their inability to process their victimization as Black males. Raised in an era where sexual education was absent, sexual attention was welcome. None of the men described the perpetrators as predators. At some point, all of the men associated curiosity and sometimes pleasure with their sexual violation. While these adults’ sexual violations of children must be condemned, they must also be recognized as filling an essential sexual education lacuna of Black boys that must be satiated in different ways.

These snapshots point to the need for a centralized comprehensive sexual education for black children and their parents. In addition to increased dissemination of resources for how to talk about sex with children, a complete list of inappropriate sexual behaviors should be made easily accessible. Parents should also be informed about the behavioral changes of boys that have been sexually violated, and American society as a whole should become more familiar with the statistical numbers of Black boys that are regularly sexually violated. From this study, one can no longer make the argument that only Black girls are victims of peer sexual victimization because of their gender. As the stories attest, perpetrators were also sexually aggressive girl children. Black boys are sexually vulnerable to male and female adults and young girls.

CONCLUSION

Male victims of sexual violations are more likely to be physically abused and experience violent sexual violations than their female counterparts (Crowder 2014). As the snapshots of Black male sexual experiences demonstrate, Black boy victims of adult violations are unable to recognize they are being victimized. The myth of hyper-sexualization and the lack of a discursive formulation of Black male sexual vulnerability to (Black) women leaves many Black men and boys without a language to express their experience of sexual trauma. The assumptions of their predatory nature, or the presumed threats that Black males pose to women generally in society, nullifies the ability of clinicians, theorists, and social workers to *see* the actual suffering of Black boys as *victims of sexual violence*. Young Black boys are often framed as perpetrators of sexual violence because the stereotypes imposed upon their group associates them with violence, criminality, and a propensity towards sexual malfeasance. Previous literatures (Goff et al. 2014) have commented upon the adultification of Black boys and the relationship this lesser childlike positionality has to gratuitous societal violence and racial profiling, but there has been no theorization or studies looking at the vulnerability Black boys may suffer from not being perceived as children—seen as more adult than their actual age—and more agentic in relation to older women.

Scholars across multiple fields have insisted that Black men in the United States suffer from existential negations, stereotypes, violence, and misandry based on their particular racial maleness (Sidanius and Veniegas 2000; Sidanius and Pratto 2001; Smith 2012). These previous literatures have provided a tremendous foundation for what Black male studies scholars understand as Black male vulnerability to societal violence and death, but have not yet ventured into Black males' vulnerability to sexual assault and rape. According to Curry (2018), anti-Black misandry is the “cumulative assertions of Black male inferiority due to errant psychologies of lack, dispositions of deviance, or hyper-personality traits (e.g., hyper-sexuality, hyper-masculinity) which rationalize the criminalization, phobics, and sanctioning of Black male life” (267), and operate to negate Black males' humanity, their peculiar susceptibility to lethal violence and death, as well as their historical vulnerability to rape as racialized males. The acknowledgement of Black male victims of child sexual abuse and rape greatly aids in deconstructing the current mythologies associated with Black masculinity, and creating the opportunity to address the trauma of this population before the negative behavior and deleterious mental health

effects of abuse are designated as deviance. According to Hernandez, Lodico, and DiClemente (1993),

Black children are at higher risk of abuse than white children, particularly black males. Children from single-parent households and of lower socioeconomic status are more common targets, as are children with physical, neurological, or emotional problems; black males are overrepresented in all those situations. . . . Although age of onset of abuse is similar across genders, girls are generally abused up to an older age, as boys begin to fend off abusers sooner. Actual or attempted intercourse is more common with boys, as is extrafamilial abuse. (594)

The sexual vulnerability of Black boys is not accounted for or analyzed in any of the current philosophical literature. Conversations concerning Black masculinity in Africana philosophy and race theory tend to rely on Black feminist theorizations of Black masculinity as privileged, patriarchal, and invulnerable to (Black) female abuse. Black boys are often not understood to be socialized and maturing within spheres of sexual violence. Consequently, they are theorized as invulnerable to sexual coercion, sexual abuse, and statutory rape, despite their intimate proximity to these kinds of violence.

Current theorizations of Black masculinity that often focus on hyper-masculinity and female objectification continue to ignore the well-documented association between child sexual abuse and negative behavioral outcomes such as: sexual coercion of future sex partners, increased risk taking behavior, post-traumatic stress syndrome, substance abuse, affective numbing, and sexual promiscuity in Black men (Hernandez, Lodico, and DiClemente 1993). Other studies have noted that male victims of child sexual abuse had more severe and negative adult mental health and behavioral outcomes including depression, anxiety, and sexual aggression (Turner, Taillieu, Cheung, and Affi 2017; Lewis, McElroy, Harlaar, and Runyan 2016). Child sexual abuse was also related to both an increased risk of being victimized by an intimate partner and perpetrating intimate partner abuse among males (Richards, Tillyer, and Wright 2017). The well-established connection between child sexual abuse and negative behavioral and mental health outcomes in adulthood should give race and gender theorists pause in determining Black hyper-masculinity to be the sub-conscious or deliberate motivation driving negative inter-personal conflicts and violence. A recent study found that racialized males who were sexually victimized by women of their own race were “more likely to engage in sexual risk-taking and were, in turn, more likely to endorse stereotypes of hypersexuality about women in their racial group” (French,

Teti, Suh, and Serafin 2018, 8). Given the prevalence and propensity for childhood physical and sexual violence amongst this population, Black males should be theorized as socialized into particular sexual scripts or coping with likely childhood trauma when evaluating their adult behaviors.

The knowledge of this particular Black male vulnerability requires new theorizations that empirically verify the assertions about Black males' sexual experiences and the realities of their sexual victimizations. As Curry (2017) notes: "The sexual assault of Black boys and the ways this particular violence toward them conditions their socialization and maturation are practically nonexistent with academic literature generally and are rarely mentioned with any degree of empirical certainty in Black masculinity literature" (124–25). This study has serious implications for future research on Black men and boys that continue to utilize popular gender theories that assert hegemonic or toxic masculinity to be the cause of Black male interpersonal conflicts. The various accounts of Black women's and girls' roles in perpetuating sexual violations and statutory rape complicate current theorizations that suggest Black men acquire misogynistic attitudes and hyper-sexuality through imitating patriarchal norms in society. Consistent with Curry's theorization of Black male vulnerability (2017), this study offers empirical evidence that Black boys are peculiarly vulnerable to sexual violations from women and girls. Contrary to the thesis of male invulnerability to female rape or childhood sexual violations, this study offers evidence suggesting that young Black boys are in fact a vulnerable population that requires more research and resources to better understand their particular sexual risks as Black and male. More research on female sexual offenders in the Black community, as well as adult violations and sexual coercions of young Black boys from other men in these communities, households, and families are warranted by the stories from other Black male victims not analyzed in this particular publication. Future studies on Black males and gender theories of Black masculinity would be well served by asking if childhood sexual violations or trauma explain many of the anti-social or deviant behaviors currently theorized as belonging to an etiology of toxic Black masculinity.

NOTES

1. For correspondence or questions about this article please contact: Dr. Tommy J. Curry, Professor of Philosophy, Texas A&M University at: tjcurry@tamu.edu.

2. Dr. Ebony A. Utley conducted the interviews of the subjects and is referred to as *Interviewer* throughout the text.

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