Subjectivity and Revenge in Karen M. McManus's *One of Us Is Lying*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the issues of peer rejection and revenge among adolescents through their portrayal in young adult literature (YAL). Adopting the lens of Lacanian theory on subjectivity and desire, the paper analyses a revenge plot in Karen M. McManus's novel *One of Us Is Lying* and its origins. It argues that peer rejection contributes to contradictory self-concepts; how adolescent characters view themselves clash at some point with how others regard them, leading them to seek retribution. Their attempt at revenge will be examined along the lines of Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the paper argues that their revenge is driven by the impulse to fulfil the Other's desire, which eventually fails due to the unobtainable nature of the desire itself.

Keywords: adolescents, Lacan, peer rejection, young adult literature

Literature is viewed as a means to represent different facets of human culture, including that of adolescents. This group of the population is significant in that they are at a transitional age where most human maturation and identity formation take place, and the bulk of literature written about them tries to capture this process. Such stories can help connect adolescents to their roots and to the human condition at large, as well as facilitate their achievement of personal identity (Short, Tomlinson, Lynch-Brown, & Johnson, 2015, pp. 8–9). Central to that experience, however, is an array of negative emotions and problems that comes with being an adolescent, especially those concerning the more social aspects such as peer relationships and one's place in society. Young adult literature depicts these problems and their consequences.

Since its origin in the twentieth century, YA literature has grown and diversified, yet the scholarship surrounding it seems to concentrate itself around a limited group of well-known texts that have a strong impact on popular culture (Fitzsimmons, as cited in Fitzsimmons & Wilson, 2020, pp. 17-18). One common element that has been heavily examined in most of these YA books is the aspect of maturation of the young adult characters; the vast array of works under this label offers multiple complex variations of this. Since adolescents are often characterized as both powerful and disempowered, many young adult novels make a point to "interrogate social constructions" and present these adolescents in relation to their social contexts (Trites, 2000, p. 20). These constructions include the institutions which young adults are inevitably a part of and which have a certain degree of influence on their lives.

As an example of such representation, this article focuses on Karen M. McManus's *One of Us Is Lying* (2017). The novel follows in the footsteps of many of its predecessors like S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) and Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974) in that it positions adolescent characters in familiar domains such as schools or their own neighborhoods but also has them navigate serious issues of murder and criminal accusations. The article explores how YA characters driven by the angst that stems from peer rejection can seek retaliation through violence. Towards this end, Jacques Lacan's theory on subjectivity and desire is employed due to its applicability to the psychological states of the young adult characters being discussed. Through the lens of psychoanalysis, with particular emphasis Lacanian theory, this paper aims to analyze the reasons behind the revenge acts carried out in the novel and illustrate how they are spurred by the perpetrators' own incongruous self-images and their inability to handle the powerlessness that stems from rejection.

Literature Review

Adolescence is a period marked by change, be it physical, emotional, or social. While a clear and unanimously accepted boundary of at what age adolescence starts or ends can hardly be found, many sources delineate the benchmarks for adolescence to include ages as young as 10, according to the Society for Adolescent Medicine (SAM), to as old as 25, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (Curtis, 2015, pp. 9–10). Hence, many use the term adolescence more broadly with a focus on it being a transitional progression from complete dependency to a state of capability to handle developmental tasks, respond to contextual demands, and cultivate "personal agency" (Curtis, 2015, p. 1; Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003, p. 478; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996, p. 769).

Adolescence is wrought with not just physical, but cognitive, psychological, and social changes, as well as various stressors such as familial conflict and emotional disruptions (Arnett, 1999, p. 317; Latrobe & Drury, 2009, p. 4). In addition, adolescence is regarded as a "disorienting and liminal space" (Tribunella, 2010, p. 75) in which its occupants, namely, teenagers or young

adults, are often portrayed as psychologically "alienated" and "overwhelmed" (Underwood, as cited in Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003, pp. 276-77). Its challenges also include having to negotiate unfamiliar social roles (Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'Malley, 2004, p. 1120). Ironically, and perhaps dangerously, these young adults are in the age group where they have to face and make many "critical and reverberating life choices" (Costa et al., 1994, p. 6).

According to a number of leading social and cognitive psychological theories pertaining to adolescence, major developmental tasks during this period include the search for one's identity and the formation of meaningful relationships outside of the family. In *Adolescence: Continuity, Change, and Diversity*, Nancy J. Cobb (2010) defines it as a time when girls and boys try to forge a stable identity for themselves, to examine the choices around them and determine the sources of their personal strength (pp. 10, 26). Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory states that the key for adolescents to construct their identity is experimentation with different new things to see which fit them the most and to connect the roles and skills cultivated in their earlier experiences with the ideals of the future; this is followed by the achievement of intimacy through forming meaningful relationships with others (Erikson, 1968, p. 128). Robert Havinghurst likewise defined the developmental tasks during the adolescent years as involving the acceptance of one's characteristics and cultural identity and the achievement of mature relations with peers (Latrobe and Drury, 2009, pp. 26–28).

Therefore, it is not surprising that connecting with others, especially peers, and understanding oneself are intertwined for young adults. In fact, the answers to the question of "Who am I?" are often found in adolescent relationships to other people (Cole, 2009, p. 124). In particular, peer groups constitute a point towards which adolescents orient themselves in order to establish autonomy from their parents, and social acceptance from their peers may determine emotional development for adolescents well into adulthood (American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 21). The significance being placed on peer relationships marks this as a focal point in adolescent life (Marston, Hare, & Allen, 2010, p. 960), so much so that some deem teenagers to have "a passionate herding instinct" (Brown, 1990, p. 171). As found in Csikszentmihalyi and Larson's study, adolescents' emotions are frequently linked to events concerning peers (as cited in Rosenblum and Lewis, 2003, p. 280). However, since social interactions with peers are likely to present abundant challenges and stressors, such as arguments, ridicules, and aggression, teens are also constantly tested and measured in terms of their ability to navigate these difficulties (Reijntjes, Stegge, & Terwogt, 2006, p. 90). Failure to respond positively in such situations may result in one being excluded or rejected (K. Sullivan, Cleary, G. Sullivan, 2004, p. 34).

Exclusion or rejection from peers could then lead to diverse, often unsavory, outcomes. How teens respond to rejection may take many forms. Certainly, there are coping methods that are positively viewed and encouraged, but some adolescents do react unfavorably to even the smallest hint of ostracism. In fact, a study by Eisenberger, Lieberman, and Williams (2003) suggests that the neurocognitive response that occurs during social exclusion is akin to how the brain reacts to physical pain, implying that we are undergoing an "injury to our social connections" (pp. 291–292). Other negative effects are also common, such as helplessness (Orri et al., 2014, p. 7), loneliness (Asher and Wheeler, 1983, p. 13), depression (Sandstrom, Cillessen, & Eisenhower, 2003, p. 533), and self-defeating behaviors (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002, p. 613). Whereas some emotional responses are personal and rather passive, more violent reactions can often develop as well. Individuals who have faced rejection, especially repeatedly, may become aggressive and turn their pent-up emotions outward in what has been termed the outcast-lash-out effect (Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006, p. 213;

Reijntjes et al., 2010, p. 1394). Warburton and his team (2006) have attributed this tendency to the perception of threat to one's control which thus elicits an attempt at restoration (p. 214).

One possible end result of the outcast-lash-out effect is revenge, whether in thought or in action. Böhm and Kaplan (2011) define this as the culmination of "external violations" and "internal vulnerability" born out of a traumatic situation which reduces one to an inferior position (p. 19). According to Gollwitzer, Meder, and Schmitt's study (2011), revenge serves a proximal goal of making the perpetrators suffer in equal measures, while the ultimate goal is to send a message to the wrongdoers, thereby making them understand why they are being punished (p. 372). This is supported by another study where goals of revenge, including the aim of preventing transgressions in the future, "demonstrating powerfulness" and "inducing guilt," are included (Gollwitzer, 2007, p. 121). Correspondingly, Orri et al. (2014) assert that revenge serves a communicative purpose, one which informs others of their misdeeds and connects the individual's distress to the actions of others (pp. 6-7). In many cultures, revenge functions only as a fantasy and having it as a motive is usually frowned upon (Miller, 1998, pp. 161–162). Nevertheless, it is still considered as a method for delivering justice (Miller, 1998, p. 168).

Teens who feel they have been wronged by others, be they family, friends, or society, may feel revenge is an appropriate course of action. Take bullying as an example; while aggressive behavior or revenge are usually ineffective in solving bullying problems, a portion of victimized teens still employ it as a coping strategy (Wilton, Craig, & Pepler, 2000, p. 241). Since bullying frequently takes place in the company of others, due largely to the fact that bullies enjoy having their assertion of dominance and intimidation witnessed, the presence of other peers who display support of the bullies, either through blatant encouragement or through passive bystanding, may serve to reinforce the link between victimization and peer rejection (Esch, 2008, p. 380; Olweus, 1994, p. 1173). Revenge could therefore be a way for the victimized or rejected adolescents to regain their control over the situation.

Taking into consideration the significance of peer relations and the adverse impact of peer rejection, it may be useful to integrate psychoanalytic theory in the analysis of texts dealing with young adults, with specific emphasis on how such psychological impact factors in an adolescent's maturation. Gaining maturity can be analyzed along the lines of gaining knowledge, as Tribunella (2010) writes that "[a]dolescence is effectively defined by initiation into knowledge" (p. 53), which essentially translates to "a realist sensibility about oneself" (p. 56). It can then be asserted that self-awareness is integral to the construction of a young adult's identity. Towards this end, this paper will draw upon Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory regarding subjectivity and desire to analyze revenge in McManus' novel.

In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, subjectivity hinges upon the existence of desire; more specifically, "the subject is caused by the Other's desire" (Fink, 1997, p. 50). From the moment of birth, or conception even, it is the decision of the parent(s), their desire for something that creates the physical presence of the subject. This reliance on the Other's desire continues throughout their lifetime, for when the subject matures enough to integrate themselves into society, their being becomes "mediated by the other's desire" (Lacan, 1949/2006, p. 79). In other words, every action of the subject is addressed to one of the Other. The Other's desire is no longer only that which spurred the subject into being; it is now "the cause" of their desire as well (Fink, 1997, p. 59). By extension, it is the Other that "controls a human being's external world" and "regulates his or her assumption of a 'self-image'" (Nobus, 1999, p. 120).

This internalization of the Other's desire, while essential to the subject's formation of self, remains ever futile. Fundamentally, one "can rarely and is rarely allowed…to completely monopolize" the attention or the desire of the Other (Fink, 1997, p. 55). Thus, the attempt on the subject's part to offer up themselves to magically fill the lack felt by the Other is in itself a losing battle. Not only is the Other's desire not singular, but it is also constantly shifting. As such, the subject, in their quest to respond to this desire, ends up perpetually, and unsuccessfully, scrambling to catch up with it (Fink, 1997, pp. 50-5, 54).

Such unattainable nature of desire is not only limited to that of the Other, but also the subject as well. This begins to take shape from the time a child begins to recognize him/herself as a subject. Referring to one of Lacan's best-known theories, the mirror stage, it is often described as a moment of identification in which a child is able to identify him/herself with that image reflected in the mirror and conceives of such an image as being distinguished from others (Lacan, 1949/2006, pp. 75–76). In addition, Lacan (1949/2006) also postulates that the mirror presents to the child "a primordial form," a form which he calls the "ideal-I" or an ideal image of the child itself (p. 76). However, it is this ideal-I that spawns a mental discordance as reconciliation between the mirror images and the subject's social determination is "irreducible" (Lacan, 1949/2006 p. 76). The mirror itself also serves as a "limit" which, in Lacan's words, "cannot be crossed. And the only organization in which it participates is that of the inaccessibility of the object" (1986/1992, p. 151). To put it simply, the *I* that is created in the mirror stage represents the assembled desire of the subject that cannot be obtained, or, as Nobus (1999) concludes, "an I that can never be realized" (p. 117). To make matters worse, the mirror stage consequently results in aggression. Acting as a point at which self-concept (that the child can conceive of itself relationally and contextually to others) originates, this stage can be seen as the "ontological mould for the social struggle for prestige," thereby instigating aggression or even destruction (Nobus, 1999, p. 112; Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 151). In fact, such aggressiveness is found in every social interaction, benign or otherwise (Lacan, 1949/2006, p. 79). Even children, once cognizant of their position in the social context, can express envy of other people's affection as well as their achievements, which potentially includes resentment (Hay, 2019, p. 85). Therefore, such desire for the ideal version of oneself, as well as for social recognition over others, can lead to failure. Imperative though it may be to the construction of subjectivity, desire eventually is "predicated upon a fundamental lack of the impossible 'lost object'" (Newman, 2004, p. 159) and "not attached to any clearly realizable or realistic goal" (Kirshner, 2005, p. 3), ultimately rendering it unobtainable.

The unachievable desire is then tackled with different coping mechanisms, most of which reside in the realm of fantasy. In a sense, it can be said that adolescents employ fantasy as they grapple with their place in the world. Given "the salience of issues of social competence" in this period (Marston et al., 2010, p. 960), it is understandable that envisioning and mentally playing out their actions and anticipating the ensuing reactions are to be expected, even in highly stressful events. As a matter of fact, the assessment of said competence is often determined by a person's ability to appropriately socialize and understand social expectations of their behaviors (Wilton et al., 2000, p. 243; Reijntjes et al., 2006, p. 90), and the underlying motive for these mental imaginings is their desire to foster connection with others (Twenge et al., 2002, p. 614). In a similar vein, Lacan views fantasy as a realm in which the subject manipulates their position "with respect to the Other's desire" with the purpose of eventually arriving at that which is desired (Fink, 1997, p. 60). However, as the true desire of the Other is obscure, the subject tries to "stitch desire to the fabric of social reality" by transforming it into other tangible or recognizable fantasies (Kirshner, 2005, p. 5). Hence, it makes sense that, in Lacanian theory, fantasy's ultimate function is to sustain reality by "cover[ing] over the lack"

(Newman, 2004, pp. 162–163). One such manifestation of fantasy is the aforementioned revenge, which is a response to a violation of the desire for social connectedness or expected treatment from others, a "perceived humiliation" that begs to be dealt with (Böhm and Kaplan, 2011, p. 20).

All in all, it can be seen that young adults undergo a transitional period that unavoidably makes them susceptible to intense, often negative, emotions. The centrality of social relationships, especially with peers, during this age also heightens their emotional response to rejection, which can result in aggression and retaliation. Through a psychoanalytic lens, these adolescents become subjects that, in the process of maturation, are motivated by the desire of the Other, constantly rotate themselves and their actions around such desire, and eventually fail due to the very unattainable nature of desire itself. This puts the subjects in a perpetual losing position in the power dynamics against the Other. This line of reasoning will be applied to the analysis of *One of Us Is Lying* in the following section.

Discussion

In 2017, American author Karen M. McManus brought the themes of maturation, rejection, and power into focus in her debut novel, *One of Us Is Lying*. Marketed as a mystery, the book follows a group of students in the town of Bayview as they go from being ordinary high schoolers to murder suspects in the span of one afternoon. After ending up in detention on the same day through a curious coincidence, Bronwyn Rojas, dubbed "The Brain" in the official synopsis of the novel, Nate Macauley, the school's resident delinquent, Cooper Clay, a rising baseball star, and Addy Prentiss, homecoming princess and doting girlfriend to Cooper's best friend, Jake, witness the mysterious death of fellow classmate Simon Kelleher who experiences a sudden allergic reaction and dies shortly afterwards. Simon is notorious as the creator of About That, a gossip application on which he posts rumors and stories about other students, using only their initials. Given that *About That* also features gossip about the four students, there is more cause for the police to suspect one or more of the four students, nicknamed the Bayview Four once investigation begins, as the culprit. After they undergo various challenges stemming from the investigation as well as the rumors spread by the application and its successor Tumblr page About This, it is then revealed that Simon has killed himself and has intended to frame his four classmates. Simon's plan is continued posthumously by an accomplice, Jake Riordan, who seeks to make Addy pay for cheating on him. A manifesto left in the care of Janae, Simon's friend, declares that Simon has committed suicide to take revenge on the society that has made his life miserable and to do it with more imagination than anyone has done before.

The main events of the book are catalyzed by the negative experiences of two YA characters – Simon and Jake. For Simon, as a school's outcast and the creator of About That, he is predictably shunned by his peers, leaving him with only one friend, Janae. Most of the student body at school regard him with a mixed sense of trepidation and resentment. Bronwyn, for example, who is normally "too squeaky clean" to be a target of About That (p. 28), still has a policy that "As a general rule… I try to give Simon as little information as possible" (p. 4). This does not bode well for his psyche as peer rejection from childhood to young adulthood is consistently recognized as a risk factor for strong negative emotions and behaviors (Trentacosta and Shaw, 2009, p. 357; Reijntjes et al., 2006, p. 90). More specifically, Simon feels humiliated when he is disinvited from the after-prom party held by one popular classmate and is "'not even allowed to go'" even though he is on the junior prom court (p. 323). On a more personal level, he is rejected by Keely, the girl he has tried to pursue, who confesses to her boyfriend,

Cooper, that she "hooked up with [Nate] at a party to get rid of Simon" (p. 266). Another character who has had a part in angering Simon is Bronwyn, who "told him the wrong application deadline" for a Model United Nations competition and caused him to miss the cutoff (p. 136).

Whether or not these acts were done intentionally is of no significance. Simon still develops, as a result, numerous internalizing problems, including loneliness, social anxiety and depression, as is often the case when perceived rejection is high (Sandstrom et al., 2003, p. 533). It is suggested that Simon is not a socially well-adjusted person. Janae says, "he'd been depressed for a while," and the fact that he only has a limited number of friends is in itself indicative of his social awkwardness (p. 322). Worse, this conforms with Dodge et al.'s study that there is a tendency for individuals having experienced rejection to display excessive aggression toward peers due to an assumption of peers' hostile intent (as cited in Reijntjes et al., 2006, p. 90). These perceived negative experiences then unsurprisingly spur Simon into a negative act of his own, which is to devise the plan that lays the foundation of the novel.

As for Jake, Simon's unexpected partner, his perceived culprit is his own girlfriend, Addy, who cheated on him with one of his friends. Jake's controlling nature coupled by Addy's loyalty towards him serve to enhance his feeling of betrayal as he originally believed that Addy was devoted to him. Although at first Jake is not aware of Addy's act of infidelity, Simon makes sure to reveal this fact to him in order to enlist his help in actualizing the plan. Jake, in his anger, readily agrees to Simon's plan.

While the circumstances surrounding their trauma are different, both feel a sense of entitlement that justifies a payback. Jake entertains the position of a popular boy with an almost perfect life—a strong member of the school's baseball team, a pretty and equally popular girlfriend, and a solid group of friends. From his point of view, it is easy to experience a sense of invincibility, or at least, superiority, over other teens. From Addy's description of him, possible bias aside, Jake is "the best running back Bayview High's seen in years" and he and Cooper, after becoming best friends in the freshman year of high school, have become "basically the kings" of their class (pp. 43–44). Therefore, finding out about his girlfriend's infidelity is likely a big blow on his ego that becomes a traumatic event for Jake in several ways. First, Addy has always been in a submissive position to him. Addy admits that she "never turn[s] Jake down" (p. 45) and always does things to please him, like dressing the way he likes or wearing her hair a certain way, so much so that her sister observes that Jake "ran every part of your life for three years" (p. 311). Men, in general, are "sensitive…about losing the interest of their partner, of feeling taken for granted" (Böhm and Kaplan, 2011, p. 88). Hence, Addy's intimacy with another man, especially one he considers a friend, is seen as insulting to him since it implies that he no longer has control over his girlfriend, or that his control over her is not as absolute as he thinks. This fractures the perfect image of himself that Jake has likely developed from his past socialization.

As for Simon, his purported intent of revenge is, admittedly, more twisted than Jake's. While the object of Jake's contempt is concrete and singular – Addy being the only one deserving of blame – Simon's victimizers are plural and collective. According to Janae, he "always felt like he should get a lot more respect and attention than he did" (p. 322). He feels he is wronged by everyone by being ignored and rejected and thus wants to show this dissatisfaction through his suicide. This is in line with Orri et al. (2014)'s study in which interpersonal trouble, as well as the perception that such issues are insurmountable, has been cited as part of the inciting reasons leading up to suicide (pp. 6–7). This is further elaborated in the manifesto that Simon leaves

behind with Janae. Admitting that "*I hate my life and everything in it,*" Simon explains he "*decided to get the hell out*" (p. 321). However, he discloses that he did not want his so-called exit from life to be banal and clichéd.

> I thought a lot about how to do this. I could buy a gun, like pretty much any asshole in America. Bar the doors one morning and take out as many Bayview lemmings as I have bullets for before turning the last one on myself.
> And I'd have a lot of bullets.
> But that's been done to death. It doesn't have the same impact anymore.
> I want to be more creative. More unique. I want my suicide to be talked about for years.
> I want imposters to try to imitate me. And fail, because the planning this takes is beyond your average depressed loser with a death wish (p. 321–322).

Not only is he set on taking his own life, he also aims to cause such a stir with it that his death will be remembered. As seen here, he does not identify any specific person as the instigator of his suicidal ideation; instead, it seems he wants his death to target any random student or, in his words, "as many Bayview lemmings" as possible (p. 321). He also shows that he has pondered the method extensively. Therefore, his eventual choice of scapegoats may be somewhat understandable. Early on in the novel, Simon mentions that he views the Bayview Four as "walking teen-movie stereotypes," which, to him, possibly represents the different factions of the student body at Bayview High (p. 11). Framing those whom he believes embody the school environment that antagonizes him can then serve as a unique way of exacting revenge that he aims to achieve.

Indeed, both Simon and Jake have their own agenda for partaking in the elaborate revenge plan. However, both of their actions can be analyzed in a similar way; their revenge is reflective of their misguided and distorted view of others which they cannot reconcile with reality, thus prompting this disturbing and detrimental scheme. To clarify, both characters have been immersed in the world of images which have inevitably had an impact on their psyche. These images, thus accumulated in much the same way through existence in society as through one's interaction with parental figures, have been internalized and crystallized into a global image that a person uses to form "a coherent 'sense of self'" (Fink, 1997, p. 37). Similarly, these characters have internalized how others see them and combined with their own perception of how they should be regarded by others, thereby constructing an ideal image. As Erikson (1968) has theorized, adolescents "are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are" (p. 128).

This line of analysis may apply more effectively to the case of Jake than Simon, although Simon's struggle with the ideal image has a more severe consequence. As mentioned earlier, Jake has been enjoying a favorable position in the school hierarchy and approbation from his social circle. This seemingly positive social stance is exacerbated by the acquiescent behavior of Addy. This high school culture, in which a well-adjusted and confident disposition such as Jake's is encouraged and accepted, is in fact harmful to the popular teens as well as the rejected; these popular teenagers are allowed to "think of themselves as superior, divest themselves of empathy and social responsibility," and eventually let their perceived "infallibility" direct their decisions, often bad ones (Sullivan et al., 2004, p. 34). Falling into this trap of indulging in popularity, Jake cannot help but regard himself as superior, and therefore he reacts exceptionally strongly to Addy's betrayal. Jake's consistent success in imposing control over Addy's decisions and behavior throughout their relationship has reinforced his conviction in his superiority. Having Addy neglect his significance, and by extension his influence, as her

boyfriend, even while intoxicated, hints at the loss of control he normally wields around her. On top of this is the fact that the person with whom Addy cheats is one of his own friends who continues to act casually around him, making Jake feel like he is being taunted. His words to Addy when she confesses confirm this belief: "You let me hang out with a guy who's laughing his ass off behind my back while you jump out of his bed and into mine like nothing happened. Pretending you give a shit about me" (p. 103). As a result, this creates a discrepancy in an image that he has constructed about himself as the perfect boyfriend who "treat[s] [her] like a queen" (p. 103). Addy voices this sentiment perfectly when she realizes that what Jake is doing serves as "The perfect revenge for cheating on a perfect boyfriend" (p. 325).

Simon, on the other hand, suffers from a different type of dissonance as he is consumed not by the aggregate of external positive notions of him but by his own perception of himself. Initially largely invisible, Simon is recognized for the first time by other students after he posts a scandal on an app called After School before he builds "his own app" (p. 44). At this point he has garnered a reputation for himself and made people "scared of him" (p. 44). Undergoing such a shift in his peers' perception of him is reflective of the common experience of role confusion during adolescence, which has a rather negative implication. For a person still in the process of forming a stable identity, there is a need for unity "between that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see in him and to expect of him" (Erikson, 1968, p. 87). Seeing how his social presence alters from being overlooked, and even rejected – considering "the way Jake just dropped Simon freshman year…as if Simon didn't exist anymore" (p. 325) – to being able to spark recognition and apprehension may cause him to internalize an image of himself that is more powerful than he really is or than his peers really perceive him to be. Through About That, he is able to make his schoolmates not only wary of the sources from which he receives the information, but also apprehensive about upsetting him and consequently ending up with their misdeeds revealed on the app.

His action, while under the guise of maintaining the anonymity of the persons involved, can still be considered as a relational form of bullying (Flanagan et al., 2013, p. 692). Though he does not seek direct confrontation, he does realize that it grants him power over his peers. Here Simon is capitalizing on the adolescents' fear of "social pain" which can stem from being publicly humiliated and later ostracized (Ouwerkerk, Kerr, Gallucci, & Lange, 2005, p. 322). His so-called power is validated even more by the fact that what he posts, however unlikely, "you could pretty much guarantee every word was true" (p. 28). The peers' grudging acceptance of his cyber assault is the "action without belief" that perpetuates the structure of domination (Newman, 2004, p. 164). Such power dynamics inevitably form the various images of his powerful self that he accumulates and identifies with in the same way a child catches and internalizes images fed to it by parents (Fink, 1997, p. 36).

The problem is then worsened as Simon has to contend with the actual opinions that the others hold about him. With few friends and a reputation of spreading degrading rumors about his peers, Simon is, at best, tolerated among his social circle. This clashes with the self-concept that he has constructed in his head, which is why he feels he deserves "more respect and attention" (p. 322). Hence, it can be interpreted that he is unable to cope with the lack that results from not being able to reconcile the disparate images of himself as he has formulated and as his peers' project. This failure contributes towards aggressive or problem behavior, which is in line with the actual tendency of rejected youth (Reijntjes et al., 2010, p. 1394).

Such discord is inimical to their ego since it obviously disrupts the process by which individuals make sense of the world, which is through the juxtaposition of "what we see and hear with this

internalized self-image" (Fink, 1997, p. 37). As adolescents, they have acquired more advanced cognition for self-evaluation and contextual consideration, which results in them being more self-conscious and susceptible to negative assessments by others (Reimer, 1996, p. 322). While the heightened reflection of the self allows adolescents to know themselves better and form a stable identity, it also poses a risk of the different self-images colliding with each other. According to Rosenberg, such a clash is most inclined to emerge during adolescence (as cited in Harter, 1990, p. 533). Correspondingly, adolescents' vulnerability to disturbances in their self-concept can be harmful to their identity (Lau, 1990, p. 112). For Jake and Simon, their vulnerable sense of self is further weakened by the inability to reconcile the different self-concepts and self-images. As a result, they resort to revenge as a coping mechanism for their unbearable situations, and their intent to take revenge reflects their version of an ideal community made up of others and of themselves.

Nevertheless, in reference to Lacanian theory, revenge, when situated in the realm of the ideal, or the fantasy, is doomed to fail. As has been established, while adolescents such as Jake and Simon mature, peer acceptance is of paramount importance, and perceived rejection does have a lasting negative effect. Consequently, they strive towards the traits that would earn them favor with peers, whether consciously or not. Still, rejection is always an imminent possibility (Trentacosta and Shaw, 2009, p. 357). Consequently, the formation of the subject, which is dependent on external images compiled into "an illusory image of cohesion and stability" with which the subject identifies, results in failure (Lacan, 1949/2006, pp. 79–80; Newman, 2004, p. 154). Influenced heavily by these ill-formed self-concepts, Simon and Jake both face disappointment that escalates into anger, causing them to lash out in the form of revenge in order to maintain the self-image that they believe to be most beneficial for them. In an indirect way, retaliation as such can serve a purpose of restoring the subject's "inner psychic balance" as its aim is to reestablish self-esteem (Böhm and Kaplan, 2011, p. 34). However, when revenge is taken against the fundamental lack within a person's psyche, it does not achieve its goal because the balance that they are trying to regain is essentially impossible to pin down.

It follows, then, that the purpose Jake and Simon's revenge scheme ends up serving is only as a tool to seek power both over others and over their own fate. What can be discerned from their actions is obviously not the kind of restoration that is defined by Böhm and Kaplan (2011) to be rather productive and reconciliatory (p. 35), but indicative of the feeling of perceived humiliation, anger, or powerlessness, from which aggression often ensues. By trying to punish others for the grievance received, both characters transfer their feelings of inferiority and indignity to those they deem to be at fault. This corresponds with several studies that refer to revenge as an "other-directed emotion" that projects negative feelings of the individual onto others (Orri et al., 2014, p. 6; Böhm and Kaplan, 2011, p. 35). In Simon's case, his choice of revenge which is suicide, goes one step further by permanently "relieving" himself of any negative feelings (Orri et al., 2014, p. 6) and even retaining control of his own life (Hendin, 1991, p. 1154). As such, both Simon and Jake are able to control the situation, the others involved, and their own position in how it plays out.

For these adolescent characters, the power dynamics that surrounds them and its influence are undeniable as young adults are active subjects who exercise power and on whom power plays. That is to say, they are embarking on a path toward autonomy as they are now constantly considering different "avenues of duty and service" with "free assent," driven by both the desire and compulsion to make choices that deviate from those of their parents but not from those of their peer groups (Erikson, 1968, p. 129). They get to grapple with challenges and "test the limits" of their power in their culture and society in which they navigate (Trites, 2000, p. 54).

On the other hand, these young adult characters are influenced by the external forces that abound in their immediate and extended circles. These social or cultural institutions operate to shape adolescents by showing them how much and how far they can employ their individual power (Trites, 2000, p. xii).

In Simon's case, it is quite clear that even though his manifesto proclaims the suicide to have a more sweeping impact, essentially he only wants to target those who have had a direct hand in making him unhappy. Apart from the psychological discordance contributing to his misery, his decision to carry out the scheme is further triggered by shame. While it is a common facet of adolescent emotions, shame may be felt especially strongly by those who struggle with the disparity between the ideal self and the real self (Reimer, 1996, p. 322). Suffering from this very contradiction within himself, Simon likely harbors a fair amount of shame, which then develops into paranoia about not being able to achieve or maintain the façade of the ideal self. It is not only a failure to achieve the respect that he desires, but also his own paradoxical self-concepts that give rise to confusion and thus shame in his mind. While he projects himself as not part of, and even above, the clichés of high-school cliques and drama, he also secretly craves it as it would mean acceptance and inclusion, which implicitly confirms he is behaving correctly in social contexts (Ouwerkerk et al., 2005, p. 322). This is seen most obviously when he "rigged the votes so he'd be on the junior prom court" (pp. 323–324). An expected reaction is that Simon "acts like he's above caring whether he's popular, but he was pretty smug when he wound up on the junior prom court last spring" although nobody knows "how he pulled that off" (p. 11). Janae confirms that "He'd make fun of people for being lemmings, but he still wanted the same things they did. And he wanted them to look up to him. So he did it" (p. 324).

Being cognizant of these discrepancies leads to his shame as he "couldn't stand the thought of … everyone at school knowing he'd done something so pathetic. Like, he'd spent years spilling everybody's secrets, and now he was gonna get humiliated with one of his own" (p. 324). As a result, he reacts in such a way that would remove shame or prevent shame – an internally-induced sentiment – from developing into humiliation – a feeling provoked by external factors. This decision is hinted at by his penchant for violence as seen in his online posts on the 4chan message board that Maeve discovers. Not only is he one of those labelled as "a bunch of sickos" celebrating school shootings (p. 176), he also demands a more creative method of "violently disrupting schools" (p. 271). One of his 4chan posts says he wants teens engaging in this public violence to "Raise the stakes, for God's sake. Do something original…Surprise me when you take out a bunch of asshole lemmings. That's all I'm asking." (p. 271). This may explain why he reacts in such an aggressive way to the wrongs he feels have been done towards him. Simon's embarrassment over his ruse makes him paranoid about his peers discovering the truth, which will then worsen their attitude towards him and even lead to further ostracism.

This instability is suggestive of his lack of control over the events in his life despite the fact that he actually covets it. His slide into depression and violent inclination also emphasize his lack of control over even his own mental state. Considering this, taking revenge through suicide is a way for him to regain control as he believes he has cleverly mapped out how those wrongdoers' lives will be destroyed after his death, as well as how his death, the action of which he has complete agency, is integral to said destruction. Here Simon treats death as an opportunity to reestablish subjective power. Moreover, he can also baffle and scare other people because, as he plans, the people will watch "it unfold for a year" and still "have no clue what actually happened" (p. 322), giving him a promise of a continuing invisible authority. In fact, even after his manifesto is scheduled to come out, he can still carry on haunting many of the others with guilt and doubt. By inflicting remorse through his suicide, Simon is exacting

"permanent suffering" on those involved (Orri et al., 2014, p. 6). This possibly reinforces the feeling of power that he can wield over those who have subjugated him one way or another. However, while justice has been served – Simon may have achieved a coveted sense of authority and power at the time of his death – this form of justice makes it hard for readers to sympathize with him. Simon, in this case, joins the rank of other characters who take revenge through their own "idiosyncratic notions of their own right," while the audience perceive their claims, methods, and motivation to be unseemly (Miller, 1998, p. 171). At the end of the day, Simon executes his plan with the purpose to dominate others, even unbeknownst to them, in order to extinguish the insecurity and shame that he experiences.

On the other hand, Jake is strongly caught up in the power he receives from partaking in this revenge plot. Unlike Simon, Jake does not use his life as a means to communicate his anger and resentment to those he deems guilty; rather, he maintains the scheme after Simon dies by publishing Simon's pre-written posts on Tumblr. While Jake's involvement is explained as Simon's ploy to keep him from revealing Simon's secret about rigging the junior prom votes that Jake accidentally finds out, this only accounts for the initial portion of it. After seeing how effective the plan is in rattling the lives of the targets, especially Addy, Jake becomes obsessed with the power that he feels he now has. As Janae confirms, Jake "'got really into the whole thing once Simon died. Total power trip watching you guys get hauled into the station, seeing the school scrambling and everybody freaking out about the Tumblr. He liked having that control'" (p. 326). The way that the messages affect people's opinions of the Bayview Four and confuse them about the case gives Jake a sense of control that, similar to Simon, he loses when he learns about Addy's affair.

Witnessing the effectiveness of the revenge endows him with even more confidence and, corresponding with what Böhm and Kaplan (2011) explain, shifts his view of himself into that of "an avenger," carrying with it a sense of righteousness and invincibility that intensifies Jake's obsession with this newfound power (p. 20). He even attempts to continue after Nate is arrested, reasoning that "That should've been Addy" and that they "need to turn it around" (p. 329), illustrating his enjoyment of the power to dictate the fates of these other characters. This sentiment is also extended to Janae. When Janae confronts him and demands they stop, he responds by saying, "Not your call, Janae. Don't forget what I have on hand. I can put everything on your doorstep and walk away." (p. 329). In his twisted perspective, much like Simon's, the revenge acts are attached with a purpose beyond a personal reason, which is why they are pursued tirelessly (Wiggins, 2018, p. 6). In the same scene, Jake also manifests his aggression, which has evidently increased, as he chases after Addy after realizing she has been listening to his and Janae's conversation, with a blatant attempt to hurt or kill her.

> Instead, he shoves me to the ground, kneels down, and slams my head on a rock. My skull explodes with pain and my vision goes red around the edges, then black. Something presses across my neck and I'm choking. I can't see anything, but I can hear. "You should be in jail instead of Nate, Addy," Jake snarls as I claw at his hands. "But this works too" (p. 331).

It is evident from his actions that once he has experienced the position of power that comes with taking revenge, Jake becomes addicted and no longer recognizes the line that determines when he should stop. He once again gets to feel the superiority that has been so typical for him before Addy's infidelity; consequently, it is not surprising that he holds on to it with such fanatical fervor.

Conclusion

One of Us Is Lying serves as a good example of a YA novel, which brings to the forefront the issues of peer rejection and how the fear of such rejection factors significantly in the psychological development of adolescents. Since during this period, the significance of peer relations and acceptance is undeniably high, it naturally becomes indispensable to teens' identity formation. Being ostracized by peers may therefore result in damaging effects to an adolescent's self-concepts. As mentioned, such threats to their self-image indeed lead two teen characters in the novel, Simon and Jake, to react aggressively and to take revenge against those who are perceived as culpable.

Their revenge is enacted through a complicated scheme to frame those perceived culprits. Apart from expressing their anger and sorrow to others, their plan also achieves a by-product of power obtained from being able to control the fates of their targets and the opinions of others. Nevertheless, since their revenge derives from the desire that is fundamentally unattainable, it eventually fails and the power they gain from it does not last. This novel points to a crucial angle of young adult representation in literature that their psychological well-being, especially their sense of self, is heavily tied to their interpersonal relationships with their peers, and failure to form healthy connections can lead to devastating results, both for them and for the others involved.

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