

**ENGL 466**  
**Etienne Rutkowski**  
**Proposal for Dr. Dara Greaves**

For this ENGL 466 (Directed Reading) course, I would like to focus on representations of adolescent and young adult sexuality in literature and popular culture. I will be narrowing my scope to look at coming-of-age experiences, specifically how they relate to consent, disclosure, and sexual development. Within this framework, one of the concepts that I will be analyzing is literary depictions and representations of “adultification” (which UBC Wiki describes as “children being exposed to adult knowledge and engaging in behaviours understood as adult-like”; adultification can also be interpreted as the treatment of children or youth as if they are adults, and being held to expectations of maturity beyond their years). Relevant sub-concepts of adultification will include child grooming, innocence, vulnerability, parentification, and infantilization. In relation to adultification, I would like to explore how the assumption of these concepts is taken advantage of. Another one of the concepts that I will be analyzing is the sexual victimization of young men and boys. I hope to explore male sexual assault, and how the existence of male sexual assault intersects with male privilege and allyship, especially as it relates to feminism. Within the scope of adolescent sexuality, I will be exploring depictions and representations of sexual development or expression as taboo. In this way, I want to connect the concepts I am exploring to a larger theme of disclosure, and how disclosure (or lack thereof) has a role to play in perpetuating the concepts I am analyzing. To summarize, I would like to investigate how the concepts I am exploring in literature and popular culture connect to and intersect with broader themes of coming-of-age and adolescent sexuality, including consent, disclosure, gender stereotypes, and sexual development.

Some of the questions this study will explore include:

How do factors such as race, gender, and sexual identity play into processes of adultification, and is adultification a common factor relating to child grooming and sexual abuse?

Does contemporary social media intensify the adultification of youth?

Are there any meaningful explorations of the effects of adultification to be found in contemporary film, TV, social media, and/or literature? What do they say about the relationships between adultification, adolescent sexuality, and vulnerability to sexual abuse?

What factors contribute to the greater stigma surrounding the sexual victimization of young men and boys? Do constructions of masculinity – as powerful, invulnerable, or lascivious – make it more difficult for male survivors of sexual assault to disclose their experiences? Do stereotypical notions of masculinity also make it harder for young men and boys to give consent or to avoid non-consensual encounters?

How do experiences of sexual assault in young men and boys complicate male privilege? Does male sexual assault survival pose challenges for allyship with women? Does it create unique opportunities for solidarity with female sexual assault survivors?

How do factors such as age and gender influence what is considered taboo in terms of sexual expression? Do social norms concerning what is considered “speakable” and “unspeakable” make it more difficult for adolescents to explore their sexuality in safe and consensual ways and/or to disclose forms of sexual abuse?