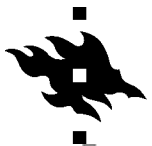


# Representations of Rape Culture in Boys Love Manga

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<p>Tarkastelen tutkielmassani tapaustutkimuksena raiskauskulttuurin representaatioita japanilaisen Boys Love (BL) -sarjakuvien kontekstissa kahden sarjakuvan kautta. Käsité BL on rajattu tutkielmassa koskemaan naisten kirjoittamia tyttö- ja naisyleisölle suunnattuja kaupallisia sarjakuvia, joissa mies- ja poikahahmojen väliset homoromanttiset ja -eroottiset suhteet sekä niiden tunnelataus ovat keskiössä. Sarjakuvien romanttisen tarinankerronnan osana esiintyy kuitenkin arkipäiväisenä esitettyä seksuaalista ja henkistä väkivaltaa juonta edistävinä tehokeinoina, kuten esimerkiksi tietynlaista maskuliinisuutta pönkittäviä toteamuksia vitseinä esitettynä. Analysoin tapaustutkimuksen kautta sitä, millaisilla kielellisillä keinoilla raiskauskulttuuri on edustettuna BL-sarjakuvissa päähenkilöiden välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa.</p> <p>Kirjallisuutena on pääasiassa englanninkielistä kirjallisuutta ja tutkimusartikkeleita sekä euroamerikkalaisista että itäaasialaisista lähteistä. Analyysissä primääriaineistona käytetyt kaksi sarjakuvaa ovat japaninkielisiä, joiden analyysissä käytetyt kohtaukset olen kääntänyt itse englanniksi.</p> <p>Analyysissäni pyrin havainnollistamaan, kuinka raiskauskulttuurin representaatiot ja niiden esittäminen osana romanttista tarinankerrontaa saattavat vahvistaa, normalisoida ja uudelleen tuottaa raiskauskulttuuria osana populäärikulttuuria BL:n kontekstissa. Tapaustutkimuksessa analysoin kriittisen diskurssianalyysin metodologisia raameja noudattaen kahta miljööltään erilaisista BL-sarjakuvista poimittuja otteita. Nämä otteet näyttävät esimerkkejä tilanteista, joissa raiskausmyyttejä käytetään tehokeinona romanttisiksi tai seksuaalisiksi koodattujen tilanteiden yhteydessä. Raiskauskulttuurin olemassaolo näyttäytyy esimerkeissä kielellisin keinoin ja hahmojen kehollisissa teoissa. Näitä keinoja ovat muun muassa uhrin syyllistäminen ja tarkoituksenmukainen harhauttaminen, mikä vaikeuttaa käsillä olevan tilanteen todellisen luonteen tulkitsemista. Nämä diskurssit merkitsevät sarjakuvissa artikuloitua seksuaalisuuden ja rakkauden väkivaltaisia piirteitä sisältäviksi.</p> <p>Analyysini havainnollistaa, että raiskauskulttuuri voi ilmetä monitasoisena ja arkipäiväisenä osana BL:n romanttista tarinankerrontaa. Suositusten narratiivien ja hahmotyyppien laaja kaupallinen tuotanto saavuttaa laajan yleisön. Näin ollen ehdotan, että ilmiön kriittistä tulkintaa diskursseissa on perusteltua korostaa, jotta raiskauskulttuurin tunnistamisen ja tietoisuuden kasvattamisen kautta rakkauden representaatioita populäärikulttuurissa olisi mahdollista muuttaa lempeämmiksi tulevaisuudessa.</p>			
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## 1. Introduction

Romance and romantic storytelling are introduced to children in fairy tales when they are young, and increasingly in different formats such as cartoons, comic books, tv shows, movies and music as they get older and slowly enter adulthood. These narratives socialise children into the world, its expectations, and its different realities, whilst establishing social norms through images of “happily ever afters” and gendered practices. (Buchwald 2005, Fletcher 2005) Among these fairy-tale like modalities of popular culture products (Buchwald 2005, Bertrand and Hughes 2005) is Japanese Boys Love fiction (also known as BL, or *bōizu rabu* in Japanese). BL and its many formats ranging from *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animation and cartoons) to drama-CDs are widely consumed in Japan as well as among non-Japanese fans overseas (Wood 2013, McLelland et al. 2015). Largely created by and for women and adolescent girls, these works of BL fiction depict same-sex romantic and sexual narratives in stories taking place between male characters. These characters are often portrayed as youthful, beautiful and cute regardless of their suggested age, and the relationships may take place between, for example, two schoolboys, two working adults (with or without an obvious age difference), or even between an adult and an underage boy (for example, Levi et al. 2010, McLelland et al. 2015, Welker 2015, Madill 2017). The narrative in these works often flows in a manner that is typical for BL: building up romantically portrayed tension through the main characters’ interactions, followed by releasing the said tension through the pair becoming a couple. The establishment of a relationship and the pair becoming a couple is used as the emotional (and sexual) climax of the story (Zanghellini 2009, Bauer 2013).

In BL, the portrayals of the relationships and interactions between male characters, and the more or less graphic depictions of sexual scenarios closely linked to them, are not always without distorted conceptions of love, romance, and sex, as previous research shows (Madill 2017). When analysed more closely, these conceptions may articulate elements of emotional and sexual abuse, harassment, and ignoring the lack of consent to sex. These elements are also present in a rape culture and in the rape myths sustaining it (for example, Brownmiller 1975, Buchwald et al. 2005, Phillips 2017, Yamawaki 2009). The term “rape culture” has become more used in popular discourse since 2013 (Phillips 2017: 2) to refer to social phenomena “encouraging male sexual aggression and violence against women”, and “a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent” (Buchwald et al. 2005: xi). The romance and relationship portrayals in BL are also not without such expressions and speech acts (Butler 1997), such as the repetitive use of rape myths and physical aggression, to advance sexual scenes, the overall plot, or the foreshadowed development of the romantic relationship. These expressions and depictions may eventually add to distorting conceptions of romance, normalising

sexual violence, and trivialising the importance of consent, which in turn leads to the reinforcement of rape culture as “serious allegories” (Buchwald 2005: 223) in the same context as fairy-tales passed on through generations (Fletcher 2005: 377). While keeping in mind that rape culture is most often aimed at and experienced by women as well as non-binary and transgender people (Buchwald et al. 2005), it is interesting how women producers of BL seem to recreate these elements of rape culture in their work, and how BL is so popular among young women readers (Zanghellini 2009). Thus, as a popular culture media, BL is a powerful platform with which to spread existing ideas, norms, and values to a wide global audience (Bertrand and Hughes 2005, Milestone and Meyer 2012).

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to show and elaborate on the representations of rape culture within examples analysed in two highly popular Japanese BL manga, Ogeretsu Tanaka’s *Escape Journey* (2015) and CTK’s *Midnight Rain* (2019), and to critically discuss how, as part of a romantic narrative and storytelling, these depictions may end up reinforcing rape culture. However, instead of drawing correlations between the cause and effect a real-life social phenomenon of rape culture may have on a fictional literary and artistic product, this thesis aims to raise awareness of the seemingly invisible rape culture for both the readers of this thesis as well as the creators and consumers of BL media modalities (Machin and Mayr 2012). By using a methodological framework centring on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the analysis of the two selected BL manga focuses on the underlying power structures of modern-day values and ideas in the context of BL, to give examples of the discourses articulating, supporting and enabling rape culture in popular culture media. Additionally, this thesis contemplates on the role of sexual consent – or the lack there of – in BL manga, and how it is easily either dismissed or used to build tension in the flow of narrative, resulting in the reproduction of rape myths supporting rape culture.

For this thesis, I chose a topic that resonates with my personal interests with Japanese popular culture products and experience from consuming these works as a reader myself. These personal connections may affect the research results and journey, as one cannot quite escape their position or the influence of their background. In the spirit of transparency, it should be noted that I have read BL manga for sixteen years since the age of twelve, which puts me in the consumer category of BL. As Finnish versions of these works were, and still are, scarce compared to the original Japanese and English translations, at the time I discovered BL for the first time, I turned to the English fan *scanlations* (scanned translations) (Lee 2009) I found online in large quantities. In 2005, LiveJournal’s *#yaoidaily* channel was a great source for quality content, and LiveJournal’s importance in the early days of internet as something that “accelerates dialogue and the development of new language, promoting new ways of thinking and writing about desire” has been noted by researchers as well (Surkan 2005: 404). As I got older, I also purchased the officially licenced English versions of my

favourites, as well as some in Japanese including the ones analysed in this thesis. As a Western reader, that cultural and linguistic background largely impacts the interpretations of the analysis presented in this thesis. It should be noted that even though the representations depicted in the BL works and the interpretation thereof may differ between different cultural positions, the transnational aspect of these works carries meaning and statements across cultural boundaries in communication with the reader. As a teenager, I never questioned the righteousness of the romance narratives in BL and it was in my adult life that I started to question and critically think about the romantic reality they provide. By being socialised into the reality of a girl or a woman, I, and most BL readers participating in the gendered practice of consumption (Milestone and Meyer 2012: 2), are interpreting the situations from our own gendered background on top of our linguistic, cultural, and locational positions.

In order to avoid a strong Western bias, this project aims to keep in mind the Japanese cultural context about love, gender and sexuality, while adopting the methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed in the “West” (for example, by Fairclough 2010, Machin and Mayr 2012, Machin 2014, Wodak 2001). This is done by introducing the context to the reader in the theory section and by further contemplation in the discussion section.

This research combines the field of study from East-Asian studies, Japanology, gender studies and media research. The modified Hepburn style is used in the Romanisation of Japanese words, with a macron indicating long vowels *o* and *u*, as well as vowels in foreign loanwords and slang words followed by the prolonged sound mark (ー). The destination marker へ (he) and the object marker を (wo) are Romanised as *e* and *o*, to also match Japanese pronunciation more closely. For that reason, は (ha) when used as the topic marker or as particles is Romanised as *wa*, too. To contemplate on transparency within the context of this thesis, the thesis uses texts to exemplify modern BL manga narratives and representations within, but as only two BL manga will be used as examples in the analysis section, the scope of this thesis sets limits on how well the results may be utilised in future BL research. The language used to write this thesis limits its accessibility to the English-speaking world. Hopefully, this thesis will serve as an example of one of the many ways CDA framework may be used to interpret texts with visual images.

## 1.1 Research questions and hypotheses

The research questions discussed and examined in this project are as follows:

1. What kind of hegemonic discourses reproduce rape culture in BL manga?
2. How are these representations romanticised and what is the role of consent in these romance narratives?

In this thesis, hegemonic discourses supporting rape culture are considered as per Brownmiller's (1975), Buchwald et al.'s (2005) and Phillips' (2017) theory, per which rape myths normalising violence and sexual abuse against women are considered to support the structures upholding rape culture. These hegemonic discourses can include various statements ranging from anywhere between a subtle "I can't wait" in the context of ignoring a partner's verbal plead to slow down (Escape Journey 2015: 122-123) to "because he suddenly made that face" in the context of justifying physical harassment of a partner (Midnight Rain 2019: 54), which can be found in the discourse found in BL manga as well, as will be demonstrated in the analysis section. Other examples found in popular culture include statements such as "it's her fault" (Brownmiller 1975: 345) or "she was asking for it" (Brownmiller 1975: 312), which are also indicators for victim blaming and rape myth acceptance (Yamawaki 2009). In a rape culture "rape is sex, rape is attraction, rape is the woman's fault – that is to say, rape does not exist" (Benedict 2005: 125). The definition of hegemony is considered to follow Laclau and Mouffe's definition (2001), who define it, and ideological dominance, to be formed through discourses fluently articulated by people in power. Discourses which may then attain hegemonic status and be enhanced through rearticulation within texts and discourses. (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: vii-xix)

The hypotheses for these research questions are, for one, that rape culture, including the notion of internalised normalisation of sexual violence, is present in the romantic narratives and scenarios through the performances, facial expressions (emotions) (Nikolajeva 2014), behaviour and discourses between the characters in BL manga. However, the degree to which rape culture content is reproduced varies among producers. Secondly, these representations are romanticised in certain patterns which help reinforce and reproduce rape myths as a norm when it comes to romantic relationships and interaction between two people. By presenting scenarios with rape culture elements as romantic and cute, as an ongoing effect these visual narratives end up reinforcing and sustaining the culture by the same means as in the real world (Milestone and Meyer 2012). And thirdly, by consuming these popular culture products, the consumers and producers of these products are, as active users and creators, absorbing, interpreting and reinforcing the culture as a norm by creating material containing elements and statements sustaining the normalisation of sexual violence. Through these research questions, this thesis aims to raise awareness of how (and if) BL reproduces rape culture by normalising violent elements as a part of romantic storytelling, and if by doing so, BL takes part in reproducing inequality on the side, for as long as we live in a rape culture that accommodates violent sexuality, we are not equal as "rape means terror" (Dworkin 2005: 20).

The key terminology, theories and previous research on BL and rape culture are introduced in the theoretical framework section. The CDA methodological framework and the primary sources will be looked at in the methodological framework section and adopted in the analysis section. The results

of the analysis will be reviewed in the discussion section and tied to the theoretical framework. Lastly, in the conclusions section, the thesis will be reviewed once more and ideas for future research will be explored.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This section examines the relevant terminology within the framework of this thesis. Furthermore, the theoretical framework, including previous research on BL, are introduced in this section, as are the limitations of the thesis. The focus of the research topic is on the discourses within texts in two BL manga examples, which is why the following has been noted relevant in the background, but not touched upon in this thesis. In this section, the theoretical framework consisting of rape culture and myths, linguistic injury (Butler 1997), and previous research on these in the Japanese context such as domestic violence and victimisation, and the effect of pornography in shaping collective sexuality (Ōbuchi 1985, 1991; Shibata 2008; Yamawaki 2009) will be shortly introduced, as well as tied to the context of BL. Within the theoretical framework of this thesis, is the idea that all discourses (as well as the ideas and ideals behind them) are constructed and, thus, enabling their fluidity and potential for change. Saying this would also suggest, that as discourses are open to change, they also have a potential to advocate said change, through powerful articulation (Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

The limitations include not using interview surveys or questionnaires to provide an in-depth understanding of the effects BL has on its readers and consumers, despite the importance these factors play in the overall discussion surrounding the dialogue between the effects of social reality and popular culture products. This thesis is further limited by it not delving into the roles of the BL industry, the Japanese manga industry, or the BL producers' points of view. On the other hand, the focus points of this thesis are the rape culture ideologies embedded in BL discourse and the effect of linguistic injury that takes form in the imagination of the reader. However, a second-hand example of BL readers' emotional responses is introduced in the previous research section, which gives this thesis an idea of how BL can be read, and the effect the contents may have on some people. In other words, as we cannot prove the results of the CDA analysis via interviews conducted first-hand for this thesis, the scope of the results will remain in the realm of philosophical thinking, whilst using the theoretical framework presented below to argue for the presence of rape culture elements in BL discourse.

The theoretical framework is comprised of books and articles from the viewpoints of Western (mostly Euro-American) scholars as well as Japanese, and East-Asian scholars, to give a broader idea of the subject of BL in an attempt to escape Eurocentricity to at least some extent in this thesis. The inclusion of Japanese research on rape culture is essential, as BL originates from Japan. Among previous research are issues revolving around BL, such as depictions of intimate partner or domestic



violence (McLelland et al. 2015; Pagliasotti et al. 2013, Levi et al. 2010), underage nudity, sexual harassment, fan cultures, and the censorship of queer readings (Wood 2013), subversive readings (Aoyama 2012) of misogyny and masculinities (Bauwens-Sugimoto 2011). However, due to the limited scope of this thesis, some of these notions are not explored beyond mentioning them here, as the focus is on rape culture, pornography, and linguistic injury.

## 2.1 Boys Love (BL)

Boys Love is a genre of fiction, where homoromantic and homoerotic romantic narratives are aimed at a mostly heterosexual audience of girls and women. This thesis defines Boys Love as a term that functions as a broader category for the Japanese genre but especially as a key term for commercialised works (Bauer 2013: 82) and works that present a happy ending. Terminology associated with BL among fans and producers alike include, for example, *yaoi* and *shōnen'ai*, and as their meanings in Japan and in the West have different nuances (McLelland et al. 2015: 5, Welker 2015: 42), for the sake of simplicity this thesis uses the term BL to cover commercially produced works, and BL *manga* to specify the type of works used in the analysis section. Some scholars use the form Boys' Love (Wood 2013, Chang and Lin 2015) when referring to the genre but curiously in the West, the apostrophe signifying possessive case in the words *boys' love* has been left out, solidifying BL to be known simply as Boys Love. By leaving out the possessive indicator, the term would indicate specifically the Japanese Boys Love genre, and not boys' love in general, and the solidified term signifies commercial works published in Japan and licensed translations overseas.

Despite BL's focus on romantic narratives taking place between male characters, the protagonists are rarely depicted as homosexuals for their sexual orientation (McLelland et al. 2015: 3, Suzuki 2015: 93). Since its contents are geared towards an audience of heterosexual women and girls, by women and girls alike, homosexuality is rendered mainly a shallow aesthetic, or a device for emphasising the main duo's unique feelings towards each other, as well as allowing the artists and readers an escape from gender norms placed on women by the society. This manner of approach suggests that the emotional dynamics of the main couple's interaction is more important in the world of BL than realistic representation of sexual minorities, and the portrayal of sexual minorities in BL has been criticised by readers and researchers alike (Zanghellini 2009). Another key feature in BL is that the stories often have a happy ending (Bauer 2013) which places the focus of the narrative on the emotional climax and the journey taken by the characters in these stories.

Other BL related terminology used in this thesis includes the *uke* (receiver) and *seme* (attacker) dichotomy, which appears as a rule in BL. According to this rule, the characters forming the main couple have traditionally been portrayed as passive and more feminine (*uke*) and aggressive and more masculine (*seme*), in both appearance and behaviour, which has enhanced heterosexual gender stereotypes within BL. (Bauer 2013: 82) However, as shown in the analysis section, the more contemporary BL works provide a fluid interpretation of the rule by, for example, portraying both characters with masculine bodies, speech patterns and behaviour, and by the *uke/seme* rule being enhanced by having the *uke* always on the receiving end of penetration.

### 2.1.1 Historical and contemporary context

The long history of illustrated male love, romances, and erotica, partially targeted at a female audience in Japan, can be witnessed in art forms tracing back to the *Heian* period, such as Murasaki Shikibu's renowned *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji). Traditional *Kabuki* theatre with its male actors performing women characters, *Edo* period *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints, especially erotica), and *chigo* stories picturing same-sex relations between Buddhist priests and their acolytes, offer examples of how art has been a playground for depictions of same-sex (male) relationships. (Levi et al. 2010: 1, McLelland et al. 2015: 6). Depictions of "love" between kabuki actors, and samurai, have been written by Ihara Saikaku in *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (1687) (McLelland et al. 2015: 6) and in the *Comrade Loves of the Samurai* (1687), with the latter portraying love between samurai and their younger male partner as passionate, with most of the short stories ending in tragedy (often in one of the men's suicide), however. This suggests a centuries old turbulence associated with the idea of love in arts and texts.

Japan was free of homophobia as we know it before Western influence surrounding gender and sexuality ideals was adopted in the 19th century Meiji period, due to which cultural productions featuring male love and erotica were censored or dropped. (McLelland et al. 2015: 7) The survival of some of the traditions can, however, be seen in the 1910's and the pre-war period girls' illustrated magazines which featured *bishōnen* characters (beautiful boys) and homoerotic novels, which serve as the roots of 'girls' aesthetics' (Anan 2016) and later take form in the BL phenomenon of the 1970's. By adding layers of gender-bending androgyny, these hints at male love in the portrayals of these beautiful boys, also influenced cult movies and the all-female *Takarazuka* theatre and their male role performances among a female audience. Mixed with the idea of cuteness, these aesthetic features of androgynous, youthful, soft-looking beauty are at the core of BL's origins, as well. (Levi et al. 2010: 2, Anan 2016: 1-2) Together with the historical social movements and events in Japan, such as the 1960's leftist, 1970's women's movements, the post-war relations between the US and Japan, girls' aesthetics

has evolved into a form of visual art that questions the hegemonic social structures of what girls and women may or may not enjoy or take part in. (Anan 2016: 1-2)

In the 1970s, a new generation of women manga artists took over the *shōjo* manga (manga aimed at girls) industry which was previously dominated by Japanese men (Zanghellini 2009: 162). The side effect of men running the aesthetics concerning manga content aimed at girls was that the depictions of these girl characters came largely influenced by the Japanese *male gaze* (Mulvey 1975: 11) which meant the girls in these manga were depicted as large-eyed, beautiful, passive, helpless, and in need of rescuing (Zanghellini 2009, Bauer 2013). This new generation was called the *24-nen gumi*, Fabulous Year 24 Group or the Fabulous Forty-Niners (Bauer 2013: 80), referencing their birth-year in the Showa calendar. The group introduced new elements to *shōjo* manga by adopting influences from both Japanese and overseas popular culture of the time, and these changes also included changes in narrative and character types. (McLelland et al. 2015: 9, Welker 2015: 42-43) On the contrary to the previously prevailing aesthetics distinctive to the *shōjo* manga industry of the 1950's and 1960's, the *24-nen gumi* added empowering elements through girls' aesthetics (Bauer 2013, Anan 2016). Among the new types of protagonists were portrayals of active and self-aware female characters in stark contrast to previous representations of vulnerable, passive girls. (McLelland et al. 2015: 9, Bauer 2013) The changes in narrative paved way for increasingly complex stories in which the new types of protagonists were thrown into competitive scenarios. Through competition between cute heroines and their beautiful rivals, "cuteness" and "beauty" were introduced as new signifiers of moral character. These changes in the meaning of appearance, depth of narrative, and the introduction of new character types took place in both *shōjo* and in manga targeted at male audiences, leading also to the increasing popularity of *shōjo* manga outside its target audience. (Zanghellini 2009: 163, McLelland et al. 2015) This pathway of development brought "cuteness" into the domain of BL, as the heroine and the meanings added to her appearance crossed over to the world of boys' manga and inhabited the bodies of male characters in BL defying "gender borders". (Zanghellini 2009: 163) With media representations of cuteness on the rise in the 1980's grew the imagery of young-looking, androgynous, cute and beautiful male characters, likewise in BL (Zanghellini 2009, Anan 2016).

Some among the *24-nen gumi* began to write romantic narratives with sexual features between male characters, and these works were met with great interest (Bauer 2013: 80-81, Madill 2017: 132). Amateur artists in fan groups (*sākuru*) took the approach of interpreting male-male relationships in mainstream manga with romantic sub-plots further by parodying, for example, *Captain Tsubasa* in the 1980's, in self-published works (*dōjinshi*) that were hugely popular in comic markets (*komiketto*). (McLelland 2000a: 276, Levi et al. 2010: 2, Thorn 2004: 170). These works came to be known in Japan as *yaoi*, which is a wordplay of *Yama nashi*, *Imi Nashi*, *Ochi Nashi* (No climax, no point,

no meaning), or *Yamete! Oshiri ga Itai!* (Stop! My ass hurts!), which highlights the humoristic approach of the time's BL scene (McLelland 2000a: 277, Zanghellini 2009: 160, Bauer 2013: 82, Madill 2017: 133). Fujimoto (2015) argues that *shōnen'ai* (boys love) works of the 1970's offered its readers and creators an escape from the men's world and its social realities, such as strict gender roles, expectations and suppression of both sex and sexuality. Yaoi, on the other hand, enabled a shift from passive consuming to active engagement in playing with their sexuality. (Fujimoto 2015: 80–81, McLelland et al. 2015: 5)

The “seme/uke rule” crossed over to BL from yaoi and emerged as a norm in commercialised works too. This rule entails that the characters in a relationship are depicted within a gendered hierarchy with fixed gender role stereotypes placing the uke at the receiving end of the seme's attacks and penetration – be they sexual, emotional, verbal, or physical. (Fujimoto 2015: 77, Bauer 2013: 82) A change in the commercial BL scene, which was brought on by the Japanese JUNE magazine, took place in the 1990's which meant that happy endings were now to be expected in BL, as opposed to the often tragic depictions of romance in yaoi and *shōnen'ai* (Suzuki 2015). It also interesting to note, that despite the romance between male characters, the characters reject homosexuality because it is argued (Ishida 2015) to be important to the assumed female readership for BL characters to show “exclusive attraction to each other” (McLelland et al. 2015: 15).

The contemporary context of BL should include a perspective from outside of Japan to pay attention to the popularity of BL in a transnational, cross-cultural context. In early 1990's China, Boys' Love came to be known as *danmei* (耽美), which means ‘indulging in or addicted to beauty’, and has since found a massive internet-based following as a major web-genre (Engebretsen et al. 2015: 133). One way to look at the seme's behaviour, and the overall seme trope, is to look at it from a Chinese perspective, as one that no longer is only a “display of power” but instead a “defiant gesture against social conventions” which allows him to “pursue his forbidden love of the uke”. (2015: 134-135) BL represents a range of “social concerns and a more vivid imagination” as the format offers “not only a queer narrative framework of male-male relationship, but a revolutionary ‘mental tool’ that helps women imagine alternative gender relations, explore new self-identities and consider strategies for re-inventing the big wide world outside the prison-house of patriarchal gender rules.” (2015: 135)

The themes in the Chinese BL have shifted from more feminine ones, such as love and passion, to masculine themes, such as war, sports and supernatural phenomena, breaking the idea that these themes belong “exclusively to the men's sphere.” Due to popularity in the mainstream audience, the themes have shifted to accommodate the audiences wishes: nowadays the popular themes include the seme and uke depicted as equals, unrestricted by gender, social roles associated with it or class. (2015: 135) This shift can be witnessed in *Escape Journey* (2015) and *Midnight Rain* (2019), where the

characters speak to each other as equals, and contemplate on the social restrictions of society placed on male couples, as elaborated on in the analysis section. Furthermore, as women's sexuality has long been tied up with reproduction and the family stemming from a Confucian Japan, representing women romantically involved with men as their equal partners, has been difficult (2015: 135, McLelland et al. 2015: 6-7).

Along those lines, Engebretsen et al. (2015) report one reader of BL describing their feelings as: "the images of male homosexuality are the only picture we have of men loving someone as an equal, it's the kind of love we want to have." (2015: 136) This comment shows how there is tiredness towards the representations of women as passive sex objects in contemporary pornography (Shibata 2008) as well as in traditional male-dominated manga industry (Bauer 2013: 80). In BL, however, the characters and plot showcase graphic portrayals of sexual objectification (Shibata 2008) through the female gaze (Mulvey 1975) on male bodies, the popularity of which shows the need for inter-subjective sexuality (Shibata 2008). Women audience can then as onlookers watch without feelings of shame or guilt as BL functions as a platform to explore their fantasies (Madill 2017, Zanghellini 2009).

### 2.1.2 Previous research on BL

BL and the popularity of Japanese homoromantic fantasy stories, largely among heterosexual girls and women, has been a curiosity to researchers, especially in the West and among Taiwanese scholars. Among the theories introduced by previous research on the topic, researchers have come to conclusions such as women being attracted to BL by being able to reverse the male gaze in BL reading and, thus, overcome various gender constraints in a world that pushes male dominated patriarchal views on women (Chan and Lin 2015: 382, McLelland 2000a, McLelland 2000b). In such a world, BL has offered an alternative platform for women and girls to experience pleasure through breaching gender norms advocated for by the heteronormative society. Violence in BL narratives and sexual scenarios have also been examined by researchers (McLelland 2015, Madill 2017) as have ideological myths in discourses prevalent in manga (Rawson 2001) and themes such as "transnational gender politics and performativity, feminist and queer readings, and fan community building" (for example; Pagliasotti et al. 2013: 1, McLelland et al. 2015). However, the inclusion of rape culture theory has not been solely focused on in previous research.

Previous research on BL covers different subjects ranging from the history of its foundation, to the sexual exploration of the fans of BL, both authors and readers, in a safe alternative setting as viewers (McLelland et al. 2015, Pagliasotti 2010, Madill 2017). BL may also offer a "voyeuristic element" (Thorn 2004: 177, Engebretsen et al. 2015: 135-136, Welker 2006: 844) that helps with building a feeling of safety because the female human body is spared the visual harm or danger possibly

threatening it, even indirectly, when sexually coded scenes take place between male characters. BL works provide a domain for women and girls to explore their fantasies while retaining their subjective agency as sexual beings (Zanghellini 2009: 173) which may empower BL users to take matters into their own hands in imagining sexual scenarios (Fujimoto 2015), and perform as active producers and consumers, artists, and readers. The effect of sociality is enhanced through community building online and at fan conventions, for example at the Japanese *komiketto*, and other smaller events (Bauer 2013), as well as on online websites. However, despite the absence of the female body being placed under sexual scrutiny in BL works, the underlying social conditioning of women remain in these works through the authors' subjective backgrounds and the readers' interpretations. For adult consumers of BL, the sexual contents and romantic narrative may perhaps be contemplated on one's personal lived experiences (Zhanghellini 2009). But what if the users are young adolescents or "as impressionable young readers" (Brownmiller 1975: 342) lack experiences that enable critical reflection over the consumed materials?

The emotional effect BL has on readers has become a popular topic among researchers in recent years. Chang and Lin (2015) have studied the effect of "healing" in a Taiwanese context regarding the feelings reading BL raises in BL consumers, inspired by BL's increasing popularity among girls in Taiwan. Through their study, "three types of 'healing' perceptions and four types of situations prompted the emergence of the feelings" were revealed based on their interview survey with twenty-two participants. (2015: 381) Among these perceptions concerning interpersonal relations were, for example, "the sweetness of romantic love and the coziness of family and friendship", "the joy and pain of looking back at one's past". (2015: 383) The healing perceptions caused by the narrative or the characters included "feelings of relief", "feelings of comfort and soothing", "feelings of completion and satisfaction", "feelings of hilarity", whereas "feeling of pampering love" was brought on by the "lovable story characters". (2015: 383) Thirdly, perceptions of healing caused by visual sensations were "infatuation in beautiful male figures" and "feeling of warmth triggered by pictorial performances". (2015: 383) These perceptions were reported to arise in situations where the textual characteristics matched with the reader's romantic experiences or expectations, where they matched the reader's life experiences, where "an atmosphere of tenderness and softness was included by the textual characteristics", and where it was possible to experience "extended and prolonged reading in the consumption of derivative works". (Chang and Lin 2015: 384) These results are noteworthy, as they give an idea of how BL may be experienced by the members of its audience – a notion that can be carried on to the analysis section as background context.

The thoughts raised by the previous research also raise a question: if in a space that is meant to be safe for women and girls and possibly arouse positive emotions in them, by using elements of

sexual assault, harassment, and ignoring of boundaries as a force to advance the plot (McLelland 2015, Madill 2017) rape culture elements still prevail, how will that affect the reader, and how do different cultural and linguistic positions affect the interpretation of the experience? Where there are readers for popular themes, there is a supply to satiate that demand, of course. The popularity then, of violent depictions of sexuality in love stories, is thought-provoking. Have we become so accustomed to such imagery, that our sexualities are tied to these violent depictions (Roth 2005: 365-366)?

### 2.1.3 The ideology of love and romance

West (2011) contemplates on how love and sex in the Japanese context is closely tied to law and marriage, with notions of romantic love fading in the background under legalities by drawing attention to how individuals in Japan may have confront individual acts framed in terms of larger societal settings. (West 2011: 7-8) The court judges' narratives rearticulate discourses around love and marriage that include notions that promote marriage as the norm and how the cumulative effects of sexual deviancy, for example, result in a social collapse if left unattended (West 2011). McLelland et al. (2015) also points out how these conservative commentators worry that the declining birth-rate is related to women's readings' contents and what is seen as "gender confusion" due to the decline of traditional gender roles, in which these commentators think BL plays a role in. (McLelland et al. 2015: 17)

The difference between the interpretations and definitions of love in English and Japanese is noteworthy to acknowledge. According to West (2011) the English definition concentrates on the feeling of being loved and the Japanese focuses on the feelings of wanting and sadness (2011: 30). Here, the Japanese interpretation of love is described as "when in love, in a daze", and how a partner's tendency to become jealous is considered to correspond with the quality and quantity of love (2011: 30). West also argues, that the gender division in Japan is at the core of the definition of love in the Japanese context, as "the gap in male and female perceptions of love correlates with both a separation of the sexes and strictly defined gender roles in Japan" (2011: 30). These gaps between the sexes (not including non-binary people) are also present in economic power and looks (2011: 70), with their difference in value taking place between male and female beauty (2011: 72).

Additionally, according to McLelland et al. (2015), in reference to the changing nature of love itself, that the English word "love" and the Western idea of "romantic love" lacked a Japanese native term with similar meanings and interpretations before the mid-Meiji period, after which the word *ren'ai* was picked to signify romantic love in Japanese. Due to previously influential ideas about Confucian morality which deemed women inferior and unfit to be admired, the notions of equality between male and female lovers found in Western literature had also been strange to the intellectuals

of the time. However, with the emergence of the word *ren'ai*, which combines the meanings of physical love (*koi* or *ren*) and a wide range of feelings similar to the English word “love” (*ai*), the concept of love was widely popularized by way of women’s literature and magazines, eventually making their way into BL. (McLelland et al. 2015: 6-7)

## 2.2 Rape culture

To understand rape culture in the context of Japan and BL manga, exploring the definitions of the term and the interpretations this thesis uses to navigate rape culture’s meaning and effect is necessary. Buchwald et al. (2005) define the concept of rape culture as an intricate system “of beliefs that encourages male violence against women” and “a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent”. Living in a rape culture, “women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself”. These notions are upheld and presented as the rule, and both physical and emotional assault are affirmed by the society and the people (of all genders and sexualities) (2005: xi) resulting in victim blaming, which can be measured in *rape myth acceptance* (RMA) and *belief in a just world* (BJW) (Yamawaki 2009). However, since violent sexuality (Shibata 2008) is not an irreversible fact, as is the common belief in a rape culture and in the thought patterns of people, the attitudes and values upholding sexual violence as a norm can change. (2005: xi)

Rape culture can be a pervasive reality in any society, and as such it entwines fundamental “issues of power, sexuality and gender relationships” around sexual violence (Buchwald et al. 2005: xi, Yamawaki 2009: 163). Both Western and Japanese rape culture and myth researchers have come to the conclusion that most of all reported rapes are committed by someone familiar or in a close relationship with the survivor (2005: 8, Yamawaki 2009: 165), which points to the extent of rape culture in people’s everyday lives (2005: xi). Representations embodying elements of rape culture have been presented in countless medias throughout time, ranging from literature and art to films and popular culture media (Brownmiller 1975, Phillips 2017). These representations can, however, appear invisible since they are so commonly accepted as normal. Therefore, it is crucial to learn language to learn how to recognise rape culture representations hiding within depictions of romance and love (Benedict 2005), and the ways these discourses are reinforced and represented through articulation. In BL, the imagery and discourses surrounding sexual violence, that also get minimised, are performed by “someone close to the survivor” (2005: xi), which is a repeated pattern of how rape culture performs in reality as well (Buchwald et al. 2005, Phillips 2017). Since BL’s creators and consumers are not passive to societal movements, nor to the media of their consuming or producing (Wodak and Meyer 2001), changing the predominant elements in BL may be possible.



The term *male gaze* was first introduced by Laura Mulvey's (1975) film theory, which emphasises male agency by regarding men as active spectators while at the same time regarding women as things to be looked at, rendering them into sexual objects to gaze upon. (Mulvey 1975: 11) The dominant discourses that rearticulate male agency are maintained disproportionately in media by presenting the dichotomy of "active/male and passive/female" as a social norm (1975: 11) – which can be seen in the seme/uke rule as well. Common discourses supporting rape culture are myths that enable victim blaming when widely accepted (Yamawaki 2009). These myths include notions of how women's ways of dressing or other behaviours deemed suggestive by the male gaze is the cause for rape, hence indicating the responsibility being placed on the survivor (Brownmiller 1975). It is crucial to remember that the nature of rape is an act of violence and a use of power against another person, an act against the victim's boundaries and bodily integrity (Dworkin 2005, Benedict 2005). Men who rape do not view women, or the people they rape, as people but instead as property, as something of theirs to taint (Shibata 2008, Dworkin 2005), a possession. The men who rape view themselves as superior, entitled to a woman's, or a person's body, which renders the body an object that does not belong to her. These patterns of thinking and behaving create a circle of culture, discourses that enforce myths as commonly accepted truths, such as the one about wearing certain types of clothes warrants sexual attention and justifies rape by placing the blame on the victim instead of the assailant. In the context of BL, the romantic narrative often uses mixes up love and possession, and familiar fear as excitement and fun, by featuring these myths and offering them to the reader as portrayals of love in a relationship.

Another important aspect when inspecting rape culture is to pay attention to how "the causes of sexual violence are cultural, that they are interrelated" (Buchwald et al. 2005: xv), that is to say, the causes are not natural despite society's attempts to factualise the naturality of violent sexuality, as we can see in how men are given a pass by societies when it comes to rape since "men's violence is seen as predictable behaviour in a women-hating culture" (Dines 2005: 107). These passes include rape myths (Brownmiller 1975) naturalising men's sexual urges, them giving in to those urges despite a lack of consent, and the inability to refrain from inflicting sexual violence onto others as "natural", which is visible in the "tradition of treating rape as a joke" (Benedict 2005: 125). Furthermore, "every man, woman, and child is negatively affected by living in a rape culture, in which children, females, and some males are perceived as sexual prey" (Buchwald et al. 2005: xvii). The odds of being perceived as sexual or other sort of prey increase even further if a person belongs to multiple social categories, that differentiate them from hegemonic white supremacy and heterosexual patriarchal norms. These social categories may include but are not limited to race, gender non-

conforming people, expressing gender outside the male-female binary and disabled people (Buchwald et al. 2005).

I have personal experience of Japan's rape culture in the form of notices put up and enforced by institutions: the police and the university. The first one is a sign (Figure 1) I saw behind Kyoto's Kiyomizudera temple, stating that women should not walk alone in the dark, enforced by the Kyoto police. The second experience I had occurred at my exchange university, the University of Hokkaido's (Hokudai) North Library, in 2016-17. The library had posted notices (Figure 2) about sexual harassment on every desk, study spot and on the walls of almost every room in the library. The notices called attention to sexual harassment, taking place on especially female students taking a nap at their desk. Instead of focusing on the assailants, these two types of notices, enforced by local and institutional authorities, focused entirely on the responsibility of the potential victim in both of these potentially dangerous situations. I bring up these personal experiences to highlight how commonly accepted the idea about the victim's responsibility in an act of violence against them is, and enforced by institutions that should be the ones to provide safety in the community and society. Instead they wash their hands of the issue and problems behind these acts of violence. Is it then no wonder that these widely accepted ideas as norms make their way into BL manga and other popular culture products as well?

### 2.2.1 Rape culture in Japan

Rape culture has been researched by Japanese scholars in addition to the prevailing Western theories on the subject. Studies on rape myths, or *reipu shinwa* (レイプ神話) (Ōbuchi 1985, Tamura 1998), have been conducted since the 1980's, for example, in the context of pornography (Tamura 1998, Ōbuchi 1991, Shibata 2008) and contemporary Japanese cinema (Cheng 2016) within research fields of law, arts and literature, media, and psychology. These studies all seem to agree on the idea that "sexual aggression is a socio-cultural issue which has much bearing on male dominant value system" (Ōbuchi 1991: 119). The nature of these studies may point towards a culture of shame and silencing around rape and romanticisation of domestic violence, which is upheld by discourses and articulation of gender-role stereotypes by different media modalities, such as pornographic material. Among one of the most recent studies, emphasis is placed on the importance of informed consent and the prevalence of sexual harassment in society (Eguchi 2016). Previous research on the subject within a Japanese context indicates that rape culture is recognised as a social phenomenon in Japan too. Interestingly, the Me-Too movement did not take off in Japan the same way it did in Western countries, which may also point towards a culture of silence and victim blaming.

The acceptance of rape myths has been studied by Yamawaki Niwako (2009), who brings to attention how “almost every society in the world has social institutions that legitimize, veil, and reject the existence of gendered abuse.” For one of the most pervasive social injustices in the world, rape culture and violence against women remains among the least recognised human rights issues. This is the case in Japan as well. (Yamawaki 2009: 163) In addition to rape being an extremely traumatic event to the survivor, Yamawaki notes that “rape victims suffer not only from the actual assault, but also from the negative reactions of people around them, a phenomenon called secondary victimization.” (2009: 163) Victim blaming is supported by rape myth acceptance (RMA) as well as belief in a just world (BJW), which according to Yamawaki was found a common attitude in sex offenders in studies conducted in Japan and in the “West”. The stronger the belief in a just world, the more negative was the attitude towards people facing hardships and the acceptance of “rape” occurring (2009: 165). Together with the belief may be a strong desire and male entitlement to define and control what is just (Crowley 2005: 305). Furthermore, Shibata (2008) points out that pornography has a huge role in enabling rape myth acceptance in viewers, especially in those with sex offender backgrounds, encouraging these perpetrators to re-enact the content they have consumed (2008: 18), which will be discussed further in the next section. Yamawaki suggests that rape myths may be widely accepted in Japan because the acceptance of rape myths is connected to gender-role stereotypes enforced by society and culture, and the more rigid and traditional these stereotypes are held by individuals, the more widely accepted victim blaming and these myths become. (2009: 165)

Among the topics researched in terms of victim blaming, are ones on intimate partner violence (IPV) (Buchwald et al. 2005: 8, Yoshihama and Horrocks 2010, Hall 2012, Kamimura et al. 2014). Among these studies, Hall (2012) describes domestic violence in the Japanese context as a phenomenon endured by Japanese women and inflicted upon them by their male partners, and as a means of control in the relationships over the other. According to Hall, the problem of domestic violence appears in the society as non-existent, a myth disadvantaging the victims (or survivors), which self-contradictingly is supported by both discourse and tradition. (2012: 280, Yamawaki 2009: 165) As a response to publicly acknowledged cases of domestic violence, Japan has enacted laws condemning such violence and protecting the victims in 2001 (Hall 2012: 280-281) but not before, which tells about the inclination towards not acknowledging the problem. Hall also draws attention to a call for domestic violence to “be removed from the cultural context of shame and acknowledged in public discourse” in Japan. Together with the associated culture of shame and the perpetrators public demeanour, taking form as high status or pleasant personality, the acts of domestic violence in the private sphere may go unnoticed and disregarded by others. (2012: 281)

Hall (2012) also points out the deliberate nature of domestic violence which sets it apart from accidents (2012: 281) and are not only the result of stress or drinking but that of reaching a certain level of control. Together with the problem of secondary victimisation (Yamawaki 2009: 163), downplaying domestic violence in these cases could make the effects of victimisation worse because the survivors may strongly believe that their partners would refrain from violence if they were not intoxicated or that their partners are inherently good and wouldn't be violent if not for the stress or the drink. These trains of thought suggest the presence of beliefs in a just world (Yamawaki 2009) and internalised secondary victimisation, which may lead to the romanticisation of domestic violence if the survivor blames, for example, the partners substance abuse instead of their acts of abuse. It may then be dangerous and harmful to separate violent behaviour from intentions within the context of domestic violence too, as it may increase secondary victimisation or increase IPV survivors' habit of excusing the violent behaviour of their partners. Furthermore, as the abuser always chooses to be abusive, elements of power and control may indeed take place in acts of domestic violence. (Yamawaki 2009, Hall 2012: 280) Yamawaki's study also found that intimate partner violence (IPV) was less likely to be likened to rape by both the abuser and the victim, whereas rape by a stranger is more likely to be accepted as such (2009: 166).

Hei-Lei Cheng (2016) argues that "cinematic representation of rape and rape recovery may help break the relative silence around rape in Japan" (2016: 78). Since rape myths and their acceptance is supported by victim blaming according to which the survivor/victim is blamed for their rape experience, visual representation of such events may lead to an increase in public discussion on the subject. In the context of BL, despite the sexual scenes and romance narrative taking place between male characters, it is important to keep in mind that the authors and the audience are more often than not women (Zanghellini 2009, McLelland et al. 2015). This means that the women's point of view, or female gaze, is very much present in the scenes taking place between male characters, thus enabling a deeper level of reflection while consuming, assessing, or analysing the works' contents. As Cheng (2016) argues, people as viewers pick up ideas and ideals from stories as well as spread their own into the world through these stories (2016: 78), and it is this exchange of ideas, learned and conditioned behaviour, discourse supporting various social problems and phenomena that are also present in popular culture products (Bertrand and Hughes 2005, Milestone and Meyer 2012) such as BL. Thus, we cannot ignore the social rules and realities the women authors and viewers bring to the table from their own learned experiences, which are bound to be a part of both their creating and viewing practices.

The problem of victimisation when it comes to rape culture is present in how rape is discussed in research, in the media and among everyday occurrences, for example in jokes and people

discussing news regarding sexual offence crimes (Brownmiller 1975). When referring to people who have experienced rape, the word “victim” is often the first, if not the only, word used to describe the viewpoint of the survivor (Itō, BBC Two 2019). While it is clear that the victims are indeed victims, speaking about their experiences in only a victimised context, however, takes away their agency and reduces their experiences into something that may end up defining the person as a whole (Yamawaki 2009), and the label “rape victim” may become a social stigma in places where the silence on rape is yet unbroken, such as in Japan. To avert this and to give back their agency, this thesis refers to victims as survivors, because that is what they have done - survived - and will do in learning to live with their trauma. The rape scenes depicted in BL, and scenes containing elements of harassment and abuse, are male perpetrated on male survivors. However, keeping in mind the authors, viewers and the intended sexual fantasy aspect (for example, Welker 2006 & 2015, Zanghellini 2009) of BL, this thesis considers the women producers and consumers of the works to actively take part in the representations of rape and rape culture, and the ideas and ideals they bring and take from these representations and stories (Cheng 2016).

### 2.2.2 Pornography

Although BL is not perhaps considered to fall directly under the category of pornography, some features are, however, interrelated. Tomo Shibata (2008) draws attention to the crucial differences between “sexual objectification” and what the author calls “inter-subjective modality of sexuality” (2018: 2). According to Shibata, sexual objectification of girls and women is a massively manufactured socio-psychic phenomenon which is supported by media outlets and pornography. This industry subjugates women and girls into sexually materialized objects to serve as means for sexual gratification, without emphasis on her as a human subject with her own needs and dignity. In these media, women and girls are “represented, perceived, assumed and treated” as such objects. As opposed to this modality of sexuality, Shibata writes about “inter-subjective modality of sexuality”, per which a person is treated as a sexual subject possessing their own sexual will and dignity, instead of an object. (2008: 2-3) In BL, assumed gender roles within this industry are in one way reversed, as women in turn objectify the male body. However, on another hand, sexual objectification of women and girls crosses over to the domain of BL through the gaze of the viewer (Welker 2006: 844), who may relate to the events and discourses reinforcing sexual objectification and additionally rape culture itself.

The sexual objectification of women and girls, in the production and consumption of pornographic material, the legislation enabling the industry, as well as the language associated with objectification, plays a massive role in the realisation of a rape culture with the whole pornographic

industry as “a major propaganda system that legitimises men’s power over women” (Dines 2005: 114). For example, the word “victim”, which is often used in describing the person who has experienced sexual assault, takes away the agency of the subject, the woman or girl, and puts emphasis on their helplessness instead of on their agency in the situation. Itō Shiori points out, that the word rape tends to be replaced with words such as “tricked” or “violated” in Japan and Japanese press (Itō, BBC Two 2019). The words put more emphasis on the deed itself and on the receiver of the act than it does on the perpetrator. This further underlines the ideology that rape, sexual violence, and domestic violence “happens” onto the “victim”, instead of the emphasis being on the person committing the assault. The narrowing down of vocabulary associated with rape, pornography, and sexual objectification “linguistically constructs the vulnerability or victim-status of the all-sweeping category of ‘women’” (2008: 14), which focuses on the passivity of the “victim” and further enhances the idea of sexual objectification placed on women and girls. Furthermore, article 175 of the Japanese criminal legislation “centers on the prohibition of the exposure of genitals (especially male genitals) openly in public (including cyber space)”, which means that as long as the genitals are not visible, the production of pornographic material encouraging sexual violence and rape is allowed and legalised on an institutional level whilst ignoring the people the production of such material harms the most. (Shibata 2008: 15-18)

In the context of BL, one might perceive the uke as the one replacing the female or non-male body, which then may allow the audience comprised of women and girls to experience familiarity within the sexual situations and romance narratives depicted in BL. This possible identification would occur from a safe distance, as the uke’s body is a male human’s, and not necessarily the reader’s, a non-male body. This method of relating to a story and its characters would allow the authors and viewers to exercise their *female/girl gaze* (Mulvey 1975) and take part in the sexual objectification of male bodies. However, as a big part of BL is also on creating emotion and exploring feelings together with the characters’ journey into their sexual and emotional climax, there are elements of inter-subjective sexuality in BL, as well since the characters are portrayed as humans exercising their agency, sexuality, and needs. These narratives displayed through BL characters are, of course, created to be consumed, constructed, and scripted to convey a desired narratorial effect, and cannot be compared to real life people. However, it is important to note how representation matters, and how by depicting human emotions and mistakes in the process enables inter-subjectivity to take place concurrently with possible elements of sexual objectification.

Sexually objectifying media can “consist of the stimuli of nudes and persons engaging in sexual acts (both violent and consensual)”, and according to the research conducted on pornography’s role in sexual violence crimes, “the exposure to pornographic material puts one at a risk for...

committing sexual offenses... and accepting the rape myth” (Shibata 2008: 4). The term “forced obscenity” (*kyōsei waisetsu zai* 強制わいせつ罪), describes a crime which is comprised of unsolicited sexual touching and bodily fondling excluding rape against women/girls. Included in the crime’s description are, for example, “the act of touching the genital areas of a person against their will, the act of touching a girl’s or a woman’s breast against her will, the act of fondling a person’s buttocks against their will, the act of kissing a person against their will, and the act of having intercourse with a man against his will.” (Shibata 2008: 5) Interestingly, the “act of having intercourse with a man against his will” is not in these terms considered rape. Shibata also notes, that “the signifier ‘forced obscenity’ implies that the law on sex crimes revolves around discipline, order and male self-uprightness, but not around equity, equality, and the protection of the human rights of the victim, who is often a girl or a woman.” (Shibata 2008: 5-6)

The *chikan* (molestation) theme is very common in sexually objectifying videos and pornography but it is also a common theme in BL as well. The term includes a similar definition to that of *kyōsei waisetsu* (forced obscenity), which labels *chikan* as sexual assaults other than rape. BL often portrays these events, that could be labelled as *chikan*, as funny or as a step towards the inevitable romance blooming between the main characters. However, if done by a third-party character, the same events would be considered *chikan* by the characters and readers themselves. Which brings the acceptability of sexual assault and harassment in familiar relationships into question. One example of a rape myth found in Shibata’s research was that perpetrators strongly believed in the following: “many women have an unconscious wish to be raped, and may then set up a situation in which they are likely to be attacked,” after viewing *chikan* themed pornography (Shibata 2008: 7). The blame and responsibility in these statements are placed on the potential victim instead of on the perpetrator. The myth also offers justification for the rape in the eyes of the perpetrator. In BL, many *seme*s justify their behaviour in terms of them not being able to hold back on their desire or the *uke* having made the situation unbearable for the *seme* by looking too sexy (CTK, Midnight Rain 2019: 54).

Shibata raises an important point: “Sexually objectifying media effectively manufactures the structural production of the viewers’ sexual arousal through the representation of girls and women as the enticing flesh devoid of the human dignity therein.” (Shibata 2008: 9) The sexual objectification of women and girls is not only done by viewing them as objects, through the perception of the heterosexual male gaze (Mulvey 1975) and desire. The exploitation and domination of female bodies is additionally achieved by using language (Butler 1997, Shibata 2008). This can be seen, for example, in the formation of the word *kinshinsōkan* (近親相姦 incest) where *sō* (相) implies “mutual desire”, and the word itself “is used for the rape of a girl committed by her father” (Shibata 2008: 9). In this

example, the rape myth about girls or women desiring to be raped exists within the term itself, on a linguistic level, and the mental image of the myth is further enhanced by using pictograms. Brownmiller (1975) and Benedict (2005) also refer to the everyday jokes and conversations as means to strengthen rape culture through rearticulating rape myths. This language revolves around sexual objectification and addresses sexuality in an often “banal, private and joking manner” (Shibata 2008: 9) and overlooks Japanese women’s sexuality. Shibata adds that it is indeed sexual objectification around which “the desire for sexual intrusion” (2008: 9, 14, 18-19), and its effect, the linguistic and visual articulation revolves.

Regarding the modality of inter-subjective sexuality, Shibata (2008) argues that such a modality cannot sustain without the grounding of “fundamental equality between the partners”, and that, through sexual objectification, sex inequality comes into being (2008: 10). Shibata is not alone with these thoughts: Dworkin (2005) also states that we cannot live as equals as long as rape exists, that equality itself “is not true” (2005: 21). In a global context where “objectification-oriented sexuality”, as a part of rape culture, is seen as the norm, media that objectifies bodies and people is not exclusively pornography. Other forms of media, such as BL or any contemporary tv-show features sexual objectification of bodies which takes form in a certain type of stylising or, for example, the way a body is displayed on page or screen. In BL, the objectification is done onto male bodies but through the female gaze, almost as if the objectification the reader/author may have experienced is reproduced in this manner – but from a safe distance, through bodily disconnect.

Sexual compulsion on one hand “does not necessarily involve the will to destroy the other”, but it is “objectification that may interact with the will to destroy the other” (Shibata 2008: 11). This means that “the danger lies in “the blindness to the other’s will, human dignity, subjectivity and emotions even when the objectifier has indeed no will to harm the other.” (2008: 11) The danger lies especially in the people’s attitudes when using the absence of the intent to destroy or harm the other as an excuse to do just so. In other words, behaviour that overlooks the effects of actions when faced with an apology, reinforces the importance of intentions over the effects, which may encourage people to act impulsively. (Shibata 2008: 12) “Sexual compulsion” signifies the event where a person’s “sexual arousal comes into being only through the sexual objectification of another human being”, “a psychic phenomenon where one’s subjectivity is tempo-spatially deprived” when this happens (2008: 12). Sexual objectification is pervasive in society and “permeates the whole fabric of our existence” (2008: 12), especially when observed in heterosexual terms and male desire (2008: 7). In BL, sexual compulsion takes form in, for example, in the Japanese phrase *gaman dekinai* (inability to control oneself or one’s urges). This phrase often comes across as a rape myth that implies it is acceptable for one to coerce their partner into having sex, because they cannot control themselves. Here the sexual



compulsion is the driving force and thus becomes an excuse to ignore the other's subjectivity, dignity, sexuality and will. Such behaviour is depicted as a normal part of storytelling in BL, and as a means to establish or maintain sexual relations between the two characters. The readers may get the idea that it would be acceptable and normal for them to be treated in such a way but if they were exposed to examples of inter-subjective sexuality, that might not be the case.

### 2.2.3 The case of Itō Shiori

The journalist and documentary filmmaker, Itō Shiori (伊藤詩織), has made way for a landmark case in the struggle against rape in Japan. Itō has become the symbol of Japan's Me Too (#metoo) movement in recent years, after receiving media attention in the news across the world in 2017 with her experiences on sexual assault, by filing a rape lawsuit against Yamaguchi Noriyuki (山口敬之), a former Washington bureau chief for TBS network and a close friend of the former prime minister Abe Shinzō (安倍晋三) (O'dwyer, The Japan Times 1/2020). In addition, Itō works as a journalist for the movement and has published a book, *Black Box*, in 2015 about her experiences, which has as of September 2020 been translated into Korean, Chinese, French and Swedish (shioriito.com). The BBC documentary, *Japan's Secret Shame*, about her case has also received much attention worldwide (Ito 2019, BBC Two). Taking action against her assailant and filing a civil suit when the police failed to arrest Yamaguchi, as well as her refusal to back down in the face of criticism, has prompted a shift in how rape is viewed in Japan (Huffington Post Japan 4/2020). The claimant, Itō, finally won the lawsuit against Yamaguchi in December 2019, making it the landmark case surrounding rape legislation. According to a survey taken in 2017 (The Japan Times 1/2020), only 4% of women in Japan come forward. Japan's rape law was revised the same year (2017), and the law now states that the minimum prison requirement is five years, and it also broadened the definition of sexual assault victims, supposedly making the distinction clearer and encouraging more survivors to come forward. However, despite these revisions, it is still required for the claimant to prove the use of violence or "the incapability of resistance", which places a lot of the responsibility and psychological burden on the victim of the crime, instead of on the assailant.

In recent developments (The Japan Times 8/2020), Ito has sued the lawmaker Sugita Mio for liking tweets in defamation of Itō, which is a form of harassment (Stein 2005: 65). Sugita, a member of the leading Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has stated in 2018 that the government should not support couples who belong to sexual minorities, as they are not productive members of the society without the ability to bear children. Liking tweets defaming Ito over the rape case against Yamaguchi can be likened to group bullying, especially because of Sugita's outstanding status in society. On top of suing

Sugita, Itō also sues both Osawa Shōhei, a Tokyo University professor, for defamatory likes and comments on twitter, and Hasumi Toshiko, a cartoonist (The Japan Times 6/2020) responsible for defamatory cartoons about Itō.

These lawsuits and the defamatory nature of comments made by men in positions of power in Japanese society, highlight the taboo of speaking up against sexual violence in Japan, an issue also regarding invisibility highlighted also by Itō herself (Huffington Post Japan 4/2020):

*“Rape victims are often hidden and the word “rape” is replaced with euphemisms like “tricked” (when the victim is minor) or “violated” when a case makes it into the news. Rape is invisible in Japanese society. This is probably the reason why just 1 person was on duty in Tokyo’s only 24 hours rape crisis center (serving a population of 13 million) when I called for help in 2015.”* Itō Shiori (BBC Two, 2019).

In both law and general attitudes, victim-blaming (West 2011, Hall 2012, Shibata 2008) and seeing the victim as the primary person responsible for the crime taking place in the first place, is visible in Itō’s case. This practice is an example of how living in a rape culture affects norms and ideas on what is commonly acceptable and how a society can treat victims and survivors of violence – a practice articulated and upheld by both the society and the judicial system. Itō Shiori’s case focuses attention on the necessity to have conversations and public discussions about rape so that there may be change for the better in the future, such as an equal world without rape. The steps towards such a world have been taken by Japanese influencers on Twitter and Instagram, for example in the form of Instagram accounts operated by @lei\_ya, @hanasou.jp and @ko\_archives, paving way for a new generation of activists in Japan.

## 2.3 Linguistic injury

Judith Butler (1997) coins the term *linguistic injury* to refer to language usage in the form of force and power. In this setting, language may also be used as a disciplinary means if someone’s verbal or physical behaviour falls outside the preferred norm or response. The focus of linguistic injury is more on the effect than the intent behind the inflicted linguistic wound. However, the intent is also discussed by Butler to be of importance since the perpetrator then has both the means and motivation to dominate the recipient into submission with the tone or method supporting the wounding words in focus. Words and statements are thus used as active punishment. (Butler 1997: 2-3)

In BL, inflicting linguistic wounds is often indicated by emasculating, demeaning or otherwise humiliating language. Here, the injury is inflicted onto the body of one of the male characters by the partner or other surrounding characters, and second-handly onto the reader. The effect and the intent of the linguistic injury can then be seen on the facial expressions depicted on the participating

characters, as well as in the bodily gestures and visible sound effects drawn next these depictions. Butler (1997) argues that the effect of the linguistic injury can be experienced similarly to an actual physical injury, since the force behind the speech act is always directed at the body, which may be confusing to both participants and onlookers of a given situation (1997: 39). These inflictions may promote and reinforce toxic gender statements and ideologies deemed socially correct surrounding masculinity and femininity, as well as ideologies of love and sexuality, because the act of injuring may be used as punishment for atypical ideas or reinforce hegemonic ideology. This, then leads to the articulation (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) of a dominant discourse which is manoeuvred by the statements within the linguistic, which could also sustain rape culture through the representation of rape myths in discourse. Furthermore, the method of inflicting linguistic injury is often pictured as a repetitive behavioural pattern taken by the more dominant or active character, the seme, to coerce the character portrayed as more passive, the uke, into behaving along lines that please the dominant one. Instead of inflicting physical injuries, the assaulter exerts power over the other's body and mind by choosing to inflict invisible wounds. These invisible wounds may take form in the effects of speech acts or visual behaviours of sexual harassment and emotional abuse.

The appliance of theories predominating in the "West" into a Japanese cultural context raises important questions, such as: will this thesis be rendered to a case study conducted through a Eurocentric lens? We can, however, see examples of the cross-cultural pervasiveness ideologies and discourses surrounding rape culture by adopting the studies and theories discussed in this section into the theoretical framework of this thesis. The framework provides us with important language to discuss the phenomena analysed in the manga excerpts, in the context of BL and Japanese popular culture, which have been influenced by both Japanese and non-Japanese components.

### 3. Methodological framework

In this chapter, the methodological framework used in the qualitative case study analysis of *Escape Journey* (2015) and *Midnight Rain* (2019), are defined, and discussed in more detail.

#### 3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

As inspired by Angela Rawson's dissertation (2001), this thesis too focuses on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodological framework in analysing the effect language has on the articulation of certain beliefs in the context of popular culture. As per Rawson (2001), this thesis considers language as a tool used in manga to reinforce social stereotypes that in turn support male-dominated social hegemony, as BL manga and its language is aimed at a specific audiences including adolescent girls,

young women and older women, with embedded messages articulating social functions and norms. Language analysis and the interpretation of text under the framework of CDA supports the hypothesis (Rawson 2001: 1) that the ideology of rape culture and rape myths are present in BL manga which may have become normalised notions in its audience. Seemingly harmless and invigorating stories brought forward by BL also send implied messages to the readers about sexuality, sexual conduct, and romance, all of them framed to arouse positive emotions (Roth 2005, Chang and Lin 2005), whilst maintaining the same heterosexual social norms women as subjected to in everyday social life regarding sexuality and relationships. “Women’s [comics] focus on idealized romantic love” (Rawson 2001: 2), is among the ideas analysed through a rape culture lens to exemplify the presence of rape supportive myths and ideology in the texts and visuals.

In this thesis, the CDA framework is used to focus on issues of power and gender present in discourses. The analysed texts are cultural products in the form of Japanese BL manga “in the original Japanese language”, which have been purchased as paperbacks in accordance with research ethics. The English translations of the text examples have been done by the writer of this thesis. During the translation process, some of the nuances of language and meaning may be lost due to cultural and linguistic differences between English and Japanese. However, the English translation reflects the contemporary speech patterns produced by the protagonists in the original format. Interestingly, *Escape Journey* (2015) features furigana as a reading assistant tool which widens the audience across all ages especially enabling a young readership of sexually graphic material.

BL is considered a mass media popular culture product in this thesis (Bertrand and Hughes 2005), and as such, BL has means of reaching a wide transnational audience. Due to the framework and size limitations of this thesis, fan activity will not be discussed at length, but it should be mentioned that the readers are considered both consumers and producers of BL in this thesis. The narratives featured in the works are featured precisely because they are so popular, which makes the readers not just passive recipients (Wodak and Meyer 2001), but active participants in maintaining the reproduction of popular representations of both idealised romance and rape culture. The more popular the narrative and the discourses are, the more normalised the ideas, values, and attitudes behind them become. Furthermore, in the context of BL as a mass media popular culture product, “CDA aims to interpret text on behalf of readers/consumers who might be unknowingly manipulated”, with “more focus on social cognition” (Machin and Mayr 2012: 212) and the researcher’s role in affecting the interpretation of the text based on their background, and the social categories they belong to (for example, social class, gender and race), in recognising the power structures present in conducting research. CDA is used as a methodological framework in this thesis because manipulation through text requires norms and ideology for support, and this thesis aims to discuss how dominant

discourses associated with rape culture are articulated in the context of BL manga. "Aligning women's agency alongside the interests of consumer capitalism" (Machin and Mayr 2012: 210) is an interesting idea that could be delved further into, considering most of the readers and producers of BL are women, working in a capitalistic society, consuming BL as goods, possibly finding BL inspirational and a tool to celebrate one's sexuality outside the patriarchal norm (Madill 2017), but there is need for further research outside the scope of this thesis to take that into account. The intentions of the text producer will not be reflected upon too much in this thesis, as the point of interest is the possible effect of the produced text on the reader, "non-academic" people (Machin and Mayr 2012: 211). The emphasis on the effects is taken into consideration by using linguistic injury theory (Butler 1997). CDA is an underdeveloped area when it comes to the analysing the social conditions of text production and consumption (Machin and Mayr 2012), which does not make CDA the best tool to discuss the producers' role in depth in the scope of this thesis.

As the aim is to analyse and shed light on the social phenomenon of rape culture in the context of BL, as well as consider alternate means in conveying consent in romance narratives, the CDA method plays an important role in examining the pervasive nature (Buchwald et al. 2005) of the phenomenon. As per CDA's "interdisciplinary nature and focus on the relationship between texts and its social context" (Le et al. 2009: 3), this thesis attempts at critically analysing text (and visual images) in the context of rape culture and linguistic injury (Butler 1997). By adding linguistic injury, which considers words as a means to inflict pain, as "a linguistic concept", this thesis attempts at "describing and explaining discourses" (Le et al. 2009: 3) related to rape culture, consent and their representations as romantic within the context of the selected Japanese BL manga.

The definition of 'discourse' in this project follows the interpretations of Le, Le and Short (2009), which are based on the Foucauldian idea of a discourse: it "constructs the topic and governs its meaning" (Le et al. 2009: 6). This means that a discourse sets the parameters of what seems logical and acceptable, or in other words, the norms, and governs these. "This reading of discourse has important consequences for understanding power" (Le et al. 2009: 6) because power lies within the discourse, and by upholding and articulating certain discourses, such as rape culture myths, they become normalised. Hence, discourses are a powerful means of oppression and of information, as well as of regulating lived realities of people, created, and continuously negotiated by people. Fairclough (2010) and Wodak (2001) define CDA and discourses as forms of social actions and power relations as discursive (Le et al. 2009: 8), and Fairclough's model framework sees discourse as text, discursive practice, and social practice. In the context of this thesis, discourse is further interpreted as something that "may rather be a vaguer and a shifting collection of values, ideas, identities, and sequences of

activity” (Machin and Mayr 2012: 208) than something easy to spot, which will be demonstrated further in the analysis section.

David Machin and Andrea Mayr discuss the limitations of the methodological framework in their book *How to do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction* (2012). CDA reveals the ideology embedded/buried in discourse which is not necessarily obvious to “the casual reader” (2012: 207). In the context of this thesis, the ideology of rape culture where love, romance, and sexuality, are portrayed as violent, and the violence as ordinary. And this being presented as normal or neutral for love, romance, and sex to include violent notions and present lack of respect towards people’s boundaries. The purpose of using the CDA methodological framework is to bring “ideological positions out into the open so that they can be more easily challenged” (2012: 207). By using the CDA framework, “our ability to describe texts and to document how they communicate” can be increased (2012: 207).

By what means then do BL manga articulate “the dominant discourses in a society” (Machin and Mayr 2012: 212), such as rape culture? One way is to analyse the heightened or “lowered articulation of detail in backgrounds” (2012: 211), where the use of background effects plays an important role in establishing the atmosphere or mood underlying the narrative. Visual and linguistic semiotic choices (2012: 208) presented in BL manga, such as cute characters, the use of flowers, bubbles, and other such symbols in the background, can be used to conceal and desensitise the reader to the ideologies in discourses.

In BL manga, another way to convey meaning besides background modality, and discourses found in verbal dialogue and thought monologue, is to read the emotional expressions on the pictorial faces of the characters. As an integral part of the narrative formation in BL, it is important to note that reading emotions on the faces of drawn fictional characters, aimed at an adult or young adult audience, may impact the interpretation of the depicted scenes. Nikolajeva (2014) points out that whereas basic emotions, “joy, distress, fear, anger, surprise and disgust”, are easy to recognise even for babies, and are universally similar, emotions of a higher cognitive nature require more from the reader as emotions such as “love, guilt, shame, pride, envy, and jealousy” are social emotions and “may be culturally dependent” (2014: 726). This cultural dependency implies, that one’s cultural and linguistic background, as well as gender and other social factors, influence the way the reader reads emotions in drawn pictures, which further emphasises the interpretations one might draw from popular culture products, such as BL manga, depending on their cultural and linguistic position.

Furthermore, according to Nikolajeva (2014), social emotions differ from basic emotions by needing more than one person to function, and therefore, social emotions may be negotiable by the individuals involved. For example, when it comes to love, becoming happy should be equally valuable

to both participants, and when linked together with the basic emotion of joy, may lead to happiness if reciprocated. However, if unrequited, love can lead to distress. (2014: 726) The definition and the idea of “love” may also differ between cultures, and the requirements thereof may also vary from time to time. “Social emotions are not directly connected to external expressions and thus more difficult to communicate” (2014: 727). This idea also translates into the context of BL and the characters’ emotional expressions and how they may be read depending on the readers’ position and capacity to create or interpret meaning in interaction with verbal communication and visual expressions found in BL works.

However, as the CDA framework comes from a very Western academic background, there is a risk of overshadowing the Japanese context by implementing a Western bias, especially in terms of ideas about love, gender, and sexuality. It should also be noted that the researcher of this thesis comes from a Western background, with Finnish as a first, English as a second, and Japanese as a third language, in terms of fluent speaking (and excluding Swedish, German, and Spanish), which may bring its own obscurities into the mix. This thesis aims to keep in mind Japanese cultural context about love, gender, and sexuality. This has been done by introducing the context to the reader in the theory section, and by further reminders in the analysis section. It is important to be mindful about utilising the results presented in the discussion section in an essentialist manner, as a “compelling analysis could still be atypical” without presenting adequate proof supporting the results. The researcher, which is to say I, has deemed the texts politically compelling enough to study. However, in the scope of this thesis further research conducted with survey studies or interviews is necessary to find out the depth of the problem is social reality. Through the CDA framework, it is possible to analyse “lone texts as examples of a particular dominant discourse in a society” (2012: 208), which makes linguistic research present as an important step in critically challenging the unequal, uneven, power relations in our societies. For example, the word “critical” is defined within this thesis’ context to mean a way to visualise the discourses we need to unlearn to become a better society for everyone.

CDA has received further criticism regarding its limitations in remaining unbiased, as the researcher and their background, as well as the way they read and interpret texts, affects the analysis’ results directly. Does the researcher choose texts to support their own analysis? The answer is most likely “yes” regardless of the methodological framework in use, as the selected texts are of interest to the researched topic at hand, as well as the researcher themselves, hence the motivation to study a certain social phenomenon. However, despite selecting texts influenced by one’s own interests, one can also remain critical and self-reflective throughout the research, instead of claiming a research to be bullet-proof under further inspection. Therefore, it is important to pertain to transparency and acknowledge the limits a research’s subjectivity, their personhood, and personal experiences, sets on

the research one conducts. CDA is, however, “more than an interpretation: a systematic and controlled exercise that can be empirically repeated by others” (2012: 210). CDA can be seen as more of analysis because the selection of texts and materials is subjective, making analysis a subjective interpretation, but which is still supported by previous research, theory, and the highlighting of social realities in the background, making it empirical philosophical research. Despite the criticisms CDA has received, it has been chosen as a framework for this thesis because it “has, nevertheless, brought to light important issues concerning ideology and power” (2012: 215), which, in the context of language study, shows that an issue can be seen and interpreted in a way that puts emphasis on importance of the effect over “intentions” behind them. One can intend to be good but still do bad things: a person believing in an ideology may reinforce it thinking they are doing so from the goodness of heart, but the effect of reproducing an ideology may still be harmful to others.

### 3.2 Primary sources

The research material for the thesis consists of two one-shot BL manga in Japanese, with the analysed scenes translated to English by the writer of this thesis. Ogeretsu Tanaka’s *Escape Journey* (2015) and CTK’s *Midnight rain* (2019) will be used in the analysis section to exemplify the use of certain statements and myths in dialogue, as well as physical scenarios, discourses so to say, associated with rape culture and linguistic injury. The two manga have been chosen based on their popularity in Japan as well as their accessibility. *Escape Journey* was ranked as one of the most popular BL works published the third best commercial BL comic of 2016 in the 7th annual BL Awards, an event that has been going on since its launch by the Chil-Chil website in 2009 (chil-chil.net, 2016), and the manga was continued by two additional volumes due to the story’s popular reception. The story follows the romance between two university students who become lovers again after their initial fall-out in high school. Due to its popular reception both in Japan and overseas, *Escape Journey* is a product of the modern BL scene in Japan, which can also be seen in the popularity of the author and their works. As *Escape Journey* has been both translated by fans and officially licensed, it speaks for the overseas popularity of the product, which speaks highlights the BL phenomenon crossing transnational borders as a cross-cultural product. Aesthetically, *Escape Journey* fits in well with the typical BL aesthetics, which emphasize lightly drawn beautiful and youthful characters for the primary atmosphere whilst utilizing darker tones and themes for sad and confrontational scenes.

*Midnight Rain* (2019) is a popular BL manga by the *mangaka* CTK with its events taking place in a non-Japanese milieu between two grown men, featuring a darker atmosphere than *Escape Journey*. *Midnight Rain* won the popularity award of spring 2020 on the chil-chil.net website (2020), placing



tenth in the “Best Deep” (BEST ディープ) category. Winning popularity contests speaks for both *Escape Journey*’s and *Midnight Rain*’s popularity within the Japanese BL community.

The two comic book artists, or *mangakas*, whose works are analysed in this thesis, have an online presence in addition to them having published physical books and in monthly magazines. The Chil-Chil website, specialising in reviewing, ranking, and running a database for commercial BL works in Japan, offers detailed listings of each of their works. The website also gives the opportunity for the readers to write reviews and give scores to the works, which enables the ranking of the works by popularity and makes it easier to access works according to one’s interests.

The two works have been published in the 2010’s and they represent modern BL scene in Japan, which can be seen, for example, in the popularity of the authors and their works. The two BL mangas have also been translated by fans, and officially licensed as well, which speaks for the overseas popularity of these BL mangas. It should also be noted that both authors have had their work licensed into English, which highlights the BL phenomenon crossing transnational borders. Furthermore, both authors have had many works published in the leading Japanese BL magazines (such as *Junk! Boy* and *BexBoy*), which speaks for popular demand as well.

## 4. Analysis

Analysis on the research material introduced in the previous section has been done by following the CDA methodological framework, and by choosing the examples most corresponding to the themes discussed in the theory section for the analysis. The two manga used as examples have been read thoroughly but with leaving out additional extra chapter after the main stories, with the sections used as examples translated by the writer of this thesis, and the discourses among those sections coded. As per the CDA framework, the analysis will use coding based on rape culture and linguistic injury theories. In addition, the Japanese terms, such as “forced obscenity” in the context of Japanese rape legislation (Shibata 2008), are kept in mind while introducing the definitions behind the codes.

The codes are divided into five categories. These categories represent the content of the discourses, which include rape myths and statements supporting rape culture. The five main coding categories used in the analysis of the chosen BL examples are as follows:

- a. sexual harassment (verbal, physical, and emotional)
- b. sexual abuse (rape and assault)
- c. ignoring or disrespecting boundaries set by partner
- d. romanticisation of violence regarding love

e. reinforcement of rape myths and toxic gender statements

The aforementioned “harassment” and “abuse” in the first and second categories differ in their definitions. In this thesis, harassment is seen to include sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention (verbal and physical), and gender harassment. Unwanted physical sexual attention includes, for example, bodily touching, touching of the genitals through clothing, and forced kissing. On the other hand, harassment may lead to sexual abuse, and in this thesis, abuse is seen to include mistreatment, abuse of power over the other, and unwanted sexual activity. Emotional and verbal abuse include notions of victim blaming and the manipulation of the partner. Furthermore, abuse is seen as a broader term to cover rape and assault, as they involve emotional, sexual, and physical features and are thus entwined with the idea of abuse. Both harassment and abuse presented in textual texts and image texts hold the keys of linguistic injury, the effect of which can be seen, for example, on the character’s pictured facial expressions, and through their written verbal replies or other verbal reactions, such as grunting and silence.

The third category, *ignoring or disrespecting boundaries set by partner*, is defined by discourses exhibiting behaviour by one of the characters not listening to the boundaries set by the other character, who in the context of BL, is the partner or romantic interest. These boundaries include the partner verbally exclaiming “no”, or by him presenting other verbal or physical resistance, which the perpetrator ignores by continuing or coercing the partner into sexual acts, or by justifying rape through similar reasoning that is reflected by rape myths.

The *romanticisation of violence regarding love* is a category characterised by behaviour expressed by the harassed, abused, or manipulated partner. In the analysis, this romanticisation is brought forward to the reader by the partner justifying, reasoning, or blaming himself for the abuse inflicted upon him by the other. This is common behaviour among IPV and rape survivors (for example, Yamawaki 2009), intended to minimise the experienced emotional damage, as well as pertain to the belief that the familiar abuser did not “intend” to cause the effects they, however, have caused.

The last category, the *reinforcement of rape myths and toxic gender statements*, tracks the discourses using rape myths to justify abuse, or other toxic behaviour (behaviour that inflicts visual or linguistic injury). Furthermore, this category also tracks the discourses that solidify the ideology behind both rape myths and male dominated society: toxic gender statements. These statements include ideology that frames homosexuality as shameful and useless (gay men unable to produce offspring), men stronger as opposed to women (or the abuser stronger than the victim/survivor), and the naturality of women being interested in family making and marriage. The gender statements are considered toxic in this thesis because they promote only one kind of reality for people to pursue. At

the same time, they also help reproduce heteronormative hegemony and gender stereotypes through discourses where these statements are stated as facts. One way to look at these statements would be to consider them subversive social critique when framing them through a character's distressed point of view but as pointed out in the analysis, this interpretation, while whole-heartedly possible, falls flat in the overall contextualisation the narrative and its plot points provide.

The coding and categorisation are justified by matching them with the most common discourses presented by the two BL manga. However, for the sake of transparent research, it should be kept in mind that the background, thoughts and presumptions of this thesis' writer influence the manner in which these texts are analysed and the selection of the scenes that have been chosen to be used as examples. To ensure the whole story has been acknowledged by the writer, the analysis section will follow the narrative in a chapter by chapter manner whilst highlighting the scenes portraying the elements elevated also in the coding categories, more thoroughly. The answers provided by the analysis for the research questions will be contemplated further in the discussion section.

In the analysis, thoughts are indicated by the use of parenthesis: ( ) and speech is indicated by the use of Japanese quotations marks: 「 」 and the text characters ' ' in the Romanized text sequence. The flow of the monologue or dialogue shifting from one frame to the next indicated by ending the sentence with the punctuation marks: 。 and .

#### 4.1 Analysis of *Escape Journey* (2015)

Ogeretsu Tanaka's *Escape Journey* (2015) is a BL manga that depicts an emotional journey illustrating the rebuilding of a relationship between two male characters, Hisami Naoto (uke) and Hase Taichi (seme). The prevalent visual effects indicating the establishment of a happy or light atmosphere include the use of bright colours on the front cover, the contents page and in a piece of art the reader comes across right after the cover page (Figure 3. 2015). Against a bright orange background, Naoto and Taichi are riding a red bicycle, with its basket filled with beach equipment (sunglasses, water bottle and flipflops). Taichi sits on the saddle and Naoto is seated behind him pictured with a smile on his face with one finger extended to poke Taichi on the cheek. At first glance, the cover seems to intrigue the reader with a fun adventure, based on these visual effects. Additionally, at the beginning of each chapter, there is cover page art that features Naoto and Taichi, or one or the other, with a bicycle. The bicycle can be interpreted as a mode of transport needed for the two's "escape journey". The Japanese text has furigana in use as a reading aid for spelling out in Japanese syllables how the more difficult to read *kanji* (Chinese characters) are meant to be read and pronounced. The use of furigana in the context of this BL manga indicates that the contents are accessible for a target audience that may

include younger Japanese readers as well as foreign readers with some capacity to read and understand Japanese.

Naoto and Taichi are introduced as first-year students starting their semester at the same university. On the inner cover of the manga, the readers are provided with a glimpse at Taichi's reminiscent inner monologue and an initiation of contact with Naoto at the entrance ceremony. Taichi's thoughts reveal that the two have known each other since high school and Taichi has been holding on to a wish to talk to Naoto (Figure 4. 2015: inner cover):

T: (一なおだ。ずっと会いたかった話したかったなおだ。今しかない こんなチャンスは。こんなに、早く会えた。もう一回だけ、) 「高校一緒にだったんだよ。」

*(--nao da. zutto aitakatta hanashikatta nao da. ima shika nai konna chansu wa. konna ni, hayaku aeta. mou ikkai dake,) 'kougou isshoni dattan da yo.'*

(—It's Nao. Nao with whom I've been wanting to meet up and talk to. There won't be a chance like this [again]. To think we were able to meet this soon. Just one more time,) "We went to high school together!"

The reason for pointing out this scene is because it is one of the rare scenes with Taichi as the narrator, the rest of the story largely following Naoto's point of view, with little insight into how Taichi is thinking. Additionally, the scene offers the readers insight into the familiarity between Taichi and Naoto in the way that Taichi refers to Naoto as "Nao". The backstory for Naoto and Taichi's high school relationship is that they had been lovers who fell out of touch due to an unresolved fight. Naoto had ended their relationship because Taichi referred to the relationship as only "sexual gratification" (*seiyokushori* 性欲処理) (Figure 5, 2015: 3):

N: 「太一！お前マジでうっぜんだけど。こんなならお前と付き合うじゃなかった…！」

*'taichi! omae maji de uzzēnda kedo. konnan nara omae to tsukiau janakatta ...!'*

"Taichi! You're really pissing me off. If I knew it'd be like this, I never woulda dated you...!"

T: 「は？俺ら付き合ってたんだ？ただの性欲処理でやってるだけだと思ってたわ。」

*'ha? orera tsukiattetanda? tada no seiyokushori de yatteru dake da to omotteta wa.'*

"Huh? We were dating? I thought we were just using each other for sexual gratification."

N: 「なっ…！」（それは俺が、）「そうかよ… もう一生顔見せんなバカ!!」（てめーを振るときに言ってやろうと思ってたセリフだよ！）

*'na-..!' (sore wa ore ga,) 'sou ka yo... mō isshō kao misenna baka!!' (temē o furu toki ni itte yarō to omotteta serifu da yo!!'*

"Wha..!" (Those are the lines,) "I see... I don't ever wanna see your face again, idiot!!" (I thought I'd give your ass that time I dumped you."

The two speak in a very familiar fashion and use patterns likened to those of Japanese men's language (*dansei kotoba*), such as using slang (*uzzē* instead of the basic form *urusai*) and derogatory pronouns (*omae*) and words (*teme*, or asshole in English) when referring to each other. These linguistic aspects increase the effect of the *linguistic injury* inflicted on Naoto by Taichi. Interestingly, Taichi uses the sentence ending particle *da wa*, which emphasises the nonchalant manner Taichi is giving his statement using contemporary slang. After the fight, Taichi and Naoto have not spoken since, until they meet again at the university a year later. As a first-year university student, Naoto is shown to look forward to finding a girlfriend (Figure 6, 2015: 4).

N: (新しい彼女できるかな〜とか。)「よっしゃ〜 女の子7人目捕獲♥」

(*atarashii kanojo dekiru ka na~ to ka.*) 'yossha~ onna no ko 7 ninme hokaku ♥'

(I wonder if I can make a new girlfriend~ or something.) "Yay~ the seventh girl captured ♥"

Naoto's ambition to find a girlfriend nods towards the reoccurring notions of homophobia and homophobic statements present in BL, framed as a character emphasising his own heterosexuality (Zanghellini 2009, McLelland et al. 2015). The purpose of the scene can additionally be interpreted as one that notifies the readers how Naoto is not interested in other men. However, Naoto's way of picking up girls' phone numbers and referring to them as collectibles - reminiscent of the pursuit of catching Pokémon in the use of the verb *hokaku* (to capture) – gives an impression of him engaging in performative masculinity by chasing girls as a game.

In the first chapter, Naoto and Taichi start spending more time together, reminiscing about their shared past and agreeing not to tell anyone about them being ex-boyfriends. However, they establish a casual relationship again, despite Naoto's claims of wanting to find a girlfriend. The first time Naoto and Taichi have sex after their initial break-up in high school takes place after Naoto and Taichi have been out drinking. Taichi tells their mutual friends that he will carry Naoto to Taichi's place, and Naoto ends up spending the night. Drunken Naoto makes suggestive remarks and Taichi asks him to stop (2015: 32):

N: 「なーに俺をお持ち帰りしちゃってんの〜? エロ〜〜〜♥」

'*nāni ore o omochikaeri shichattenno~? ero~~~ ♥*'

"Whaat you're taking me home as leftovers? How erotic~ ♥"

T: 「あんまそういうこと言うなよ。」

*'anma sō iu koto iuna yo.'*

"Stop saying that kinda stuff."

However, drunken Naoto does not listen to Taichi and says he likes Taichi's bed and asks if they should go to sleep together (2015: 32):

N: 「いーじゃん太一も。一緒に寝たらア？」

*'iijan taichi mo. isshoni netara-?'*

"It's fine-, how about we sleep together Taichi?"

They both get into bed and joke around in a situation that leads into them kissing with Taichi moving on top of Naoto and holding him down by the wrists. Naoto's thoughts reflect conflicted feelings towards their relationship, despite his earlier provocative comments (2015: 35-36):

N: (ダメだって頭では分かってる。太一とは恋人にはなれない。友達以上には進むべきじゃない。)

*(dame datte atama de wa wakatteru. taichi to wa koibito ni wa narenai. tomodachi ijō ni wa susumu beki janai.)*

(I know in my head that we shouldn't. We don't work as lovers, Taichi [and I]. We shouldn't move beyond friendship.)

The scene continues with Taichi asking for Naoto's consent and waits until Naoto consents verbally by saying yes. In this scene, the seme (Taichi) assertively establishes sexual consent by verbally asking, and the scene does not move forward before the uke (Naoto) consents (2015: 36-37):

T: 「……なお ……いいのか。」

*'...nao. ...ii no ka.'*

"...Nao. ...Are you sure?"

N: (一緒に居て楽しい。笑える。それだけでいい。それだけでいいはずなのに。)

「いいよ。」

*(isshoni ite tanoshii. waraeru. sore dake de ii. sore dake de ii hazu na no ni.) 'ii yo.'*

(It's enough to just spend time together and laugh. Just that should be enough.) "I'm sure."

In the sex scene that follows, Taichi and Naoto are depicted to use a condom, which does not happen in every BL manga making the emphasis on its usage an interesting feature. The male genitals have been censored as per the pornography law, article 175 (Shibata 2008), but the line of the condom is

clearly visible (2015: 37, panel 3; 2015: 41, panel 2). Naoto, however, feels conflicted over taking their relationship beyond even friendship, as they have not yet established where they are emotionally at after meeting again post-break up. As they keep going, Naoto starts to indicate a need to stop but Taichi does not heed Naoto's visual and verbal cues (2015: 39):

N: 「や…もお…っ いっ…てえ……」

*'ya... mō...- it...tē...'*

"Sto... alrea... 't hurts..."

T: 「はっ… うで ジャマ」

*'ha-... ude jama'*

"Ha... [your] arm [is] in the way"

Based on the scene, Taichi's behaviour supports the ideology behind discourses that enforce the rape myth: consent given once lasts through the whole duration of sex. Taichi does not stop or react to Naoto's pained groans or pleads to stop, and Naoto is shown as having second thoughts in the morning, possibly even remorse (2015: 40):

N: 「あ〜〜 ヤっちまった〜〜」

*'aa~ yacchimattaa~'*

"Aaaah, now I've done it~"

In the previous scene, Naoto and Taichi establish consent, but asking for consent is not revisited during some of the following sexual interactions but rather taken for granted by Taichi, who initiates keeps in charge of the following sexually loaded scenarios. The scene that depicts the morning after is coded with comical elements ranging from Naoto's exaggerated hungover facial expression to the emphasised use of the grapheme tilde (~).

Chapter two starts with Naoto contemplating in a comic manner, how everything is the same way he remembers it (2015: 42):

N: (記憶バッチリ。腰痛バッチリ。ゴム (使用済) バッチリ。よし帰ろう。太一が起きてくる前に!!)

*(kioku bacchiri. yōtsū bacchiri. gomu (shiyōzumi) bacchiri. yoshi kaerō. taichi ga okitekuru mae ni!!)*

(Just as I remember it. The same backpain. The same (used) condoms. Alright, time to go home before Taichi wakes up!!)

The comic effect is depicted with emphasising the aftereffects of intercourse through Naoto's inner monologue and the gestures he makes towards every item he lists: the back pain, used condoms and how he has experienced it all before. At the bottom of the page, there is a visual marker for Naoto's "escape" (tōhō 逃亡) which further enhances the hilarity of the situation.

At the university, Taichi and Naoto behave in a friendly way and Taichi does not bring up the previous night. Naoto is shown thinking that he only gave into temptation because he was drunk. Naoto's new friends among the girls whose numbers he collected, Mikarin and Fumi, invite Naoto and Taichi to a double date since Fumi is infatuated with Taichi, not knowing that Taichi and Naoto used to go out together. At the aquarium, Naoto brings up Pokémon this time himself as he compares them to the manatees (2015: 55, panel 5). The group is shown having a good time with Taichi and Naoto stealing glances at each other when the other one is not looking. Taichi takes Naoto's hand hidden from other people's sight. Naoto reveals he got aroused by the handholding, ears shown burning red to emphasise the point, and Naoto asks Taichi to take him to Taichi's place, and they take a taxi.

At Taichi's place Naoto and Taichi are again shown engaging in penetrative sex. Here, and throughout the sex scenes in *Escape Journey*, the depiction of penetration in different positions works to reinforce and normalise the discourse on penetration as a marker for sex. It could also be read as a way to emphasise their previous relationship, how they are already close, and have had sex before. Taichi tries to take care not to hurt Naoto who is depicted extremely flustered, with his face blushed and drool dripping from his mouth. Taichi asks if Naoto is sure he wants to move so fast without preparation since it hurt last time which indicates that Taichi did listen to Naoto's pleas before but did not heed them. Naoto, however, rushes the penetration and assertively takes control over the scene which defies the classic uke trope of a submissive partner. Taichi does not resist but comments how Naoto does not want to use a condom (2015: 66, panel 3):

T: 「オラってなあ… つーか、ナマ…」

*'oratte nā... tsūka, nama...'*

"I said hey... and bareback?"

N: 「ゴムつけてっと痛えんだもん。」

*'gomu tsuketetto itēdamon.'*

"But it hurts using a condom."

Interestingly, it is Naoto who does not want to use the condom, and Naoto does not ask Taichi's consent for not using it, which is a coercive means to withhold protection. Naoto also uses language which can be interpreted as intentional childishness, with the sentence ending particles *da mon*, often used by children to signal dissatisfaction, which adds a linguistic element of selfishness to Naoto's



behaviour. Not only does this scene possibly reinforce the myth that the “man”, who is represented here by the seme (Taichi), is inherently more sexual and willing to leave out condoms for added pleasure but it also reinforces the myth that using condoms may decrease pleasure. The man’s consent is seemingly presumed based on the assumption that a man is always willing, which is how Naoto’s interaction with Taichi can be interpreted, thus enforcing *toxic gender stereotypes*. Naoto and Taichi then open up about their mutual feelings and agree on wanting to be more than just friends. The scene is depicted romantic by showing images of Taichi and Naoto holding each other lovingly, foreheads touching, faces flushed and Taichi looking like he might cry as there is a drop of sweat or a tear on his cheek, and Naoto smiles at Taichi, looking genuine (2015: 68-69). The next morning, Naoto is texting their friends Mikarin and Fumi when Taichi wakes up and puts Naoto’s phone away, initiating a sexually coded scene where they fool around until the scene fades.

In the previous focus points of this analysis, Naoto and Taichi’s past, first meeting, drunken escapades and reconnecting of their relationship took place. After the two have a consensus on starting to date again, hints towards their past are shown to the reader from Naoto’s point of view: before Taichi would never have apologised but now he does after arguments. However, in the morning when Naoto gets a call from Mikarin, Taichi is depicted with a shocked and hurt expression, which indicates jealousy. Naoto also exhibits jealousy or hurt when he finds out Fumi has been sending messages on LINE (a popular social messaging application in Japan) to Taichi. Naoto has a flashback from two years ago that depicts Taichi being teased by their classmates for getting jealous over the attention Naoto receives from girls, which is visited in chapter three.

It is revealed that they had a good time as friends back in high school and how they slowly got close. When Taichi’s parents are divorcing, Naoto shows up for support and the two “escape” the situation by riding away on a bike. The two happily joke about it being almost like eloping (2015: 88-89) and suddenly their bike breaks down. As they sit down to wait for a bus, Taichi kisses Naoto who is depicted thinking (2015: 92-93):

N: (太一とこういうことをするのは。普通じゃないことだって分かってはいたけど。だめだとは思わなかった。)

(*taichi to kō iu koto o suru no wa. futsuu ja nai koto datte wakatte wa ita kedo. dame da to wa omowanakatta.*)

(I definitely knew doing this kinda thing with Taichi wasn’t normal. But I never thought it was wrong.)

Naoto’s thoughts reflect the ideology that there may be something wrong with two boys kissing, which nods towards *toxic gender statements*. Another scene enforcing these statements takes place on

another day at Taichi's parents' home when he tells Naoto his thoughts about the divorce. Taichi makes a comment about how his mother is not the only one at fault and how his "mom was stolen" (*torareta* 盗られた) (2015: 98-99) because of his father's long work hours, which indirectly leaves the woman without agency over her actions by placing the focus on her being regarded as a possession that can be taken away by a man. Taichi states that as long as Naoto is with him, he will be content (2015: 99):

T: 「一緒にいてくれれば。それでいいから。」

*'isshoni ite kurereba. sore de ii kara.'*

"As long as you're with me. I'm content."

Taichi's statement may also indicate him establishing ownership over Naoto by indirectly letting readers now understand that they are a couple, when later during their fight Taichi refers to them as satisfying each other's sexual urges (2015: 3). The ownership discourse is supported by Taichi leaning over Naoto and grasping his hands. Later at school, Taichi's jealousy over Naoto's popularity with girls comes into clear display by Taichi speaking rudely to Naoto's friend Risa, causing secondary *linguistic injury* in Naoto as shown by his expressions and him getting upset, and afterwards initiating kissing in the school hallway despite Naoto's verbal protest (2015: 104-105):

T: 「こいつ誰？」

*'koitsu dare?'*

"Who [the fuck] is this?"

After Naoto reprimands Taichi for his behaviour in the hallway, Taichi kisses Naoto who softly objects, and since the scene does not end with Taichi letting go of Naoto, the scene could be interpreted as showing elements of *verbal harassment* towards Naoto's friend and *physical and emotional harassment* by initiating a kiss in public in the midst of an argument. Naoto's following thoughts reflect his reluctance to keep being with Taichi (2015: 104-105):

N: (それから、キスもセックスもたくさんした。男同士で普通じゃなくても。今まで通り楽しくやっていけると思ってたから。でも。だんだん太一と一緒にいることが楽しいとは思えなくなっていった。)

*(sore kara, kisu mo sekkusu mo takusan shita. otoko doushi de futsuu janakute mo. ima made dōri tanoshiku yatte ikeru to omotteta kara. demo. dandan taichi to isshoni iru koto ga tanoshii to wa omoenaku natteitta.)*

(From that moment on, we had lots of sex and kissing. Even though it's not normal between two guys, I thought we could keep having fun the same way as always. But, little by little I stopped thinking that being with Taichi was fun.)

Here, the discourse normalising heteronormativity and *toxic gender statements* is Naoto's remark on sex not being normal between men but fun, which emphasises the presence of Japanese homophobia in BL. After the scene, the two are shown fighting more and more, until they "became less than friends" in Naoto's mind (*tomodachi ika ni natta* 友達いかになった) (2015: 108, panels 1-2). Taichi is depicted with shocked and regretful facial expressions when Naoto stopped talking to him in school (2015: 108-109). The narrative shifts from the flashback back into depicting Naoto and Taichi as a newly established couple at the university. However, as Naoto has been recalling past events, he is depicted as having inner conflict over their situation and as increasingly reluctant to have sex. As Taichi tries to initiate sex, Naoto pushes him away and both of them are shown with shocked and confused expressions (2015: 112).

In chapter four, by Naoto complaining about the lack of girls over their summer break (2015: 114), the statement enforces heteronormativity in the context of Japanese masculinity as well as *toxic gender statements*. The readers are introduced to another discourse emphasising masculinity (Kimmel 2005) as Taichi says (2015: 115):

T: 「俺は週4でやれて毎日スッキリしてた夏休み。」

'ore wa shuu 4 de yarete mainichi sukkiri shiteta natsuyasumi.'

"For me, being able to do it four times a week made it a refreshing summer break."

This statement normalises the link between manhood and having a lot of sex whilst assuming the normative idea of sexuality as being performed by regular and frequent sex acts. However, whereas Taichi seems to enjoy the sex he is having with Naoto, Naoto on the other hand says to himself he did not like what they did (2015: 115):

N: 「…俺はセックスばっかってやだったけど。」

'...ore wa sekkusu bakkatte yadatta kedo.'

"...I didn't like do how all we did was sex though."

When Taichi asks Naoto about what he said, Naoto pretends that he said something else, which implies Naoto is afraid to speak his mind. Fear of escalating the situation is common behaviour with IPV survivors (Yoshihama and Horrocks 2010, Hall 2012, Kamimura et al. 2014), and the two were depicted fighting a lot in high school before their initial break-up, which could be what Naoto is afraid of

experiencing again. Naoto is shown chatting with his friends Mikarin and Fumi, who has had a crush on Taichi throughout the storyline taking place at the university, which has resulted in depictions focusing on Naoto's insecurity. Mikarin tells Naoto how Fumi has decided the names of their children already if she were married to Taichi and how Taichi would make a good father (2015: 118). This causes visible unease in Naoto (2015: 118), relaying the effect of *linguistic injury* despite Mikarin and Fumi having good intentions stemming from the same heteronormativity affecting Naoto's thoughts in seeing same-sex relations as unusual. If Mikarin and Fumi were able to imagine Naoto and Taichi together, would they talk to Naoto so openly? This scene puts emphasis on family and marriage being on girls' minds, as per the *stereotypes on femininity* and traditional views placed on women (Yamawaki 2009), also commented on by Naoto masking his shock by jokingly referring to Fumi as "cute and feminine" (2015: 119, panel 1):

N: 「ふみちゃんやっぱすげえ乙女だよねかわいすぎ！」

*'fumichan yappa sugē otome da yo ne kawai sugi!'*

"Fumi-chan is super feminine after all! Too cute!"

Naoto is then depicted to notice Mikarin's new hairstyle and Taichi sees Naoto smelling Mikarin's hair. Taichi is then depicted as getting increasingly jealous over Naoto with Taichi's insecurity further enhanced by their peers gossiping about the possibility that Naoto and Mika would be dating (2015: 119-120). Taichi's jealousy is visualised through, for example, forced handholding in public coupled with Naoto's inability to verbally resist (2015: 120-121), which could be interpreted as falling under the *harassment* and *disrespecting boundaries* categories. Naoto ponders on why was unable to say let go (2015: 121):

N: (離せよ。とは。なんと言えなかった。)

*(hanase yo. to wa. nande ienakatta.)*

(Why couldn't I tell him to let go?)

They head to Taichi's place and Taichi starts kissing and touching Naoto already at the entrance hall, which Naoto verbally resists. However, Taichi does not listen to Naoto, which is depicted by Taichi making his own assumptions about what is to Naoto's liking and acting on those assumptions, instead of stopping to listen (2015: 122-123):

N: 「ばっ、か… 待てって！」

*'ba-, ka... matette!'*

"Idi, ot... I told [you to] wait!"

T: 「無理。待てねえ。」

'muri, matenē.'

"Impossible. I can't wait."

N: 「ベッドで！」

'beddo de!'

"On the bed!"

T: 「なお…」

'nao…'

"Nao..."

N: 「んなこと。さわんなっ…」

'nna koto. sawanna-…'

"Don't touch me there..."

T: 「なんで？胸好きじゃん。」

'nande? mune suki jan.'

"Why? You like your chest being touched."

N: 「ちげえよ…！好きじゃね…！」

'chigē yo...! suki ja nee...!'

"You're wrong...! I don't like it...!"

The situation is interrupted by Taichi receiving a call from Fumi. Seeing Fumi's caller id, Naoto is depicted with a shocked expression and he reflects on Fumi's words about Taichi making a good dad and how things ended between Naoto and Taichi's last time. Naoto questions if anything would come out of their relationship and thinks there is no point in being together since it would not result in kids and marriage (2015: 124-125) – a discourse that highlights heteronormative society. After the sex scene, Taichi is depicted being affectionate towards Naoto who is sleeping by caressing his fingers and kissing Naoto's forehead (2015: 126-127), which is in stark contrast to the way Taichi *ignored boundaries set by the partner* and *physically harassed* a reluctant Naoto. Naoto expressed verbally that having sex hurt this time, which Taichi also ignored (2015: 124-125), marking the scene as having elements of *abuse* as well. Taichi's caresses seem to be in place to lighten the mood and code the scene as loving and romantic.

As a plot twist, perhaps already anticipated by the readers based on Naoto's emotional withdrawal, the relationship does not progress as smoothly as Taichi wants it to. As Naoto has started to withdraw from spending time together sexually with Taichi, their relationship and its happy exterior starts to crack under the pressure of jealousy and insecurity from both sides. With no communication

as to what both of their needs or boundaries are, the tension created by miscommunication and insecurity escalates into the two having a fight. Fueled by Taichi's insecurity over Naoto's popularity among girls, and especially Mikarin, and Naoto's insecurity over Taichi having referred to their relationship as sexual gratification, and Fumi's crush on Taichi. Visting Naoto and Taichi's past together with these emotional triggers may cause "joy and pain looking of looking back at one's past" in readers (Chan and Lin 2015: 383) in previous scenes but perhaps also in the following.

Taichi invites Naoto over to his place and Naoto suggests they watch a movie together, instead of having sex (2015: 129). Despite Naoto's insecurity about the nature of their relationship, and his fear of conflict, Naoto is able to articulate his boundaries directly. At Taichi's place, Taichi gets jealous seeing Naoto receive a text from Mikarin, and Taichi goes against the agreed upon movie night by forcibly kissing Naoto (2015: 132). Naoto objects by telling Taichi to stop and verbally indicates kissing or sex is not what they agreed to do. Taichi downplays Naoto's concerns and undermines Naoto's decision to want to watch "a boring movie" instead, and questions Naoto's decision to come over, if he was not after sex (2015: 132-133):

T: 「じゃあ。お前何しに来たわけ？わざわざつまんない DVD を流しに来たのかよ。」

'*jaa. omae nani shi ni kita wake? wazawaza tsumannai DVD o nagashi ni kita no ka yo.*'

"Why did you come here then? To play some boring DVD?"

N: 「元々はてめーが呼んだんだろうが！……お前、俺がここに来んのはセックスするためだけとでも思ってるのかよ。」

'*moto moto wa temē ga yondan darou ga! ....omae, ore ga koko ni kun no wa sekkusu suru tame dake to demo omotten no ka yo.*'

"It was you who invited me over in the first place! ...Do you think I only come here for sex?"

The effect of Taichi's linguistic injury in the form of *disrespect towards Naoto's boundaries* is indicated by Naoto's angry and hurt facial expression. Naoto accidentally breaks Taichi's Blu-ray player, and their fight escalates as Taichi blames Naoto for not apologising properly (2015: 135). This scene suggests that both Naoto and Taichi may think they are being taken for granted – a display of insecurity taking form in a domestic fight. The final tipping point towards violence is triggered by Naoto inflicting linguistic injury on Taichi, as he refers to Taichi's words from their break-up (2015: 136):

N: 「ヤリてえだけなら。俺の他にも性欲処理係作れば？」

'*yaritē dake nara. ore no hoka ni mo seiyokushori gakari tsukureba?*'

“If you just wanna screw something, why not make someone else in charge of your sexual gratification?”

Taichi’s shocked and hurt expression quickly changes to an angry one as he slaps Naoto in the face. They end up in a physical fight. Verbal examples of *reproduction of rape myths in dialogue* as well as *the reinforcement of toxic gender statements* are present in the following scene which Taichi threatens Naoto by referring to his strength and proceeds to rape the uke, by forceful anal penetration. Furthermore, the imagery supporting the dialogue adds visual examples of *sexual assault* and *harassment*. (Figures 7 & 8, 2015: 138-139):

T: 「頭悪いんじゃないねえのお前。なんで力で俺に勝てると思ってんの？」

*‘atama waruin janē no omae. nande chikara de ore ni kateru to omotten no?’*

‘Are you touched in the head? Why would you think you’d be able to win against me in terms of strength?’

N: 「太一っ…！ぐっ…！太一！！」

*‘Taichi…! Gu…! Taichi!!’*

*‘Taichi…! Ngh…! Taichi!!’*

T: 「うるっせえな…」

*‘urussēnā…’*

*‘Shut up…’*

N: 「嫌だ やめろよ！」

*‘iyada yamero yo!’*

*“I don’t want it, stop it already!”*

In this scene, the physically stronger, more aggressively depicted character (*seme*) establishes his power over the other character (*uke*), who is depicted unable to resist, by making a verbal statement about the character’s differences in strength, thus, also inflicting linguistic injury. The visual image of Taichi towering over Naoto in a small hallway adds visual coherency to Taichi’s verbal comment, since the *seme* is depicted as slightly taller and more muscular. The situation also has elements of *emotional, sexual and physical abuse*, as the fight is initiated in a sexually loaded scene and the *seme* is pinning down the *uke* on the floor, tearing off his clothes, trying to make him submit. Taichi tells Naoto to “shut up” in a way that emphasises masculinity by roughening up the word with the double consonant *s* and the lengthened *e* vowel, instead of by using a curse word, for example. The *na* sentence ending particle at the end of the phrases implies he is talking to himself, which means the phrase then could also be translated to “[It’s] so [fucking] loud”. This would dehumanise Taichi’s view of Naoto in the heat of the

moment even more, making the linguistic injury feel twice as bad. One more interpretation could be that Taichi too refers to their break-up fight during which Naoto told Taichi that he was “fucking annoying” (*maji de uzzēnda kedo*) (Figure 3, 2015: 3), and recreates the situation by using Naoto’s words against him.

The scene continues with Taichi proceeding to rape Naoto. In the scene, the uke continues to verbally resist the assault, and the seme inflicts linguistic injury by the following statements (Figure 8, 2015: 139):

N: 「てめえこんなことして…ッ　っ！」

*‘temē konna koto shite…’*

‘You bastard, doing something like this… !’

T: 「もう一発？　…チッ　可愛くねえなマジで…　可愛くねえから後ろ向かいて　顔見たらムカつく」

*‘mō ippatsu? ...chi- kawaikunēna maji de... kawaikunē kara ushiro mukaite. kao mitara mukatsuku’*

‘Want me to hit you again? ...tch, you are really not cute... you’re not cute, so face forwards. Looking at your face pisses me off’

N: 「離せ!!　くそっ…！」

*‘hanase!! kuso..!’*

‘Let me go!! Shit..!’

Here Taichi ignores Naoto’s boundaries and lack of consent, sexually harasses him verbally and physically, and abuses him emotionally, sexually, and physically. During the second statement, the seme physically moves the uke to face away from him and insults the uke to establish dominance and power over him, the other. The language used by the seme is also very harsh and dismissive in tone, and he is speaking in an exaggeratedly manly way, as indicated by the lengthened syllable *ne* and the derogatory second-person pronoun, *omae*, which further enhance the effect of the linguistic injury.

By the time Taichi snaps out of his anger, he sees Naoto crying and stops (2015: 141). Naoto, who has visible bruising on his wrists, says without turning to face Taichi that they cannot be lovers and that they were better as friends (2015: 142). Taichi is pictured reliving their past break up as he tries to apologise and get a hold of Naoto who ignores Taichi (2015: 143). Taichi is visualised with a hopeless expression, face partially hidden under his hair and biting his lip (2015: 145), then tries to apologise through text where he admits he was at fault (2015: 149-150). Naoto skips lectures at the university and thinks about the relationship and what he even wanted in the first place. They stop speaking to each other after the incident.



In chapter five, after Naoto returns to class, Naoto tells Taichi that he is also at fault without looking Taichi in the eye (2015: 153). Taking responsibility for abuse too is common behaviour among IPV survivors (for example, Kamimura et al. 2014). Seeing Fumi being close to Taichi, Naoto realises he wanted to be Taichi's family but thinks he cannot be because he is not a girl (2015: 155-156), which again enforces heteronormativity through the display of Naoto's insecurity about social norms. This could also be critique against the stiff social structures regulated by heterosexuality, but such critique remains on a shallow level, at least for now. However, towards the end of his realisation Naoto is depicted as relieved, now that they can be friends forever with Taichi (2015: 158). They act friendly at the university but when Naoto sees Taichi spending more time with Fumi he is depicted hurt and jealous (2015: 162, 170-171) and is shown longing for closeness with Taichi (2015: 170-171). Later, Naoto hears that Taichi's father has been hospitalised, and Naoto is sad that he cannot be there for Taichi's support (2015: 173-176). Naoto thinks he cannot act as normal although they should be back to being friends (2015: 182). Throughout the chapter Naoto is depicted as confused over his own feelings which is understandable considering how Taichi and Naoto have not had an open discussion about their fight or their past issues. Both Taichi and Naoto show jealous insecurity about each other, but throughout the manga they do not communicate and mostly act on assumptions resulting in miscommunication. This could be a reflective critique on Japanese masculinity, or the stereotype about men's inability (all men in general) to communicate their feelings, and how it results in pain for their loved ones.

In the sixth and final chapter, Taichi and Naoto's friend Fumi confesses her feelings to Taichi, who declines her affections. Taichi explains that he loves someone else but that he made a mistake, which Naoto overhears. (2015: 192-193) Fumi offers advice and says that it is important to communicate one's feelings even if it feels like it will not go well, as she herself demonstrated (2015: 195, 202). Moved to tears by Taichi's honesty Naoto rides after Taichi on a bike (2015: 202) and is honest about his feelings and fears about not being able to be family because they are both men (2015: 208-209):

N: 「なんで…なんで俺なんだよ。俺……太一の友達と恋人にはなれても。家族にはなってやれないのに。」

*'nande... nande ore nan da yo. ore... taichi no tomodachi to koibito ni wa naretemo. Kazoku ni wa natte yarenai no ni.'*

"Why... why me? I... even when I become Taichi's friend and lover, I can't become [your/his] family."

Taichi responds by questioning the necessity of labels for their relationship for them to be together and tells Naoto he loves him and wants to live together (2015: 212-214):

T: 「なあ、好きだよ。なおと一緒に生きていきたい。」

*'nā, suki da yo. nao to isshoni ikite ikitai.'*

"Hey, I love you. I want to live together with Nao."

The romantic coding in the scene is emphasised by many of the panels focusing on their facial expressions, hands grasping fabric, and the two of them laying on the snow holding each other after having fallen on the bicycle. The mood between the two seems to lighten when they head to Taichi's place and Naoto kisses Taichi who is reluctant to accept the kiss and they talk about the fight they had the last time they were together, and establish consent (2015: 218-219):

T: 「オイやめろって。」

*'oi yamerotte.'*

"Hey I said stop."

N: 「なんで？」

*'nande?'*

"Why?"

T: 「なんでって…その…嫌だろ？」

*'nandette... sono... iya darou?'*

"What do you mean why... I mean... you don't like it, right?"

N: 「は？」

*'ha?'*

"Huh?"

T: 「だから…セックスすんの……嫌だって言ってたし。」

*'dakara... sekkusu sunno... iya datte ittetashi.'*

"So... let's not have sex... you even said you didn't like it."

N: 「あー… 悪い…あん時はまあ不安？っていうか。色々思うことあったんだけどー… 今はさあ。むしろ怖いもんなしって感じ！だからさあ太一の好きにしちゃって！」

*'aā... warui... an toki wa mā fuan? -tteiuka. iro iro omou koto attan da kedō... ima wa sā. mushiro kowaimon nashitte kanji! dakara sā taichi no suki ni shichatte!'*

"Ah, my bad. That time I was, well anxious? Or something. There was a lot going on but now, y'know, on the contrary I feel like there's nothing to be afraid of! So Taichi, you can have your way with me!"

T: 「…好きに、ね…」

*'...suki ni, ne...'*

"What I like, huh..."

After their talk Naoto and Taichi have sex that is depicted with them both enjoying it. Taichi gives Naoto a ring he had had for Naoto since high school, and apologises for his behaviour during their break-up in high school (2015: 225), which is an important moment in the overall emotional climax started in this final chapter by the bicycle ride. Later, Naoto comes out to Fumi and tells her he and Taichi are dating but also apologises for coming out despite Fumi being depicted as understanding and supportive, and against Naoto's need to apologise for coming out (2015: 228-229):

N: 「いき…いきなりキモいカミングアウトしてごめんな。」

'iki... ikinari kimoi kamingu auto shite gomen na.'

"Sor... sorry for suddenly coming out grossly like that."

F: 「ちがうくて」

'chigaukute'

"That's not it!"

The scene has Naoto make a self-deprecating joke about coming out of the closet by associating it with being something nasty. The readers may understand it reflecting Naoto's insecurity but again, the homophobia is included in the discourse by presenting readers with the idea that derogatory jokes about sexual minorities may be alright. The ending leaves the reader on a hopeful note that things will get better now that the two have started to communicate with each other: Naoto and Taichi get back together again with Naoto justifying Taichi's previous actions as having come from a place of love, allowing him to forgive Taichi for the sexual assault which, interestingly, is not described as one in the manga. This is an example of *romanticisation of violence regarding love* that also second-handily reinforces the performance of masculinity as violent being acceptable if it comes with the intention of love. It also paints the domestic violence and rape scene, as well as their previous habits of settling differences through fighting, into a format that should be understood as humane. However, it may also give the audience ideas that if their partners behave in similar ways that they too, should be as understanding as Naoto or as relentless as Taichi in trying to secure their chosen partner. Hopefully, as the ending depicted the importance of communication and consent that the critique towards Naoto and Taichi's displays of harmful behaviour goes further than surface deep in the minds of the readers.

#### 4.2 Analysis of *Midnight Rain* (2019)

The type of men featured in the story fall under the "bearded uncle" (*hige oji* 髭オジ) category (Figure 9, 2019: cover page), which implies that the main characters do not fall into the *bishōnen* (beautiful boys) category associated with the BL aesthetics of young, smooth faced boy-like characters also

present in *Escape Journey* (2015), but instead they sport beards and have adult bodies. On top of different aesthetics, *Midnight Rain* is set apart from *Escape Journey* by featuring a story taking place outside Japan between foreigners with Western influenced names: Ethan (seme) and Mike (uke).

In chapter one, the first glance at Ethan and Mike is given to the readers by a two-page spread depicting Mike falling in Ethan's arms outside an apartment building with rain falling. (2019: 3-5) After setting expectations for the story to follow, the scene then cuts to where the story begins: Ethan hears commotion outside his apartment, he goes over to look at the sounds through his window shutters. The commotion is revealed to be a fight in an alley outside Ethan's apartment building. A close-up of Mike with a bloody face, and a splash of blood on his clothes, cuts to a close-up of Ethan's face, which is only half visible through the window shutters. The scene ends with Ethan closing the shutters. The visual effects in this scene feature dark contrasts between light and shadows, to both enhance the nightly atmosphere of the event and to give the story an aura of seriousness. These visual effects carry over the whole story, setting it apart from *Escape Journey's* lighter visuals. (2019: 6-7)

The following day Ethan and Mike meet at a laundromat opposite Ethan's apartment. Ethan notices Mike cleaning his bloodied clothes and starts talking to Mike in a light and embarrassed manner, depicted by the sound effects associated with his speech and by his facial expressions. Ethan admits to witnessing the fight and gives Mike tips on how to clean blood off clothes. Mike is depicted slightly irritated and uninterested in Ethan's small-talk, by his prompt "one-word" replies. However, the two start to connect and introduce each other by name. (2019: 8-18) The next scene shows Ethan meeting his debt-collector at a diner, and it is revealed that Ethan has been paying off a debt left by his parents for ten years while working at a factory, refusing jobs offered by the debt-collector, with three more years remaining to pay the rest of the debt off. Ethan's life is described as "miserable" by the debt-collector (2019: 19-22), which is visually enhanced later by portrayals of next-door domestic fights and mould on his ceiling (2019: 24-25). After getting home from the diner, Ethan is shown sliding on the floor with his back against the door, holding his head in his hands. He is shown thinking how he is tired of his repetitive lifestyle, about not seeing Mike since they first met a week ago. (2019: 26-27) Startled by his door buzzer, Ethan gets up from the floor and, to his surprise, he finds none other than a wounded Mike at the door, who is shown fainting and falling into Ethan's arms, with rain pouring in the background, as predicted. (2019: 28-30) Continuous references to the title of the manga do not go unnoticed by the reader, as Ethan brings up "midnight", "rainy season", reminders which are amplified by the dark and rainy visuals, which make it difficult to ascertain the time of day, giving the story an overall feeling of a dreamlike state (2019: 24-25).

The events of chapter two take place four days later, with Mike shown waking up at Ethan's apartment, and his wounds having been tended to by Ethan. The two have a conversation about why

Ethan let Mike in, and how Mike was the one who came to Ethan. The building of tension between the two men is depicted by Ethan casually touching Mike's chin in a very familiar way, and by showing Mike remembering Ethan whispering "It'll be alright" (*daijōbu da, maiku*) (2019: 39) in his ear while Mike was unconscious. Mike's reaction to Ethan's touch, and the sudden flashback from his sickbed, is to physically push Ethan away, after which Ethan asks Mike's consent to put ointment near his mouth and change the bandages on his wounds and Mike allows this. The scene's mood takes a different turn, as Ethan states the following, and continues into a scene featuring non-consensual sex (2019: 43):

E: 「…ここまで大人しいと指以外のモノも入れたくなるな」

*'...koko made otonashii to yubi igai no mono mo iretaku naru na'*

"Since you've been so obedient until now, it makes me feel like inserting something besides my fingers too..."

Mike snaps out of his thoughts, seemingly confused, and says that if Ethan does anything weird, Mike will beat him to death (2019: 43):

M: 「変な真似したらぶっ殺すぞ」

*'henna mane shitara bukkorosu zo'*

"I'll end you if you do anything weird."

Ethan replies he is only joking, which frames potential harassment as a joke (Benedict 2005). The scene gives examples of sexual harassment in the form of Ethan's comment, and of gaslighting or manipulating someone to question their own sense of mind, in the form of Ethan downplaying his actions as a joke. Sexually coded, the scene puts further emphasis on the length of Mike's eyelashes from Ethan's point of view, as well as on Mike's closed eyelids, and the small drop of drool from Mike's mouth, as Ethan applies the ointment to Mike's mouth (2019: 44):

E: 「案外睫毛が長いな」

*'angai matsuge ga nagai na'*

"[His/your] eyelashes are unexpectedly long."

The frames show less and less of Ethan's facial expressions as the scene unfolds. Ethan then asks if it [Mike's wounds and applying the ointment] hurts, and when Mike replies that it does not hurt, Ethan pushes Mike down on the mattress. Hovering over Mike, Ethan says (2019: 46):

E: 「これは痛くないよ」

*'kore wa itaku nai yo'*

"This won't hurt"

In the next frame, Ethan is shown grabbing Mike's penis and Ethan starts pleasuring Mike against his will. In this scene Ethan ignores Mike's lack of consent and takes advantage of Mike's weakened state. Mike resists Ethan by telling him to stop (2019: 47):

M: 「やめー やめろ!!」

*'yame- yamero!!'*

"Sto- stop!!"

However, despite Mike's verbal protest, Ethan does not stop, and tells Mike what Ethan is doing is alright, just like before in Mike's memory from when he was wounded and sick (2019: 48):

E: 「大丈夫 マイク」

*'daijōbu maiku!'*

"Mike, it's alright."

This apparently startles Mike, and in the next frames he is pictured to be involuntarily easing into Ethan's touch. While he is performing fellatio on Mike, Ethan questions his own actions, which is displayed by Ethan thinking to himself (2019: 49):

E: 「俺はいったい何をやってる？何が大丈夫なんだ？これじゃ これじゃまるで…」

*'ore wa ittai nani o yatteru? nani ga daijōbu nan da? kore ja, kore ja maru de...'*

"What on earth am I doing? What's supposed to be alright? This is like, this is almost like..."

Ethan is portrayed to be contemplating his actions and comes to his senses seemingly shocked by what he is doing to Mike. But not before Mike ejaculates and punches Ethan. In the next frames Ethan is depicted to behave in a sheepish and apologetic manner and he apologises to Mike (2019: 52):

E: 「ごめんね ホントごめん」

*'gomen ne, honto gomen'*

"I'm sorry, really sorry."

Mike tells Ethan to get out and to wipe his hand. Ethan starts treating Mike like a guest again, as if nothing happened, and tells Mike to make himself comfortable.

E: 「ゆ・・・ゆっくりしてて」

*'yu... yukkuri shitete'*

"Ma... make yourself comfortable."

After he leaves the room, Ethan is depicted remorseful, as he sighs and thinks to himself (2019: 54):

E: 「はああ… どーかしてる 何てことしちゃってんだ俺 急に あんな顔するから…」

*'haa... dōkashiteru, nante koto shichattan da ore, kyou ni, anna kao suru kara...'*

“Sigh... What’s wrong with me? I screwed up, didn’t I? Because he suddenly made that face...”

Here it is clearly shown in Ethan’s discourse, that he does not fully take responsibility for his actions, indicated by the *cha* form which implies doing something without meaning to. He seems to be aware that what just occurred was not alright. However, Ethan places responsibility over his own actions on Mike as he implies, he cannot control himself, or his impulses, because he got aroused by the other person’s facial expression. This discourse reproduces the myth that a person, a man in this case, is not able to control his sexual urges if he gets aroused. By implementing this myth in a sexual setting, it may naturalise the idea that it is normal for men to behave like this, that their sexual needs or impulses cannot be controlled, but that outside of the situation they are nice and gentle still. The scene ends with Ethan hovering over the sink, imagining the face Mike made and with Ethan starting to masturbate to his fantasy (2019: 54). Fantasies, however, do not only reside in the head: they have real implications in the social world (Dines: 114) especially in pornographic or related imagery.

Chapter three features Mike’s background story: Mike explains that he is used to being alone and living a life of running into trouble and getting injuries because of his direct personality. Mike has had no one around him and he is used to being alone, which is why Mike is uncomfortable with Ethan’s kind words and smiles, cooking, and touching Mike’s skin. Mike is the most uncomfortable of getting used to spending time at Ethan’s flat. After the sexual assault the previous night, Mike notes that Ethan cannot look Mike in the eyes, and thinks Ethan is going to pretend like “that” did not happen. Seemingly irritated, Mike says he will leave which Ethan brushes off by saying they should have Mike’s favourite meat the next day, and how leaving would aggravate Mike’s wound. Mike, now angry, grabs Ethan by the collar and pushes him against the wall. Mike tells Ethan to shut up after Ethan touches his shoulder. Mike’s thoughts and his reaction about the situation reflect his background that how he feels intimidated by kindness (2019: 60):

M: (何も望まない親切なんてあるわけない。今までも、これからも。だから慣れてはいけない。)

*(nani mo nozomanai shinsetsu nante aru wake ga nai. ima made mo, kore kara mo. dakara narete wa ikenai.)*

(There’s no such thing as kindness without expecting anything in return. That’s how it’s been, that’s how it will continue to be. That’s why I can’t allow myself to get used to [kindness].)

Mike punches Ethan again after he does not stop talking and threatens to kill Ethan if he tells anyone about Mike. Ethan, on the floor on his knees, grabs Mike's hand and offers to leave the apartment in return for Mike staying, saying he is concerned about Mike. Mike thinks it would be better if Ethan cursed at him and hated him instead of expressing kind gestures, which implies Mike is experiencing psychological conflict. Mike is wounded, has been assaulted by Ethan, but Ethan does not verbally acknowledge aspects unrelated to Mike's wounds. There is a contradiction between Ethan's previous behaviour and the way he says he has Mike's best interests in mind, which could be interpreted as a form of gaslighting, when the abuser pretends nothing is wrong and verbally expresses care for the abused, despite sexually assaulting Mike the previous night. Mike looks at Ethan with disgust and tells him to "eat shit" (*kuso kurae*, クソ食らえ) (2019: 64) as Mike leaves the apartment into the rain outside.

Mike goes to beat up one of the guys who injured him and compares the thug's reaction to Ethan's over being beaten up while confirming to himself that the normal reaction is to be frightened and beg for one's life, unlike how Ethan reacted by taking the punches Mike threw at him and offering solace in his home. Mike lets the thug go after threatening to stab a knife in their neck if he sees them again. Mike grunts in pain and remembers a fight during which his opponent (O) says that no one would miss him if he died (2019: 70):

O: 「テメェなんて死んでも誰も気にしねえ！」

*'temē nante shindemo dare mo ki ni shinē!'*

"No one would give a shit if you died!"

To which Mike thinks to himself (2019: 70-71):

M: (心のどこかで。もしかしたら、という声が耳鳴りのように止まない。もしかしたら。

あいつならこんな俺でも…)

*(kokoro no doko ka de moshikashitara, to iu koe ga miminari no yō ni tomarenai. Moshikashitara aitsu nara konna ore mo...)*

(Perhaps somewhere in my heart a voice like that rings without end. But perhaps with him, someone like me could...)

This discourse indicates that Mike sees Ethan as someone who is different from the people Mike has been around, thinks that maybe with Ethan, even someone like Mike could be missed if dead. Ethan goes to the laundromat and finds Mike there. Ethan is worried that Mike got injured again and asks about the blood on Mike's clothes. Mike yells at Ethan, asks if he does not have any pride and is confused why Ethan is not angry even after Mike beat him up. Ethan admits he was too embarrassed



to say at first, that the day Mike came to him, he was thinking about dying, about giving up. Ethan says Mike clung to him wanting to live and it gave Ethan a reason to keep going. Ethan takes Mike's hands and Mike allows the touch. Ethan says that even if it was by chance, he is the one who was saved first which is followed by (2019: 76):

E: 「しかも俺、お前にムラっとして衝動的なことしちゃったし…朝も何か言い間違っただけで  
お前に嫌われて当然だと思う。だからお前にはいくら怒られてもめちゃくちゃにされて  
も大丈夫。」

*'shikamo ore, omae ni muratto shite shōdōtekina koto shichattashi... asa mo nani ka ii machigatta  
mitai de omae ni kiraware tōzen da to omou. dakara omae ni wa ikura okoraretemo mechakucha ni  
saretemo daijōbu.'*

"Besides, it was me who did those reckless things to you... in the morning it seemed like I had said something wrong, so you hating me was to be expected. That's why I'm alright no matter how mad or crazy you get at me."

Here Ethan takes responsibility for his previous mistakes but does not apologize or give himself agency, as is again implied using the *cha* form. Ethan tries to make an effort in respecting Mike's boundaries by asking him permission to at least treat his wounds, and by offering to bring supplies to the laundromat since Mike has expressed he does not feel comfortable staying at Ethan's apartment. Mike has been listening with a flustered look on his face, and as Ethan is leaving, Mike suggests he does not hate Ethan. As Ethan turns around, Mike grabs him by the collar and pulls him into a kiss, a scene that ends chapter three. Both men are displayed emotionally broken, with flaws, and not the necessary tools to have a healthy relationship, yet they do also express capacity to try.

Chapter four begins by following the scene readers were left with at the end of the previous chapter, with Mike and Ethan sharing a passionate kiss. Ethan says he did not intend for things to lead up to them kissing and the two have the following conversation (2019: 84-86):

E: 「こんなことに…なるつもりじゃなかったのに…」

*'konna koto ni... naru tsumori janakatta no ni...'*

"Things weren't supposed to... end up like this..."

M: 「嫌なのか？」

*'iyana no ka?'*

"You don't like it?"

E: 「…そう見えんの？」

*'...sō mien no?'*

"...does it look like that?"

M: 「前から誰にでも安っぽい冗談言いながらちんこいじくったりしてたのか？」

*'mae kara dare ni demo yasuppoi joudan iinagara, chinko ijikuttari shiteta no ka?'*

"Weren't you teasing my dick earlier while saying those cheap jokes?"

E: 「いや…」

*'iya...'*

"No..."

M: 「なら？ 俺に発情した？ 怪我して動けない相手によ？ 指以外どこをしゃぶって欲しい訳？」 [While touching Ethan's groin through his boxers]

*'nara? ore ni hatsujō shita? kega shite ugokenai aite ni yo? yubi igai doko o shabutte hoshii wake?'*

"What, then? Did you get aroused by me? By a wounded partner, unable to move? Where was it you wanted to shove something other than fingers?"

E: 「ここでこんなことしないで俺ん家に…」

*'koko de konna koto shinaide oren uchi ni...'*

"Let's not do this here, at my place..."

M: 「は？ 家？ 行って何する気？ マジ変態じゃねえ？」

*'ha? uchi? itte nani suru ki? maji hentai ja nē?'*

"Huh? Your place? To go do what exactly? Isn't that really perverted?"

E: 「お前が揉みまくってるからだろ」

*'omae ga momimakutteru kara daro'*

"Because you keep rubbing me."

M: 「テメェは良かったのに俺はダメなのか？」（こいつマジ…こんな酷いツラになっても感じてやがんの）

*'temē wa yokatta no ni ore wa dame na no ka? (koitsu maji de... konna hidoi tsura ni nattemo kanjite yagan no)*

"It was alright for you [to do this] but I'm not allowed? (Seriously, this guy... making such a horrible face."

Mike verbally jabs Ethan with a linguistic injury about how Ethan behaved when Mike was in a vulnerable state, making Mike ejaculate against his will. Mike says that unlike how Ethan handled things before, Mike will take responsibility for "it" instead of abandoning people. Ethan looks shocked and his attitude changes from taking it all into a more assertive one, leads Mike to sit on a counter at the laundromat. The scene unravels into the two men having sex at the laundromat, Ethan says "even though I was desperately trying to hold myself back, I'm thankful you'll be taking responsibility. This scene is crucial, as it is the first time that they have consensual sex, and talk about boundaries, albeit indirectly by provocative taunting tones. Ethan expresses discomfort at having sex in public, at the laundromat, but is again depicted giving into his urges, partially by Mike's taunting. Responsibility is also brought up in their conversation, and Ethan comments on how he wanted to hold back but is glad to give in to his wants if Mike indeed takes responsibility. Here, taking responsibility refers to accepting the consequences of what is about to occur, which could be interpreted as there not being any grounds to complain later if something undesirable happens during sex. In a way then, "taking responsibility" in the context of this BL manga and this scene, is code for the rape myth that consent once given lasts for the whole duration of sex, that once given the consent cannot be withdrawn. Ethan's masculinity is emphasised by him taking longer to cum than Mike (2019: 95). The next morning Ethan wakes up worried that Mike has left, but Mike is still in the apartment. Ethan says he is glad and happy about Mike staying, Mike thinks the sex was good for him too.

In chapter five, Ethan and Mike watch a show about dogs on the television, and it turns out Mike likes dogs. Ethan jokingly compares himself to one, which makes Mike blush. (2019: 105) Comparing himself to a dog emphasises the dehumanisation of male human sexuality and desensitises the reader who sympathises with Mike's character to the assault (Miedzian 2005: 163) he has experienced earlier in chapter two. It also reproduces the myth present in Japanese masculinity, that male human sexuality is animalistic and uncontrollable, leaving all responsibility during sexual intercourse, or sexual assault, on the shoulders of the participant or possible victim.

After Ethan goes to work, Mike thinks about being comfortable in the apartment and not having to worry about anyone coming to kill him, and about being able to sleep well, too. This is a clear change from his thought in the earlier chapters, pointing out a shift in the narrative. Mike wonders if Ethan is gay because Ethan did not hesitate having sex with a man. This is an example of Mike distancing himself from homosexuality, which is revealed when Mike ponders that even though it

[having sex with a man] was not a first time for him either, that he is not gay himself (2019: 110-111). This discourse is a common trope in BL, which is meant to put emphasis on the main pairings' love's uniqueness. Since Mike is "not gay himself" (2019: 111), the desire he feels for Ethan is special, which portrays their love narrative as unique (McLelland et al. 2015). Mike also thinks Ethan is mature in age and in experience.

Mike goes out to buy supplies to help Ethan out at the apartment. While Mike has been out, the debt-collector has gone to visit Ethan's place and Mike finds about Ethan's debt. When Ethan comes home from work at night, Mike tells him about the debt-collector dropping by, and Ethan confirms Mike knows about the debt. As Mike goes to sleep, Ethan rolls him over and Ethan's overshadowed facial expression stays hidden from Mike's point of view. Due to Mike's rough past, he is conditioned to think the worst: that Ethan is angry and that he will hurt Mike. Ethan then licks Mike's neck and laughs that his not in debt because of gambling, that Ethan is just poor, and the tension of Mike's anticipated violence absolves. IPV theory (Kamimura et al. 2014) comes to play in this scene, because Mike behaves like an abused partner or someone who has gotten used to being abused and expects it once he has gotten comfortable enough to let his guard down. It is also interesting, how the reader is left to believe violence may occur by how the characters and their viewpoints are positioned in the frames. It is then difficult not to emphasise with Mike and possibly experience the linguistic injury the characters' positioning, shadowed faces with hidden expressions may bring forth, especially in women readers, who may have experienced IPV themselves. Ethan assures Mike that he is fine, and that Mike does not have to worry about him. Mike believes Ethan but remembers Ethan saying before how he had been thinking about dying, and Mike realises that Ethan is lying.

In chapter six, Ethan comes home early from his work at the factory and has bought Mike clothes. Mike gets angry over Ethan spending money on clothes even though he is in debt. Ethan understands why Mike is upset but still insists on wanting to buy Mike nice things without asking first. As Mike is walking around angrily mulling over the events, in town he gets a phone call and is offered a job that will take him out of town. Mike hesitates at first but then takes the job offer after being provoked about having a "girl" by the caller (2019: 134). Mike justifies his decision by thinking that Ethan is the one hiding and lying about things, and how it would be troublesome to get Ethan to open up about his reasoning for his actions. Mike is also convinced about Ethan's benevolence coming to an end at some point, and that it is better for Mike to leave before he is abandoned by Ethan. They have sex, which is described as having gotten better and better, and how Ethan knows exactly what Mike likes, which annoys Mike. The sex is depicted as consensual with both partners willing. The description about the quality of sex boosts Ethan's masculinity, because it is masculine to know what a woman wants and likes (Kimmel 2005).

Mike is depicted doing household chores: cleaning the mould from the ceiling, cleaning, waiting up on Ethan as he had asked him to be home early in order for them to have a conversation. Mike is upset that Ethan is late and has not called, presenting the trope of a worried girlfriend, which is a clear indicator of Mike being the uke. Mike thinks to himself that he deliberately has not been opening up to Ethan, and it turns out they don't know much about each other after all. Mike admits to himself that he cares and wants Ethan to rely on him. Mike is depicted as coming to his senses and gets up to leave saying he has grown weak by being comfortable, which is a nod towards another performance of masculinity. Ethan comes home and catches Mike just as he is leaving, and Mike is shocked to see Ethan bloody.

The final chapter, chapter seven, starts with violence that is depicted as comical as Mike strikes Ethan after hugging him (2019: 151). It turns out that the blood on Ethan is not Ethan's blood but someone else's as Ethan had been in a fight. Ethan is happy that Mike was worried. Ethan got into a fight with the same people who stabbed Mike in chapter one. Mike and Ethan talk, and Ethan tells Mike more about his circumstances with the debt. It was passed on to him, from his father's gambling history, and Ethan has been paying his father's debt off little by little, not dreaming about anything, and falling into depression. Ethan notes that he may have burdened Mike by telling him about Ethan wanting to die, and how their current conversation might also be too much. Mike questions Ethan if he is sure about wanting to tell him about it. Ethan gives Mike a key to his apartment and asks him to stay. Mike is shocked and falls back into his routine of distancing himself by saying he will leave for the job he had been offered and that Mike only waited to let Ethan know because Ethan had taken care of him. Ethan remembers the day Mike came to him saying he did not want to die and asks Mike to stay. Mike accepts even though he thinks things will not end well. Ethan asks Mike if he is afraid of being happy. Mike is shocked and thinks that being happy is the thing he wants most. Mike belittles Ethan as Mike has done in every conversation perhaps as a defence mechanism allowing him to not show weakness. They head home, Ethan says he wants to take Mike out on his next day off, Mike kisses him and agrees to the plan. Ethan finds out Mike has had a cell phone the whole time, and the chapter ends with them bickering over Mike not giving Ethan his phone number.

## 5. Discussion

The hypotheses presented in the introduction are supported by the analysis to some extent. Based on the analysed scenes, the *rape myths and toxic gender statements* seen in *Escape Journey* (2015) can be described as the following statements: "it is not rape if there is love;" "the man could not help himself or control his urges;" "consent given once is always valid;" "violence is an acceptable means of

control if there is love.” Love is used to excuse mistreatment and use of power over the other, thus, one interpretation drawn from this analysis is that idealized love can be used to romanticise abuse in relationships in the context of BL manga. Violence is a reoccurring theme as a tool for advancing the plot in *Midnight Rain* (2019). However, as opposed to *Escape Journey* and in terms of “forced obscenity” (Shibata 2008), the forced ejaculation performed on Mike by Ethan does not cover the definition of assault or rape, making it an example of physical harassment instead. In both manga examples, linguistic injury is visible in the characters speech patterns in situations where they intend to hurt the other as well as in unintentional effects such as Fumi and Mikarin gossiping about Taichi in front of Naoto, not realising Naoto was in a complicated situation with Taichi. As *Escape Journey* and *Midnight Rain* have both attained high rankings in the Japanese BL scene, and have been translated into English by both fans and commercial publishers, these notions indicate that the manga have a large following of fans and readers. A large following then indicates that the messages in the text, ideology, and myths, have possibly reached and influenced far and wide.

Why then, is research related to rape culture important? One reason is to break the collective silence (Crowley 2005) surrounding rape culture and to visualise its prevalence in different social contexts. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that the future generations have access to language, vocabulary, and a safe space to verbalise their boundaries regarding unwanted sexual attention and experiences (Benedict 2005). Furthermore, to teach everyone that a “no” means no (Eguchi 2016), even if the body implies yes, and someone tries to push against those boundaries. Research on rape culture is thus important, because it offers its readers means and language to validate one’s own experience, which may bring forth a feeling that there is safety in numbers, and one does not have to be alone in silence. In a more academic sense, studies on rape culture clear a path towards equality, and a reality where rape culture would be considered controversial instead of normal, by critically assessing the social realities we live in right now, and how popular culture reflects these societal patterns. Most importantly, rape culture studies “teach girls to be both story-critical and media-critical” (Buchwald 2005: 223-219), as fairy tales and romance narratives can prove to be “dreadful gender role models for girls” (Buchwald 2005: 229).

In some ways BL may normalise discourses articulating violent sexuality and the ideology of ownership associated with love and sexuality, as portrayed by Naoto, Taichi, Ethan and Mike in how they treat their partners in attempting to dominate them, which reinforces the reality of rape culture. Women consumers of BL, thus, may help commodify discourses supporting rape culture through images of violent “love” by portraying it as romantic in a way that glamourises and seduces (hooks 2005: 295) people into further consumption of similar materials. Perhaps BL allows a platform for

women to learn their sexuality, which may mimic familiar heterosexual behaviour in an alternate setting, but further research is required to explore this idea further.

## 6. Conclusions

This thesis has attempted to find out how rape culture and the rape myths supporting it are represented in BL manga through excerpts taken from Ogeretsu Tanaka's *Escape Journey* (2015) and CTK's *Midnight Rain* (2019) and analysed within the CDA methodological framework. The research questions asked in the introduction were:

1. What kind of hegemonic discourses reproduce rape culture in BL manga?
2. How are these representations romanticised and what is the role of consent in these romance narratives?

As shown in the theory and analysis sections, hegemonic discourses reproducing rape culture in BL manga include statements that reinforce ideology of violent love. In both analysed manga, the happy ending of the couples was reached after painful interactions ranging from portrayals of domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, and multiple linguistic injuries. These situations were oftentimes portrayed in terms of humour together with visual coherency, and in both examples the violence was forgiven under the idea of "love", which is an example of how representations of rape culture may be romanticised in romance narratives. The role of consent was visited in both examples and the results were interesting: consent was articulated in the sexual scenarios presented in both analysed manga. These representations reflect the social realities of the people creating and consuming materials that hold these representations. Furthermore, representations of rape culture and the formulation of rape myths into consumable narratives reinforce the social realities they stem from. By looking at how one popular culture media modality, in this case BL manga, represents and reinforces rape myths and thus rape culture itself, we can spread and raise awareness towards the toxicity of these representations and the effect they may have on their consumers and creators.

One way to dismantle rape culture and objectification-oriented sexuality would be to make inter-subjective sexuality the new norm by making it mainstream through media outlets (Shibata 2008, Buchwald et al 2005). This would be beneficial for both children and adults, as it would help re-learn unhealthy patterns of conducting sexual objectification on a larger scale by raising awareness. Inter-subjective sexuality is subversive on its own and thus, a critique of sexual objectification which is one way of undoing sexual objectification. (Shibata 2008, Buchwald 2005)

This thesis has attempted to shed some light on the research questions about the hegemonic discourses supporting rape culture in BL manga, as well as give an idea regarding the romanticisation of rape culture representations in the context of BL manga. By using the CDA method as a framework, it is possible to analyse the underlying power structures and relations within the language used in BL manga selected for analysis in the context of rape culture and linguistic injury. In comparison to previous research, the thoughts presented in this thesis follow similar lines on how exploring one's sexuality in a safe space is wonderful, despite the toxic elements presented in BL manga. Readers are not without agency, after all, so hopefully raising awareness on these critical aspects will influence the readers of this project (and BL manga) to consume their preferred media with a few grains of salt. However, further research is needed to give a broader perspective into the subject at hand. Due to the size and the limitations of this project, the target audience reactions, for example, are not included in the analysis. Further research could investigate and interview Japanese, Western and other BL readers for further insight into how cultural and linguistic differences affect the interpretation of rape culture discourses together with romance narratives.

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## Appendices

Figure 1. (© Riina Pesonen 2017) A sign behind Kyoto's Kiyomizudera temple stating: 「危険。女性の一人歩きはやめましょう。」 ("Danger. Let us put an end to women walking alone.") and signed by the Kyoto police headquarters (京都府警察本部).



Figure 2. (© Riina Pesonen 2017) A sign taped to a desk at Hokkaido University's North Library, which states the following: 「ちかんに注意！特に居眠り中の女子学生が狙われています。」 ("Beware of molestation! Especially women daydreaming students are being targeted.") and signed by the Hokkaido University North Library.





Figure 3. (Libre © Ogeretsu Tanaka 2015, Escape Journey (EJ) 2015: front cover)



Figure 4. (Libre © Ogeretsu Tanaka, EJ 2015: back / inner cover, under the cover leaflet)





Figure 5. (Libre © Ogeretsu Tanaka, EJ 2015: 3)



Figure 6. (Libre © Ogeretsu Tanaka, EJ 2015: 4)



Figure 7. (Libre © Ogeretsu Tanaka, EJ 2015: 138)





Figure 8. (Libre © Ogeretsu Tanaka, EJ 2015: 139)



Figure 9. (Libre © CTK, Midnight Rain 2019: cover page)

