

Wicked waters: Examining liquid locations of sexual violence in YAL

The rape of the land and women has long been connected in literature and across cultures (Philips, 2004). With young adult (YA) sexual assault narratives growing increasingly popular, the location of attacks in such stories is significant, such as when rape is depicted in nature because, in reality, much sexual violence occurs in the private sphere (Kerber, 1988) - the home (Altrows, 2016). Using an ecofeminist lens (d'Eaubonne, 1974) and conceptions regarding the treatment of sexual violence in children's and YA literature (Marshall, 2004; 2009), this paper examines YA texts *Speak* (1999), *Living Dead Girl* (2008), and *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* (2016), which all set rape scenes outdoors. These settings function to drive the female protagonists indoors, thus (1) reductively reproducing a geography of trauma that challenges their emerging agentic survivor identities by (2) sustaining a damaging trope repeated in children's literature where female characters are encouraged to fear natural spaces (see, for example, Marshall, 2004) through the perpetuation of rape scripts (Ryan, 2011) and myths (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Thus, these novels lack an appropriate representation of the "where" of rape, fostering a subtextual fear mongering of nature, particularly understood through land, trees, and water. For this presentation, I will focus my attention on watery sites and water symbolism; the tears, shards of ice, glaciers, lakes, rivers, and even aquariums that appear across these stories. In these YA texts, water figures centrally in the symbolism of all three novels, slipping between meaning but nevertheless is 'dammed' by its association with sexual assault for the protagonists; any power it might represent is limited, in keeping with Marshall's (2009) notion of "victim power." As such, this presentation will examine the protagonists' relationships with water as fraught with tensions that further distance them from the natural world and limit their ability to build agency.