

Analysing *Mrs Everything: A Novel* through the Lens of Embodied Sexual Practice Perspective

**Aleena Hussain & **Amna Khalil*

ABSTRACT: *Regardless of the era, women are faced with the threat of rape constantly. The novel *Mrs Everything: A Novel* (2019) by Jennifer Weiner was explored under the lens of the Embodied Sexual Practice Perspective theory presented by Ann J. Cahill to highlight the dismal consequences of rape or the threat of rape incidents. The research investigates the molestation of Bethie by Uncle Melvin, the effects of rape on Bethie, and analyzes the sexual assault of Lila by her boss. The characters of Bethie Kaufman and Lila Braverman who experienced sexual abuse were subjected to sexual shame, victim-blaming, rape trauma, and fragmentation of self and subjectivity. This paper suggests the revision of laws and the spread of awareness to change societal norms to eradicate the threat of rape and the actions that allow derivatization so that womanly subjectivity and aspirations are allowed equal freedom.*

Keywords: sexual embodied practice perspective, rape trauma, sexual shame, victim-blaming, fragmentation

Email: *aleenah4507@gmail.com

Introduction

Mrs Everything: A Novel (2019) by Jennifer Weiner is a coming-of-age story revolving around two Jewish sisters, Jo and Bethie Kaufman, who navigate life after the death of their immigrant father. This novel employs a linear narrative with an alternating first-person perspective of the two sisters. The story begins in the 1950s American town of Detroit ending in a family reunion in the year 2022. These sisters tackle life head-on while facing the obstacles of child molestation, an identity crisis, abortion, and rape, which threaten and twirl around traditional feminine ideals and institutions.

The study investigates the consequences and dismal effects of sexual assault on the lives of Elizabeth Kaufman and Lila Braverman. The research paper explores the molestation of Bethie by Uncle Mel, the effects of rape on Bethie, and analyzes the sexual harassment of Lila by her boss. This is explored through the theory of Embodied Sexual Practice Perspective Theory presented by Ann J. Cahill in order to create social awareness and contain the evil of rape. The scope of the study is to suggest the creation of laws for rape prevention. Also, the limitation faced by the researcher is that only specific parts of the text are analyzed for this research.

Conceptual Framework

Ann J. Cahill is the author of *Rethinking Rape* (2001) in which she provides the concept of embodied sexual practice perspective. Cahill defines rape as, "a sexually specific act that destroys (if only temporarily) the intersubjectivity, embodied agency and therefore personhood of a woman" (13). It is notable that Cahill not only lays stress upon the motivations of the offender and consequences for the victim but also discusses the violent sexual ramifications related to the factors of sexual orientation and disability. She dissected the works of renowned feminist philosophers like Susan Brownmiller, who stated that rape constitutes violence and not sex. Cahill rejects this notion on the basis that Brownmiller views rape as the culmination of assuming power and the female body being biologically rapable and the male body being naturally capable of rape, the same dichotomy exists between nature and culture as well. Another feminist philosopher studied and contradicted by Cahill is Catherine MacKinnon, who assumed that rape was precisely violent because of its heterosexual content and motif within a patriarchal society where women's choices and sexuality are considered inferior. Cahill disagrees with this notion by arguing for the right and room for women's resistance, production of power and women's agency.

Cahill presents the theory of Embodied Sexual Practice Perspective as an amalgamation of postmodern and queer feminist perspectives. It comprises three main premises. The first is that instead of attributing the act of violation solely to violence and power and denying the sexual aspect of rape, Cahill acknowledges the nature of sexual assault as violent and brutal and highlights its sexual component. She argues that rape is sexual in nature and is a sexually specific act that has consequences and implications that are both sexual and psychological. To maintain power and sexual domination, sexualized body parts are used as eroticized ammunition. Experiences of sexual shame and discomfort are the aftermath of the sexual assault among the victims.

The second presumption of this theory is that rape is sexually specific; therefore, everyone experiences, relates and identifies with it differently and at an individual level. As Cahill states that “Every rape experience is unique, but each is bodily; therefore, we are capable of locating the various axes of bodily meanings that rape affects” (9). Every person possesses a unique body with a unique mindset, so rape for every woman is different in form and situation largely depending upon the body it is forced on. The differences and disparities in association and experience of sexual violation are in terms of social class, age, sexual orientation, race or the connection to the sex offender and other psychological, environmental and situational factors such as low empathy, deviant sexual arousal and scripts, deviant fantasy, alcohol and drug use/misuse, and childhood abuse (McPhail 7).

The third postulate of this theory supposes that the existing self/body goes through an experience of violent destabilization due to sexual violation. The victim recognizes the impact of the rape and associates distinct feelings with that specific experience. This forms a significant shift and a change within the victim which is abrupt and at times violent as the victim tends to disintegrate emotionally because “to know oneself as not only rapeable but as

raped, is to become a different self” (Cahill 133). The sexualized violence gives way to the formation of a degrading and destabilizing understanding of self and one’s femininity.

Beverly McPhail reviewed the sexual embodied practice perspective theory presented by Cahill in her article “Feminist Framework Plus: Knitting Feminist Theories of Rape Etiology Into a Comprehensive Model” (2015). She discussed its strengths and weaknesses along with other rape theories to converge them into one comprehensive model through knitting feminist theories of rape etiology by using a feminist framework (McPhail 7).

Sexual violence is generally perpetuated with a certain disdain and disregard for the victim’s subjectivity or essence as the perpetrator views the victim as a thing or property akin to a sex object to be used for his pleasure or amusement, which generally gives way to subordination, domination and power codes being formed. To be considered a sex object that can and cannot be raped and is rape-able not only provides acknowledgement to the victim’s subjectivity but also encompasses a degree of pain, sorrow, discomfort, conquest, and overpowering. Cahill promotes and is in favour of resistance to the acts that pertain to sexual violence and the threat of sexual violence. However, those women who reject and object to the stigmatization of being derivatized are often met with indignity and at times with the labels of unsexy or being unsexed and under various terms of “overweight, disabled, religious, elderly” (Granola Grad school and Goffman). This demeaning labeling of women who resist rape can be observed in this text with regards to Bethie Kaufman and Lila Braverman.

Analysis and Discussion

Elizabeth Kaufman is better known as Bethie throughout the novel. The sudden death of her father, Ken Kaufman, when Bethie was just thirteen years old, had started a chain of events resulting in her being molested by her paternal Uncle Mel, having a profound body image and

weight loss complex. Dr Melvin Kaufman was the younger brother of Ken and the paternal uncle of Jo and Bethie. Melvin lived luxuriously in a fancy ranch house with his wife, Shirley and three children. The Ken Kaufman family only visited them twice a year for festive formal dinners; therefore, Bethie's exposure to her uncle was limited to family gatherings only.

From the very first interaction after Ken's death, Melvin displayed signs of unwelcome interest in Bethie, his niece, as he came the next day of mourning and twice tried to grope her. First, it started with an innocent hug that an uncle would bestow on a grieving niece, but it quickly escalated towards groping as Melvin's hand drifted down "on the part of her body that was no longer technically her hip" (59). Before this uncomfortable hug, Bethie's sexual experience was limited to kissing two or three boys of her age from school willingly and no one had "touched her like that before. No one ever had" (59). The second time Melvin tried to grab her was when her mother had sent her to get a sweater from her parent's room. He had followed her and under the guise of crying for his brother, he had "clutched her, enveloping her in his arms ... had buried his wet, scratchy face against her neck and pressed his whole body against hers. This time, one of his hands brushed against the side of her breast" (60).

As observed from the pivotal presumption of the embodied sexual practice perspective theory, rape or the threat of rape is not only a violent act but also sexually targeted as well. This is evident from the way Bethie first notices and associates Uncle Mel's caresses as sexual as she felt the initial hug making her dress "straining against her bust" (59). When she began her weekly work at her uncle's house as helping Shirley or babysitting their children, Mel would make sure that he dropped her home afterward and would park the car to fondle her unabashedly. The first time he dropped her home, he had pulled her near him across the bench seat and held her while "his hand meandered along the side of her breast" (68). As the weeks

passed Mel's confidence and restlessness grew to the point that he would park his car at the end of the block and settle Bethie across his lap so that:

“his hands roamed over her chest and her hips and her bottom, pinching and grabbing ... He'd rocked against her, faster and faster, his stinky breath coming in agonized pants against her neck, until, finally, he'd thrust himself against her so hard that it hurt, and shudder, then wilt back into his seat” (71).

This way of touching emphasises the sheer sexual and venereal element of the interaction. It indicates the obsession and the male fantasy that is exhibited by Melvin in a wayward and intrusive manner toward his niece. Other than merely touching, he would talk about his dead brother and the father of Bethie which adds to the perversity and crookedness of the situation. The rocking of Melvin against Bethie is similar to the incident in the novel *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov where Humbert rocks against Dolores on the sofa, thinking about no harm done while singing the tragic story of Carmen.

Moreover, the handing over of Bethie's work money at the end of the molesting session each time reeks of the impression of prostitution where one hands over the money to someone for sexual favours as Melvin insinuated “You don't want to run off before I've paid you!” (67). These ten-dollar notes had made Bethie feel "used and dirty" (319).

As the threat of rape and molestation is situated and specific, the victim, Bethie copes with this experience individually and according to her situational and emotional mindset. Being sexually abused by a close family member not only impacts and hinders one's trust issues but also paves the way for long-term emotional trauma. Bethie becomes quiet and emotionally distant from her mother and friends, just like the withdrawn and passive personality of Charlie, who was sexually harassed by his Aunt Helen in the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

(1999) by Stephen Chbosky. Bethie's unsuccessful attempt at informing her mother about Uncle Mel's touching led to her downward spiral of emotional confidence, and she avoided her friends and their invitations for a double date or a birthday party by making lame excuses.

A profound and significant change had overcome Bethie as she was the type of person who was conscious of her looks, outward public appearance and what people thought of her but after the sexual violence incident, she became a careless being who disregarded her physical outlook and attire altogether. She indulged herself in sugary and fatty food that made her weight surge and her physical disposition become that of a fat or obese person. This eating disorder arose from the destabilization of the existing self and threatened subjectivity of Bethie as the threat of rape enforced "The self is at once denied and, by the totality of this denial, stilled, silenced, overcome" (Cahill 132). Furthermore, similar to general sexual assault victims, the stigma and mental association of shame and rage became a fixed part of Bethie's mental state. This sexual shame and humiliation were entwined with the stress eating disorder that made her gain ten pounds, sprout a cluster of red pimples and earned subtle disapproval from her mother, Sarah. Bethie would cram herself with food so "that there would be no room left for her confusion or her rage or her shame" (70) and "until there was no room left for bad memories or anger or guilt or shame" (73).

At the time of the uncomfortable first hug between Melvin and Bethie, she had been in a state of shock and denial as to what took place as "Bethie froze, almost too startled to breathe ... She wondered what had just happened and if she'd imagined his hand on her bottom, hoping that if her friends noticed her pale face and her silence, they'd ascribe it to grief" (59).

The subsequent attempts of groping made Bethie react with horror, desperation and revolt. The reactions of Bethie surrounding these interactions arise from her comprehension of the warped events. These reactions consisted of "Breathing hard, speechless with shock" (60),

“shaking” (61), “flinch ... numb legs ... barely moving ... her mouth was dry, her heart pounding” (66), “Her stomach twisted” (67), “a panicky desperation” (68). She would wash and scrub her skin raw and red after every interaction with Uncle Mel to dispel the feeling of his sticky hands and foul breath on her skin. When Bethie experienced the bad acid trip at college, she hallucinated Uncle Mel, who "reached out and squeezed her breast, hard enough to hurt" (186), thereby denoting the extent of the psychological trauma. Even after decades, Bethie remembered the particular way Uncle Mel had smelt, "his smelly breath, his scratchy face ... she would never forget how it felt to be in Uncle Mel's car, the stench of his breath" (441-442) as she listened to Lila, her niece, who narrated her experience of Lester Shaub, the boss who harassed Lila.

Bethie harboured feelings of resentment and anger towards Jo for not coming back home from camp and rescuing her from being pawed. This stance of Bethie was deep-seated and unspoken until the day Jo and she had an exchange of bitter words at the Blue Hill Farm when Bethie confronted Jo regarding her unhappy marriage. The blowup between the two sisters resulted in the revelation of Bethie's long-held grudge and feelings of abandonment as she accused Jo of "You left me ... With Uncle Mel" (318). This manner of reaction and long-term remembrance clues the internalized trauma and frustration of Bethie.

Cahill not only highlights the pervasive and undesirable conditions, aftermaths and ramifications of rape or the threat of rape but also encourages an embodied resistance to eradicate this baseless phenomenon as “To be willing and able to strike back is to acknowledge that the assault is unjust, unacceptable, and not the fault of the victim” (203). This is exactly what Bethie did as she confronted, morally blackmailed and extorted money from Uncle Mel by threatening to out his disgusting excursions to his wife and the police and attaining the sum of money requested by the late Ken Kaufman once for a laundromat business proposition.

Bethie went a step further by resisting her uncle by asking the servant Negro girl named Coralee if Melvin had ever touched her and to inform the matter if it ever transpired.

A study indicated that in about 31.5% of sexual assaults involving kissing and fondling, the perpetrator declared such statements that hinted at a power and/or control motive along with the notion that the perpetrator was somehow trying to console himself that the sexual assault was consensual and enjoyable from both sides i.e., the victim and him (McCabe and Wauchope, 241). It is similar to when first touching Bethie, Uncle Mel had uttered “I’m so sorry” (59) and “My poor brother” (60) along with an allusion to *The Road Not Taken* (1915) poem by Robert Frost. Melvin had become emotional and grabbed Bethie after he had referenced this particular poem to point out that he and his brother had taken different paths in life. Later as the advances of Melvin escalated, so did his choice of words, laced with a lisping baby-talking tone as he uttered, “Poor little Bethie ... don’t worry. I’m here for you” (68) and “Poor widdle Bethie, do you miss your daddy? Poor Bethie must miss her daddy so much” (72). Melvin would utter such declarations in mock sympathy in part to console himself that he was emotionally supporting Bethie and part to satisfy his weird whims while he rocked against her until he became satiated. Nonetheless, these utterances conveyed not only the power and control dynamics of the interaction but also gave him a false excuse to hold and soothe Bethie as if she were a toddler.

According to the embodied sexual practice perspective theory, the molestation and threat of rape proposed by Melvin arise psychologically from low self-esteem, low empathy, deviant sexual arousal, deviant fantasy and an attachment disorder (McPhail 9).

Later Bethie arrives in Ann Arbor to attend the University of Michigan. In a feeble attempt to escape the horrible memories of Uncle Mel, Bethie indulged in drugs and Devon Brady. He was Bethie’s first serious boyfriend and both of them were in a live-in relationship

living at Devon's place. Along with a group of friends, they travelled to the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island, where Bethie had a bad acid trip and was raped by multiple boys leading to her getting an illegal abortion and having severe rape trauma.

After the cramped trip to Rhode Island in Connie's car, the rest of the group had gone to set up tents near the concert area while Majorie and Bethie went to the ladies' restroom to freshen up. There Bethie had accepted an acid pill from Majorie, thinking it to be Dev's. In the ensuing high, she got separated from her group and wandered around the festival area while bumping into real and imaginary people, including her Uncle Mel. Noticing her state of inebriety and suppressed panic, a boy gently led her to a tent in the field surrounded by a group of men and several sleeping bags. This boy and innumerable other people had climbed the tree to get a better view of the stage during the concert. As Bethie lay on the sleeping bag in a state of delirium and gratitude for his help, four more boys jumped from the tree and joined their group and straddled Bethie.

The boy who had dragged Bethie into the field tents away from the crowd at the concert before indulging in gang rape first displayed humour, care and sympathy to Bethie as he uttered, "Don't be scared ... Come with me ... You look like you could use some taking care of ... Don't worry ... you'll be fine. Bad trip? Bummer" (188). These utterances indicate power and contain an undercurrent of assuming control and authority, the vulnerability of the victim in the eyes of the perpetrator, a taunting expression and false sympathy that is in a sense used to lure frail prey or a bait.

She was just a gullible object to be used and discarded for the assailants to carry out their needs, satisfaction and diversion as "It wasn't until the first boy had her dress off, one hand over her mouth, clamping off her screams, and the other hand working between her legs that Bethie realized she'd made a terrible mistake" (188). Her lack of defensiveness and

insobriety was noticed, manipulated and abused by the perpetrators for their criminal gain at the expense of her victimization as:

“She is reduced to nothing but a means for the satisfaction of his desires for sexualized power; her embodied, sexually differentiated subjectivity is (temporarily, but destructively) nullified by his violent imposition of a sexual act (Cahill 193).

As the violent act of rape is sexually specific and situational, the forbearance and tolerance by the victim are individual and subjective, with ramifications and consequences that entangle both the victim and the surrounding relations. In this particular case, Bethie faces sexual, physical, social and emotional pain and discomfort that wraps and affects her relations with her mother, sister and boyfriend. Right after the assault, when Bethie finds and tries to explain her miserable position to Devon Brady, he not only rebuffs with cold hostility but contrarily accuses her of “been with someone else that night” (209).

On a technical scale, rape involved sexual penetration; nonetheless, here lies the dichotomy of rape as while the rapist initiates sexual intercourse with the victim but the victim does not have any sexual liaison with the perpetrator as neither consent nor her participation is involved in the act as Cahill relates this paradox with the statement that “by the act of rape itself, the assailant has had sex with the victim, but the victim has not had sex with the assailant” (140).

Bethie does not disclose the reason behind her breakup to her university friends or her mother. Further, she conceals the truth from the examining doctor for fear of facing his judgement due to shame. She lies to her mother about being robbed at the folk festival and breaking up with Dev as her excuse for returning home and taking a break from her university activities. These actions of her perhaps stem from fear of being ignored by her mother, like the

time she tried to inform her of Uncle Mel's touching, or due to fear of not being believed by her mother. The concealment of rape results from developing trust issues and humiliation as "Individual women privatized their experiences of assault, some out of shame and embarrassment" (Cahill 127).

Not only the horrible act of rape has an arcane impact on Bethie but also has repercussions on her relationship with her mother and sister. Her relationship with her mother becomes distant and one of pain and sorrow while watching the other quietly suffer with no stretch of help from any side. Whereas her relationship with Jo has a ripple effect that results in Jo harbouring unconscious bitterness for Bethie for interrupting her world travel trip, getting debted to Shelley, and starting a chain of events that led to Jo getting married to Dave and the subsequent divorce. Jo was the one who gave up her life savings to obtain Bethie's illegal abortion and was a reluctant bridesmaid at her ex-girlfriend's wedding, Shelley, in exchange for obtaining the address of the doctor who treated Bethie.

Bethie suffers from distortion and disintegration of her subjectivity and personhood as following the attack she felt "sick and sad, so used and dirty", similar to "a wounded animal", "sick with shame", "so exhausted, so dirty and ashamed" and "weary" (209-212). Getting an abortion heightened her sense of being "spoiled, raped, ruined", "shame and sorrow", and "dirty and ashamed and unclean" (219-220). This dreary deliberation of self is frequent in rape victims as Sohrab considers himself to be "so dirty and full of sin" (Hosseini 335) after being raped by Assef in the novel *The Kite Runner* (2013) by Khaled Hosseini.

For most of her stay at home, Bethie takes to her bedroom with unwashed and unkempt hair, "greasy skin" and "filmed teeth" (214) refusing to venture outside the privacy and darkness of her bedroom much like the character of Seraphina who takes to take home after being gang-raped at the police station from the novel *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam.

Similar to Seraphina, Bethie considers herself dirty, damaged and destroyed as the victims of rape trauma experience drastic personality changes becoming “alien, unwieldy, weak” (Cahill 154) and always remaining on “persistent vigilance” and “surveillance” (Cahill 2001, 161). The fragmentation of her being and self was partly due to societal nuance of victim shaming, fear of disdain or disbelief from her mother, and unable to come to terms with her violation and assault as:

“Intersubjectivity allows for the possibility of understanding the rape victim as not only a victim, but as a person whose experience of victimization is a crucial element, among many crucial elements, of her being” (Cahill 9).

The repercussions of rape were not confined to emotional and mental trauma but also had physical and sexual impacts as well. Bethie not only attained the sexual disease of gonorrhea but also faced the threat of ending up sterile, similar to Hannah, who had risked “contracting a life-threatening infection and becoming infertile” (Fox 29) after being subjected to horrific gang-rape in the novel *Death Mask* (2011) by Kathryn Fox. Furthermore, Bethie got pregnant and had an illegal abortion. At the time of Bethie’s unwanted pregnancy, abortion was illegal in the United States of America. However, the calamity of rape made Bethie uncertain of the identity of the baby’s biological father. Even after years of getting that abortion, Bethie still harboured contradictory feelings regarding it after a suggestion of guessing Bethie’s emotional pain by a self-proclaimed psychic in New York, Bethie’s first thought went to her unborn baby and abortion.

Bethie leaves her hometown and former life behind to live and travel as a nomad who gets by doing temporary, odd jobs and stealing or dealing drugs. She transforms from being a careful traditional feminine girl to a woman to living as an unhygienic lying, stealing and

manipulative gypsy woman, all due to the brutal disestablishment of the existing self that Bethie underwent in an aftermath of the rape. The justification behind Bethie's behaviour and actions was that in part stealing from men; she was in a sense taking back what her offenders had stolen from her as she reasoned that, "Every man she stole from or ripped off was standing in for Uncle Mel, for Devon Brady, and for the guys who'd raped her. Make them pay, she'd think" (254). The estrangement and distance from her family and loved ones is akin to the character of Ayah, a sexual abuse victim, who moves away to escape the guilt and disappointment in Lenny's eyes in the novel *Cracking India* (1980) by Bapsi Sidwa.

While the events of the rape of Bethie at the concert indicate relations of power, cultural and patriarchal influences in displaying sexual entitlement, hostility towards women, emphasized heterosexuality, peer pressure, gang membership and pack mentality (McPhail 9).

Both the incidents of molestation and rape left Bethie feeling "abandoned" (268) and "made to feel like nothing" (269), while she longed to be "supported, safe, protected" (267). Regardless of the effects and causes of rape, sexual abuse is not confined to the subjection of one generation or era, it manifests its consequences and variations like child molestation through Uncle Melvin and toxic workplace abuse as in the case of Lila Braverman, Bethie's niece.

Lila Braverman was the youngest daughter of Josette Kaufman and Dave Braverman and the youngest sibling of Kim and Melissa. Melissa got Lila a three-week temporary job at the publishing firm where she proclaimed to be sexually harassed by Lester Shaub, a celebrated editor.

It was at the 2006 Thanksgiving dinner hosted by Kim and Matt that Lila uncloaked the extent of Lester's misconduct. She made allusions to Lester's actions of incrimination and moral corruption as she insinuated that "Whatever Lester wants, Lester gets" and "he's lucky,

too. He gets whatever he wants” (435). She further added to her suggestions of Lester’s immorality by narrating how the book by a twenty-six-year-old female author became an instant hit due to the help of Shaub. Normally this would have been publishing gossip, but Lila’s straightforward innuendos made it out as if Shaub had received sexual favours in exchange for making the female author’s book a smashing success. This accusation of moral turpitude led to Missy’s outburst that Lila had explicitly advanced on Lester. After a temper fit by Lila and getting her foot injured, she was taken to the hospital by Bethie and Harold where on the way Lila explained in detail how Shaub sexually harassed her.

As soon as Lila joined Lester’s team, he immediately figured out she was not an academic intellectual and began relentlessly pursuing her. He would often invite her alone in his office and make small talk over what she did over the weekend and steadily let the conversation escalate to the point where he would inquire regarding her personal life, including dating and mental health. On the first Friday of every month, Lester would invite his employees, other writers, editors and book scouts to the King Cole Bar in St. Regis for drinks. It was one such Friday when Lila had come out of the ladies' room when Lester sexually advanced on Lila and kissed her without her consent.

The advances made by Lester were sexually motivated and this threat of rape is tinged explicitly with the element of not only sexual violence but sexual abuse as well. Shaub was not just the employer and boss of Lila and her sister Missy, his assistant, but also a seventy-two-year-old man who made advances on a girl in her twenties. This makes the incident seem quite “gross, not to mention inappropriate” (444), along with perversion and display of abuse of official power over an employee. The sexual element is also made notable through the vivid description of the attack on Lila as she informed that “Lester kisses me. He jams his tongue down my throat” (442). Before this abuse, Shaub had tried to grope Lila on multiple occasions

with the pretext of making himself a coffee at the office pantry, he would inadvertently “bump into me, or he’d give me a squeeze with his arm around my waist, only his hand would be up near my boob” (441) as related by Lila. Moreover, she infers that he would continue harassing other vulnerable female employees in the future as “He’s probably grabbing some Seven Sisters boobs in the pantry” (442), which he does and eventually gets caught and made to stand for his misdeeds officially, unfortunately after many years.

As sexual violation or the threat of rape is a situational and an individual act, therefore each victim experiences it uniquely and such was the case with Lila. Although, she firmly resisted and resented the act by “push(ing) him off” and threatened to “go to HR” (442) and report him regarding workplace sexual harassment if he ever touched her again. However, instead of raising the alarm, Lila quietly leaves the firm without informing her sister and co-workers regarding the undesirable incident. This is perhaps due to the prevalent victim mindset that no one would believe the victim’s word against the mighty assailant and the victim’s concerns would be interpreted with a blame game as stated that the choice of “silence surrounding many women's experiences of sexual assault leads to a societal failure to recognize the pervasive effects that rape and the threat of rape have on women's lives” (Cahill 127).

Since rape or the threat of rape is endowed and charged with bodily and political meanings, therefore, it is “as a threat to the possibility of the bodily integrity of women, and therefore as a threat to her status as a person” (Cahill 10). This is precisely what happened with Lila as her subjectivity and essence as a reliable individual were made the subject of question and skepticism even by her mother and sisters.

The admission of Lila was not received without backlash, doubt and suspicion. Hesitation was met with disbelief as the past misconduct of Lila was hinted at while pondering over the possibility of her allegation against Shaub. Her inability to secure long-term good-

paying jobs and her presence on the notorious sugar daddies' website was called into question as Missy counterattacked Lila by declaring, “you were the one who came on to him ... You’re into anyone who can pay your bills ... Stop being a freeloader ... Men aren’t going to pay your bills forever” (436-437). Even the dressing style of Lila and her conversation was deemed inappropriate and provocative as “she was dressed for the club, and that she flirted with everyone” (444). Similar to the case with many women who object to being derivatized and resists the threat of rape, she is ignored, disregarded and met with indignity as “women's representations of that sexual violence are met with social disbelief and suspicion” (Cahill 128).

Lila was called a “feisty” (442) woman by Shaub and was encountered with workplace professional jealousy and hostility after initially drawing Lester’s attention and admiration. She faced the disintegration of self and her subjectivity that led her to develop strong trust issues, estrangement and distance from her immediate family and she went on a rampage journey across the world of never settling in one place for too long, similar and reminiscent of the youth days of her Aunt Bethie.

Per the embodied sexual practice perspective theory, the sexual harassment and the threat of rape by Shaub over Lila resulted from the overlap of power relations, patriarchal influence, gender dynamics, toxic workplace environment conditions, and the assumption of displaying dominance and power (McPhail 9).

Conclusion

The theory of the Sexual Embodied Practice Perspective by Ann J. Cahill was used to analyze the *Mrs. Everything: A Novel* by Jennifer Weiner. It was conducted to dissect the ramifications of rape and the aftermath of the sexual assault on the characters of Elizabeth Kaufman and Lila Braverman. Bethie was first molested by her uncle, which resulted in her developing a body

image dilemma and an eating disorder. She was then raped at a folk festival when in college. This incident resulted in her acquiring a venereal disease, getting an illegal abortion and life-long rape trauma. On the other hand, Lila was harassed at her workplace by her boss, leading to her resigning from the job and being doubted by her mother and sisters. Both these women were made to feel shame, humiliation and rage after their sexual abuse incidents, along with a violent disintegration of self and personhood. Although some portions of this particular novel were left to be examined closely, therefore, this research is open for further study. This research aims to promote social awareness against the prevalent threat of rape against women everywhere.

Works Cited

Cahill, Ann J. *Rethinking Rape*. Cornell University Press, 2001.

Fox, Kathryn. *Death Mask*. Pan Macmillan Australia, Sydney, 2011.

Granola Grad school and Goffman. "Cahill, A.J. 2011. Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics." *Granolagradschoolandgoffman.com Website*, Wordpress.com, 4 November 2015,

<https://granolagradschoolandgoffman.wordpress.com/2015/11/04/cahill-a-j-2011-overcoming-objectification-a-carnal-ethics/>. Accessed 3 May 2021.

Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018.

McCabe, Marita P., and Michelle Wauchope. "Behavioural Characteristics of Rapists." *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, vol.11, no.3, 2005, pp. 235-247. *Tandfonline.com*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552600500272820>. Accessed 3 May 2021.

McPhail, Beverly A. "Feminist Framework Plus: Knitting Feminist Theories of Rape Etiology Into a Comprehensive Model." *Trauma Violence & Abuse*, 2015, pp. 1-16, *Researchgate.com*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277410621>. Accessed 3 May 2021.

Weiner, Jennifer. *Mrs Everything: A Novel*. London, Simon and Schuster, Inc, 2019.