

## **Incestual Duplication by Female Sex Offenders: Lot's Daughters (Genesis 19:30–38) as Challenge to Typologies and Violent Family-Systems<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Against the background of the often female-focused view of sexual abuse victims, this paper addresses the issue of male-identifying victims of sexual violence through the lens of the Bible. I tackle one particular form of sexual abuse: female-on-male sexual violence, of the “forced/made to penetrate” type through a re-reading of Genesis 19:30–38. Bearing in mind that this narrative was written in a social context differing in multiple ways from current societies, I, nonetheless, hope to show its relevance for contemporary practices and thinking. In order to do so, this paper intends to show how the story of Lot and his daughters, as told in Genesis 19:30–38 informs and challenges current perspectives on typologies of female sex offenders. Additionally, in analysing the broader context of the narrative of Lot's rape by his daughters, the present study aims to incorporate theories of traumatic family systems, all while evaluating in what way this system is present and how it affects the intrafamilial violence. The paper first situates the problem present in the Biblical narrative, and then evaluates the narrative against typologies of female sex offenders and theories of systematic abuse. Next, it assesses the daughters of Lot under a multiform perspective and considers their identity as both victims and abusers. Finally, it aims to show how a biblical narrative could critically inform current typologies of female sex offenders and provide insights considering abusive systems.

### **KEYWORDS**

Genesis 19; Lot's daughters; Lot; male rape; sex offender typologies; systematic psychology; female-to-male sexual violence; forced to penetrate

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Writing about sexual abuse remains a task to undertake with absolute care, respecting the *humanity* of all, against the *inhuman* incident that took place. Gender seems to play a role in how we commonly imagine victims and perpetrators of sexual violence. With the *#MeToo* movement, for example, attention was raised especially for female-identifying victims of sexual abuse and created the opportunity, in many cases, for speaking out long-hidden stories and allowed (at least partially) for a public debate of the matters. However, male victims of female sexual violence

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was stimulated by the courses of the Certificate for the Interdisciplinary Approach of Sexual Abuse, at Université Catholique de Louvain, 2021–2022. The insights there stimulated me in reading Genesis 19 with new eyes. In writing this paper, I am greatly indebted to the reviewers and editors of this article, who made useful suggestions and helped me “stay on track.” E. De Doncker is Aspirante at F.R.S.-FNRS.

seem largely left out of the picture.<sup>2</sup> The public opinion seems to be, generally, that men cannot be violated sexually by women. Or, as Siobhan Weare puts it, the main opinion seems: “Oh you’re a guy, how could you be raped by a woman, that makes no sense.”<sup>3</sup>

Stereotypes about male bodies and male behaviour underly the myth of the “unrapeability” of men, also called “male rape myth(s),” where several gendered and sexual stereotypes culminate in and sustain the myth that “real men can’t get raped.”<sup>4</sup> Concerning male bodies, these stereotypes imply a connection between erection, sexual arousal and consent: from the stereotypical image of the “hardwired,” heterosexual male, *always* interested in sex (understood as active penetration, not undergoing penetration), an erection is viewed as a direct and consented interest in sexual acts.<sup>5</sup> The stereotypical male appears here as a sexual predator, “insatiable,” always interested – how could this “insatiable man” possibly be violated, especially in the sexual act he “preys upon”?<sup>6</sup> These myths are harmful, often leading to feelings of guilt and shame for the male sexual victim, even causing an underreporting of sexual violence by the male victims.<sup>7</sup> Stereotypes about women also underly the myth that men could not be raped,

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<sup>2</sup> Advocating for gender inclusion (male and female) in the assessment of sexual violence, see: Jessica A. Turchik, Claire L. Hebenstreit, and Stephanie S. Judson, “An Examination of the Gender Inclusiveness of Current Theories of Sexual Violence in Adulthood: Recognizing Male Victims, Female Perpetrators, and Same-Sex Violence.” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 17.2 (2016): 133–48. An example of the lack of inclusion of men in the public debate around sexual violence in Belgium: Helen Blow, “Ook mannen zijn slachtoffer van seksueel geweld,” *Sociaal Net*, 16 October 2018, [tinyurl.com/5n6em86n](https://tinyurl.com/5n6em86n). See also Elodie Blogie, “Les hommes aussi peuvent être victimes de viol,” *Le Soir*, 3 February 2020, [tinyurl.com/w7dw46f8](https://tinyurl.com/w7dw46f8).

<sup>3</sup> Siobhan Weare, “‘Oh You’re a Guy, How Could You Be Raped by a Woman, That Makes No Sense’: Towards a Case for Legally Recognising and Labelling ‘Forced-to-Penetrate’ Cases as Rape,” *International Journal of Law in Context* 14.1 (2018): 110–31, doi:[10.1017/S1744552317000179](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1744552317000179).

<sup>4</sup> Cristina L. Reitz-Krueger, Sadie J. Mummert, Sara M. Troupe, “Real Men Can’t Get Raped: An Examination of Gendered Rape Myths and Sexual Assault among Undergraduates,” *Journal of Aggression Conflict and Peace Research* 9.4 (2017): 314–23, doi:[10.1108/JACPR-06-2017-0303](https://doi.org/10.1108/JACPR-06-2017-0303).

<sup>5</sup> The most extensive survey on “male rape myths” has been carried out by Jessica Turchik and Katie Edwards, who discern nine major myths pertaining to male sexual victimisation: (a) men cannot be raped; (b) “real” men can defend themselves against rape; (c) only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; (d) men are not affected by rape (or not as much as women); (e) a woman cannot sexually assault a man; (f) male rape only happens in prisons; (g) sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; (h) homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; and (i) if a victim physically responds to an assault he must have wanted it. See: Jessica A. Turchik, & Katie M. Edwards, “Myths about Male Rape: A Literature Review,” *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 13 (2012): 211–12, doi:[10.1037/a0023207](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023207).

<sup>6</sup> Walfield has shown in a survey on the acceptance of the so-called male-rape myths, indicated by Ruchik and Edward, that the theme of male sexual insatiability prevails as a consistent theme among the rape myths adhered to, explicitly viewing erection and ejaculation as sexual arousal and consent. See Scott M. Walfield, “‘Men Cannot Be Raped’: Correlates of Male Rape Myth Acceptance,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36.13 (2021): 6408, doi:[10.1177/0886260518817777](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518817777).

<sup>7</sup> See: Richard Tewksbury, “Effects of Sexual Assaults on Men: Physical, Mental, and Sexual Consequences,” *International Journal of Men’s Health* 6 (2007): 22–35, doi:[10.3149/jmh.0601.22](https://doi.org/10.3149/jmh.0601.22); P. Tjaden, and N. Thoennes, *Extent,*

especially not by female offenders. In the essentialist, gender-stereotyped view, women are defined by “sensitivity, dependence, passivity, emotionality, quietness, innocence, grace, caring and purity.”<sup>8</sup> In this view, female sexuality is associated with sensuality at best, and passivity more generally; its connection with any sort of violence is absent. How could a passive, dependent woman rape a strong, independent man? Except for (sensual) manipulation – as a wholly different motive and approach from male perpetrators – women, in the essentialist understanding, *cannot* rape men, it is *unnatural* to them.<sup>9</sup> It then seems that “real women” cannot rape men, and that “real men” cannot be raped by women.

At the same time, while not justifying the lack of research on male victims of sexual abuse, the majority of victims of sexual abuse being female also plays a role in the discrepancy in which victims are focused on, male victims being largely left aside. In academic research on sexual violence, a similar discrepancy is to be observed. Bell hooks comments on this lack of research about male sexual victims:

It lends credibility to stereotypes that suggest men are violent, women are not; men are abusers, women are victims. ... It allows us to overlook or ignore the extent to which women exert coercive authority over others or act violently. The fact that women may not commit violent acts as often as men does not negate the reality of female violence.<sup>10</sup>

This discrepancy is not only harmful for male victims and the way they are (not) presented in the media, but plays on a larger scale, too, a negative role in lending credibility to gender stereotypes such as men being *invulnerable*.

Turning then to research that recognises male-identifying victims, another remarkable feature arises. Research about female-to-male abuse focusses largely on (cis-gendered) female offenders with a paedo- or hebephilic profile, while ignoring for the most part violence by women against male adults.<sup>11</sup> This focal point of research would underline the physically vulnerable aspects of women as only capable of victimising younger, and therefore, weaker males. Consequently, the general outlook of research seems to coincide with the larger societal silence around female-to-male sexual violence. Similarly, the issue of female-on-male sexual violence is hardly addressed in legislation, due to the emphasis on penetration. In the Belgian legal system,

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*Nature, and Consequences of Rape Victimization: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Laura Sjoberg, *Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Sjoberg, *Women as Wartime Rapists*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2000), 118.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., the book by Karen Duncan, *Female Sexual Predators: Understanding Them to Protect our Children and Youths* (Oxford: Praeger, 2010). This book focusses almost solely on female offenders of children or young males.

for instance, sexual penetration is one of the two necessary conditions to classify an act as rape (art. 375 du Code pénal). Another example is given by Walfield, who cites the definition of rape by the FBI, where penetration, of the *explicitly* female victim, is a key element.<sup>12</sup> These definitions of rape, focussing on (penile) penetration, exclude several kinds of male rape, and hardly allow for female offenders. Most importantly, they exclude male rape in “cases, where a male victim is forced to penetrate the perpetrator's vagina, anus or mouth using his penis and without his consent.”<sup>13</sup> This particular form of male rape is present in the biblical narrative this paper explores.

It seems, then, that there is somehow an averseness to address female-on-male sex offence, perhaps due to current gender stereotypes, where “hegemonic masculinity engineers a reluctance to admit male vulnerability.”<sup>14</sup> Hegemonic masculinity, understood as referring to “the dominant social position of men, and the subordinate social position of women and other subordinate masculinities, such as gay masculinity,” together with gender-socialisation processes that sustain and further develop hegemonic masculinity, create the *myth of male invulnerability*.<sup>15</sup> If “real men” are expected to be dominant, heterosexual, and, in the same spirit, powerful and strong, this understanding of masculinity leaves no room for masculine vulnerability, let alone the possibility of male rape. Aliraza Javaid has shown how male victims of sexual assault or rape face an additional crisis of their masculine identity, as they experience their identity as male victims of rape to be in conflict with the socially expected image of the dominant, invulnerable male.<sup>16</sup> Besides the victim's shame for not being able to uphold the ideal of hegemonic and invulnerable masculinity, service providers and police are less likely to show empathy or understanding to male victims of (especially female) sexual violence, constituting a further obstacle in the reporting and healing of the traumatic event.<sup>17</sup>

The same duality, stressing female vulnerability in primarily addressing women as victims of sexual abuse (or men as victims only of other men), occurs as well in studies on the treatment of sexual violence within the Bible, where the issue of female perpetrators and male victims constitutes a topic that has hitherto received only little attention in biblical studies. From the end

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<sup>12</sup> Walfield, “Men Cannot Be Raped,” 6392.

<sup>13</sup> Weare, “Oh you're a guy,” 110. Cases of non-consensual, non-penile penetration are often dealt with under the separate offence of sexual assault by penetration, or sexual misconduct, but leave the case of “forced to penetrate rape” largely aside or view it as a lesser offence than rape by penetration.

<sup>14</sup> Chris Greenough, *The Bible and Sexual Violence against Men* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Aliraza Javaid, “Male Rape Myths: Understanding and Explaining Social Attitudes Surrounding Male Rape,” *Masculinities and Social Change* 4.3 (2015): 282, doi:[10.17583/mcs.2015.1579](https://doi.org/10.17583/mcs.2015.1579)

<sup>16</sup> Aliraza Javaid, “The Unknown Victims: Hegemonic Masculinity, Masculinities, and Male Sexual Victimization,” *Sociological Research Online* 22.1 (2016): 1–20, doi:[10.5153/sro.4155](https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.4155).

<sup>17</sup> Reitz-Krueger et al., “Real men can't get raped.”

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward, attention to the theme of sexual violence grew and led to important publications, from text-critical, feminist, and cultural theorist readings.<sup>18</sup> However, despite the growing attention to the issue of sexual violence within biblical studies, the first book addressing specifically the case of sexual violence against men in the Bible appeared on in 2021.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, biblical research appears to mirror those broader societal ideas and reluctancies regarding female-on-male sexual violence.

With the present paper, I hope to redress this imbalance by focusing on one particular form of sexual abuse (female-on-male sexual violence) in a particular biblical text: Genesis 19:30–38. Bearing in mind that this narrative was written in a social context differing in multiple ways from current societies, I nonetheless, hope to show its relevance for practices and ideas of today.<sup>20</sup>

Barbara Thiede, in the introduction of her recent book *Rape Culture in the House of David*, points out that still today, many biblical scholars think of applying the theme of rape to the Bible as “retrojecting, committing thought crimes,” and that, rather, we “need to understand the world biblical authors describe on their terms.”<sup>21</sup> The current understanding of rape, they argue, is so distanced from the biblical understanding of it, that it is almost impossible to speak of “rape” in the Bible, and that instead, “illicit” or “transgressive” sex are preferable terms. However, as Thiede so sharply demonstrates, there are many problems with this presumably neutral, scientific interpretation of the Bible that does not allow for “biblical rape”: 1) those researchers opting for a non-contemporary, but “biblical definition of rape” either arrive at tautologies or establish dangerous situations that awkwardly manipulate texts; 2) those calling sexual violence of the Bible “illicit/transgressive sex,” in fact repeat the Bible’s acceptance, and, eventually, valorisation of rape; 3) those who avoid interrogating the sexual violence of the Bible commit an ethical mistake, for this avoidance in fact normalises and reproduces the violence of the text and, ultimately, validates or at least excuses the sexual assaults portrayed.<sup>22</sup> The Hebrew Bible has no

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<sup>18</sup> See short overview of study of sexual violence up to 2008: Frank Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible: A Literary Analysis of Three Rape Narratives* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 1–26. For an even more extensive, and more recent overview, see: Johanna Stiebert, *Rape Myths, the Bible, and #MeToo* (London: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Greenough, *The Bible and Sexual Violence*.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Katie Edwards, *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), ix: “We do not have and cannot retrieve authorial intention for the biblical text, but what we do have is the way the text functions right now ... and the meanings, messages and implicit social and cultural assumptions it is used to convey.”

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Thiede, *Rape Culture in the House of David: A Company of Men* (London: Routledge, 2022), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Thiede, *Rape Culture*, 5–10.

exact equivalent term for “rape,” but this does not mean it did not exist or did not occur.<sup>23</sup> This biblically described sexual violence needs to be taken seriously, even when there is no exact parallel term for our current understanding of rape.

In what follows, I discuss how the narrative of Lot’s rape by his daughters in Genesis 19 informs and challenges current perspectives on typologies of female sex offenders. By analysing the broader context of this narrative, this study incorporates theories of traumatic family systems, while evaluating how these systems are present and how they affect intrafamilial violence. I will first situate the problem present in the biblical narrative, and then evaluate the narrative against typologies of female sex offenders and theories of systematic abuse. This will allow me to assess the daughters of Lot from diverse perspectives. Finally, I will consider how the biblical narrative informs current typologies of female sex offenders and provides insights into abusive systems.

### Context and Characters of Genesis 19

Genesis 19 tells the adventures of Lot, nephew of Abraham. At the start, two angels visit Sodom and stay at Lot’s house. The men of Sodom demand that Lot bring out these men, so that they may have sex with them. Lot refuses and offers his two virgin daughters to them, to do with them as they please. The angels curse the men with blindness, and this threatened rape does not take place. After these painful events, the angels warn Lot that Sodom is about to be destroyed, upon which Lot flees with his daughters and wife. While Lot’s wife looks back and turns into a salt pillar, Lot and his daughters make it to the mountains, where they stay in a cave. Here, the daughters get their father drunk, and have intercourse with him, which leaves them both pregnant (Genesis 19:30–36). In their raping of their father, they repeat twice that they do this “so that we may preserve offspring” (verses 32, 34).

Neither Lot’s wife nor his daughters are named in this text;<sup>24</sup> their identities are defined in relation to Lot. This silent and subordinate characterisation of the women surrounding Lot also becomes apparent in the narrative itself. When Lot offers his two daughters to be raped by the Sodomites, this is the first time they are mentioned, and the way in which it happens is, to say the least, astounding. They seem silent objects to be used at their fathers will: “When first we meet [Lot’s daughters], they are silent and powerless. Facing the threat of pack rape and death,

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, many words describe sexual violence against both female and male characters, see: Thiede, *Rape Culture*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> In Judaism, however, Midrashim recall the name of Lot’s wife as Edith (Tanhuma, Vayera 8; Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, 25). Nevertheless, in the Bible and in Christianity, she remains nameless.



they are nothing more than bargaining chips in a conflict among males.”<sup>25</sup> The daughters will have a voice only much later in the chapter (in Genesis 19:31), where solely the oldest daughter speaks. Their dependency upon their father remains present until the end, even within the rape of their father where they use him to ensure their future existence, as they repeat “so that we may preserve offspring” (Genesis 19:32, 34). The oldest daughter expresses her worry for procreation, saying: “there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the world” (Genesis 19:31). After the violent destruction of her home, she probably believes that there are no men left, except for her father and her lineage is completely dependent on their father – this could be read as a culmination of total dependency.

A similar silent, dependent portrayal seems to be present regarding Lot’s wife, the mother of his two daughters. We can only guess her feelings and emotions. Lot could similarly be viewed as depending upon another family member for his identity: his characterisation is often limited to the mere statement “Abr(ah)am’s nephew” (e.g., Genesis 14:12, 16), or else appears in sharp contrast to Abraham – creating again some sort of (contrasting) dependence. In general, then, Lot’s daughters, like Lot and his wife, seem to suffer from a lack of independent identity. The daughters being foremost silent and all of them nameless, depend entirely upon Lot for their identity and their fate.

### Genesis 19:30–38: Sexual Violence and its Interpretation

In Genesis 19:30–38, Lot’s daughters get their father drunk and, while he is unconscious, they have sex with him. They do this with a purpose: “so that we may preserve offspring.” They intoxicate their father, who is so inebriated that he cannot give his informed consent, which is considered as a key element in contemporary definitions of rape. The total absence of consent almost mirrors the silence of the daughters at the beginning of Genesis 19, when their father offers them to be gang raped.<sup>26</sup>

The sexual violence present in this section has been interpreted by many as the rape of Lot by his daughters.<sup>27</sup> I, too, take Genesis 19:30–38 to be a story about female-on-male sexual violence – as “forced/made to penetrate rape” that, importantly, is incestuous. Chris Greenough remarks correctly that this involves three criminal acts: “forced penetration of the father, incest

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<sup>25</sup> Carden Michael, “Genesis/Bereshit,” in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Guest Deryn et al. (London: SCM, 2015), 38.

<sup>26</sup> Kirsi Cobb, “‘Look at What They’ve Turned Us Into’: Reading the Story of Lot’s Daughters with Trauma Theory and *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” *Open Theology* 7.1 (2021): 220, doi:[10.1515/opth-2020-0156](https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0156).

<sup>27</sup> See, among others, Cobb, “Look at What”; Michael, “Genesis/Bereshit,” 39; Greenough, *The Bible and Sexual Violence*, 39–40.

and inbreeding.”<sup>28</sup> The sexual violence undergone by Lot and inflicted by his daughters is no minor one, and in fact it seems to have repercussions from three temporal perspectives. Regarding the *past*, the daughters “transform” their past identity of subordinated, silent daughters and become active, dominant abusers. Regarding the *present*, the daughters of Lot believe that raping their father is an urgent, present matter (“emergency incest”<sup>29</sup>), as they seem to think that there are no more men for them. Regarding the *future*, their actions have important consequences, since the daughters will have Lot’s children, who will in their turn become the Moabites and Ammonites, people with whom the Israelites will later be banned from having contact (Deuteronomy 23:4–7).

Accordingly, the sexual violence inflicted by Lot’s daughters upon their father is loaded with major implications for past, present and future. Regarding the multiple implications of the violence, the passage has been interpreted and evaluated in various ways. The evaluations range from positive portrayals of the daughters to negative depictions of them as abusers, and depend largely upon the reader’s interpretation of the daughters’ *intention* while raping their father.

First, some *positive* portrayals. Benno Jacobs (1934), in a fairly restricted understanding of womanhood as preserving procreation, states that the sexual violence of the daughters “derives from the utmost heroism” because they “do not act out of lust but in order to fulfil their womanly destiny and preserve their lineage.”<sup>30</sup> Another less limited and more recent positive appraisal of Lot’s daughters is given by Carden Michael, who speaks of the sexual violence as “poetic justice,” an act of revenge after Lot offered up his daughters. From a theological perspective, Michael also recalls that important figures (Ruth and Namaah) will come from the sons of both daughters, thus “initiating the line of the Messiah.”<sup>31</sup> While on a theological level this positive appraisal might be correct, on a moral level, it seems difficult to characterise this violent act as something purely positive. Moreover, the view of the daughters’ sexual violence as revenge could be difficult to hold, as there is no textual indication for revenge as a motive behind their violent act, and within the cultural, patriarchal rights of the father, with the daughters being fully submitted to him, they might not even have felt the need for revenge.<sup>32</sup> Rhiannon Graybill views the daughters’ violence in a rather positive light, though still “fuzzy, messy, icky,” referring to the daughters’ belief that they are the sole survivors of the apocalyptic events at Sodom and

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<sup>28</sup> Greenough, *The Bible and Sexual Violence*, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Kessler & Karel Deurloo, *A Commentary on Genesis: The Book of Beginnings*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 120.

<sup>30</sup> Cited and translated by Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 134.

<sup>31</sup> Michael, “Genesis/Bereshit,” 39.

<sup>32</sup> Cobb, “Look at What They’ve Turned Us Into,” 215.



Gomora, which might have pushed them to carry out this violent act, as revenge and as self-preservation.<sup>33</sup>

The *negative* appraisal of the daughters of Lot as sex offenders goes together with a negative appraisal of the seeming neutrality of the story. In fact, the *positive* appraisal of Lot's daughters obfuscates their violence, because *their* intention stands at the foreground and seems to largely excuse their behaviour. But, there *is* serious sexual violence at play: they rape their father. Greenough comments:

What we have here is a narrator, and subsequent interpreters, who share a reluctance in naming the event by what is described: an act of sexual assault against a man. Being unable to name it as sexual abuse further perpetuates the myths around sexual violence against men: namely, that men cannot be sexually abused, and that girls and women cannot be perpetrators of sexual violence. Moreover, Lot's story speaks back to the myth around male rape that the presence of an erection or ejaculation implies consent. Lot is narrated as being unaware of both of his assaults, and therefore unable to consent.<sup>34</sup>

The *negative* appraisal of Lot's daughters strives to rectify the too glorious stance of a *positive* appraisal, but perhaps does not take the damaged state in which the daughters find themselves seriously.

A more nuanced analysis could combine attention for the daughters' lived trauma and a negative response to the sexual violence towards their father. This would underline the difficulty of evaluating Lot's daughters and their actions. Cobb writes:

All these women acted under impossible circumstances and made impossible decisions to gain at least a sliver of agency. To understand their actions apart from trauma would do them injustice; however, this does not mean that any of these women are necessarily without guilt. Rather, it means that making ethical evaluations of the characters becomes complex as decisions made in circumstances with limited or no agency remain exceedingly problematic.<sup>35</sup>

It is precisely this last view, combining attention for the lived abuse of the daughters and their active violence as abusers, that will be used in this paper, to come to a nuanced understanding of the role of the daughters and, in a next step, confront these findings to current thinking. I prefer this view to the polarised negative or positive appraisal, since it already announces and raises questions to one of the themes I will explore later: the difficult binary of victim–abuser.

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<sup>33</sup> Rhiannon Graybill, "Fuzzy, Messy, Icky: The Edges of Consent in Hebrew Bible Rape Narratives and Rape Culture," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 15.2 (2019): 16, doi:[10.2979/jfemistudreli.33.1.22](https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.33.1.22).

<sup>34</sup> Greenough, *The Bible and Sexual Violence*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> Cobb, "Look at What," 221.

### Lot's Daughters as Female Offenders

Lot's daughters have a double role within Genesis 19. In the beginning of the chapter, they are offered by their father to be raped and do not speak, while at the very end of the chapter, their role is the opposite as they come to the fore as active, speaking and sexually violent characters. How do these two identities come together? I will first address the role of the daughters as female sex offenders, then I will look into their identity as victims themselves, and then try to combine both perspectives into an understanding of sexual violence that transcends the binarity of victim–abuser.<sup>36</sup>

Over the last fifty years, researchers have noted that (cis-gendered) female sex offenders (*if* they acknowledged the existence of this category at all) differ on some points from the profile of (cis-gendered) male sex offenders, while *amongst* female sex offenders, there exists a variety of profiles. According to Michelle Wojcik and Bonnie Fisher:

Despite the vast amount of research on male sex offenders, most of the existing typologies are not applicable to female sexual offenders, hence why several female-specific typologies have been developed. Compared to male sexual offenders, females are more likely to initiate their behaviour at an early age, admit their behaviour, commit their offence with a male co-offender and sexually assault male victims. Female sex offenders are also more likely to be motivated by coercion, threats, and fear of abuse, and to gain the attention and affection of an intimate partner.<sup>37</sup>

Different typologies for understanding female sex offenders were developed from the 1980s on,<sup>38</sup> but these have encountered criticism during the past few years.<sup>39</sup> I will focus on the categories of Mathews et al.,<sup>40</sup> since their typology focusses on the specific *identity/personality* of the offenders. I hope to answer the question of how to relate the *oxymoron-identity* of Lot's daughters: how can they be at once victim and offender; and what type of offender are they?

In Mathews et al., five general categories appear: a) teacher/lover offender, who abuse through their position of power; b) predisposed offender, who often repeats self-endured sexual violence within the family; c) male-coerced abuse follows the male (husband's) directives and continues the abuse he initiated; d) exploration/exploitation where abuse takes place under the

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Sanne Weber, "Defying the Victim–Perpetrator Binary: Female Ex-combatants in Colombia and Guatemala as Complex Political Perpetrators," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 15.2 (July 2021): 264–83, doi:[10.1093/ijtj/ijab006](https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijab006).

<sup>37</sup> Michelle L. Wojcik and Bonnie S. Fisher, "Overview of Sexual Offender Typologies," in *Handbook of Sexual Assault Prevention*, eds. William O'Donohue and Paul Schewe (Cham: Springer, 2019), 247.

<sup>38</sup> See for some examples: Donna Vandiver et al., *Sex Crimes and Sex Offenders: Research and Realities* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 191.

<sup>39</sup> Vandiver et al., *Sex Crimes and Sex Offenders*, 191; Duncan, *Female Sexual Predators*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> J. Mathews, R. Mathews, K. Speltz, *Female Sexual Offenders: An Exploratory Study* (Orwell: The Safer Society Press, 1989).

guise of initiating the child to sexual acts; or e) psychologically disturbed, where the abuse takes place as a consequence of significant psychopathology. In a later article in 1991, Mathews et al. keep only three categories of these five: (1) Teacher/lover, (2) Predisposed, (3) Male-coerced/accompanied.

The first category (teacher/lover) presupposes dominance and a hierarchical relationship to the victim. The daughters of Lot, however, remain nameless and are always dependently described as “daughters of ...” They thus seem the exact opposite of this hierarchical stance towards the victim. The last category (male-coerced/accompanied) does not apply either: instead of being forced to work with a male person, or accompanying a man in carrying out their sexual violence, they are working by themselves, even believing that there are no other men left. Lot’s daughters seem to fall, at least partially, under the category of “predisposed female-offenders”, as I will argue below. This category concerns female offenders who were typically abused themselves in some way, and have a traditional image of masculinity, being passive and dependent on their spouse, mostly to avoid abuse. In this category, the women often sexually abuse their own children.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, Lot’s daughters do not fit completely in the category of predisposed female offenders. In the research of Mathew et al., the “predisposed offender” typically abuses their own (prepubescent) children. However, in our story, the daughters, remaining nonetheless in an incestuous context, abuse their own father. This divergence from the typology could form an incentive for further research about female sex offenders abusing adult males. A gap in research is here the specific case of “forced to penetrate” or “made to penetrate” sexual violence, generally neglected in studies and even statistics on (adult) male rape.<sup>42</sup> Cases of “forced/made to penetrate” cover both younger male victims, as well as older, adult males, often not taken into account in research on female-to-male sexual violence.<sup>43</sup> That this category is lacking in research could point, again, to the myth surrounding female violence; namely, that women are “naturally” non-violent, and if they are violent, they are only able to (sexually) violate persons who are weaker, younger or hierarchically lower than themselves. This narrative shows exactly the opposite: the nameless, suppressed daughters abuse their named, higher placed and older father. At the same time, Lot’s character undergoes damage, and Lot appears *weak* from the perspective of hegemonic biblical masculinity that focusses on might, integrity, honour,

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Vandiver et al., *Sex Crimes and Sex Offenders*, 191.

<sup>42</sup> Sharon G. Smith, Jieru Chen, Ashley N. Lowe & Kathleen C. Basile, “Sexual Violence Victimization of U.S. Males: Negative Health Conditions Associated with Rape and Being Made to Penetrate,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37.21–22 (2022): NP20953–71, doi:[10.1177/08862605211055151](https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211055151).

<sup>43</sup> Siobhan Weare, “‘I Feel Permanently Traumatized by It’: Physical and Emotional Impacts Reported by Men Forced to Penetrate Women in the United Kingdom,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36.13–14 (2021): 6621–46, doi:[10.1177/0886260518820815](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518820815).

virility and provisioning.<sup>44</sup> Lot is not mighty, as he needs rescuing by the angels, he is not provisioning in failing to protect daughters and wife, he lacks virility and honour in not succeeding at convincing his sons-in-law, and so forth. The raping of Lot by his own, younger daughters appears as the finale of this decrescendo of masculinity: Lot is now put in the unmasculine position of being sexually subjugated, he is “unknowing” (Genesis 19:33, 35), thus he is symbolically distanced “from the male function of sexual ‘knowledge,’”<sup>45</sup> and what is left of his masculinity is only used by his daughters to procreate, but has no further, intrinsic value.

In the Genesis story and in trauma-experiences of male victims of female offenders, recourse to drugs (including alcohol) seems an important tool to overcome physical obstacles, forcing men in a subordinated role. For female sexual violence, physical aggression seems a less prevalent medium of abuse, perhaps due to women’s relative lack of physical strength compared to men.<sup>46</sup> Siobhan Weare, in her study on forced-to-penetrate cases, indicates that the use of drugs is common to “weaken” the victim.<sup>47</sup> There seems to be another interesting tendency concerning the use of alcohol in the report of forced-to-penetrate cases:

Men are more than three times as likely as women to reveal in their narratives that they were drinking or using drugs prior to an incident... It may indicate that men are more likely to admit to being sexually victimised when they are intoxicated since alcohol impairs a victim’s ability to resist attacks and therefore provides a plausible explanation for how it was possible for men to have been victimised in the first place.<sup>48</sup>

There is a fourfold repetition of the fact that the daughters intoxicate their father with wine (Genesis 19:32, 33, 34, 35). It seems that the stress on intoxication not only relates to physical obstacles for female abusers, but also reveals gendered myths entailing that a woman would not be able to violate a man, unless he would be completely intoxicated. The insistence on Lot being intoxicated could on the one hand relate to the daughter’s violence, which only seems plausible if their father is completely drunk. On the other hand, it could be said to excuse Lot: in describing Lot as being intoxicated, his passive, vulnerable role is excused and is now detached from his masculinity, and linked to him being drunk.

Taking all these points into account, the story of Lot and his daughters challenges modern categorisations of female offenders while shedding light on alternative ways that men can be

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<sup>44</sup> Susan E. Haddox, “Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 14.2 (2016), doi:[10.1177/1476993X15575496](https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X15575496).

<sup>45</sup> Karalina Matskevich, *Construction of Gender and Identity in Genesis: The Subject and the Other* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 129.

<sup>46</sup> Weare, “Oh you’re a guy,” 115.

<sup>47</sup> Weare, “Oh you’re a guy,” 117.

<sup>48</sup> Karen G. Weiss, “Male Sexual Victimization: Examining Men’s Experiences of Rape and Sexual Assault,” *Men and Masculinities* 12.3 (January 2010): 284, doi:[10.1177/1097184X08322632](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X08322632).

sexually victimised by women. The story of Lot and his daughters, in my opinion, calls for a broader typology of female offenders that allows for more nuances and leaves space for unexplored power-structures (the subordinated who attacks the superior), for different age-limits (the younger who attacks the older) and for the strategy used (intoxication). Broadening the perspective on female-to-male sex offenders in this way, other stories that might remain uncovered because they challenge societal myths could be uncovered, and the true diversity of female-to-male sexual violence could get the deserved attention.

### Lot's Daughters as Victims of a Traumatized Family System

The characterisation, to some extent, of Lot's daughters as "predisposed offenders" leads immediately to and is closely linked with the question of the so-called "transmission": still today, many consider that someone who has been abused in the past, will become an abuser in the future.<sup>49</sup> People who have been abused would then "transmit" their traumatic abuse to future generations. The topic of victims becoming perpetrators has been seriously contested, and named as a harmful myth.<sup>50</sup> In what will follow next, I in no way intend to portray victims as *necessarily* becoming perpetrators, but rather wish to focus on the concept of "transmission" as an element central in systematic psychology – a concept that does not entail fatality, but rather disentangles intergenerational trauma and violence. At the same time, the issue of victims becoming abusers raises an important question regarding female offenders: can female offenders become abusers only because they have been themselves abused before? This violence, thus, does not come "naturally," but only in reaction to an earlier trauma. In research on "transmission," this sensitive and delicate concept has been found in both male and female identifying people, where their violence cannot be defined as "learned," but rather these persons have a "vulnerability transmitted" with uncertainty concerning the precise mechanisms of this transgenerational transmission.<sup>51</sup> I, thus, view the undergoing of abuse not as a necessary and causal factor in becoming later an abuser, but rather as a major traumatic event that creates a vulnerability, which can translate itself into sexual violence, but not necessarily so.

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<sup>49</sup> Emmanuel de Becker, "Transmission, loyautés et maltraitance à enfants," *La psychiatrie de l'enfant* 1.5 (2008): 57.

<sup>50</sup> E.g., the Rape and Sexual Violence Project lists the abused-becoming-abuser as a myth, next to the myth that men could not be raped by women: "MYTH: Being sexually abused will make you an abuser. The vast majority of men and boys who have experienced childhood abuse or adult assault do NOT go on to sexually abuse." See Rape and Sexual Violence Project, *Male Survivors of Rape and Sexual Assault: Myths & Misconceptions* (2018), [tinyurl.com/3jn3efkf](https://tinyurl.com/3jn3efkf).

<sup>51</sup> Charles Cappell; Robert B. Heiner, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Family Aggression," *Journal of Family Violence* 5.2 (June 1990): 147.

How does this relate to the story of Lot's daughters? Have they been abused? Could they be transmitting their own abuse? According to Emmanuel de Becker, "transmission" is the transferal of psychological processes from one generation to another, with the goal of a structural construction of the subject.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, transmission can be a rather positive process, since it helps to build the "self." Indeed, every generation needs to transmit psychological processes that can, generally, be grouped into two categories: 1) *intergenerational*, conscient processes about which one speaks and belong to habits and values of the family (one could think here of special family traditions on holidays, or stories told from generation to generation, much in the way family recipes are transmitted), 2) *transgenerational*, largely unconscious processes that consists of secrets, taboos and traumas and can be expressed through illness or other types of dysfunction (one could think here of the taboo on premarital sex, which, passed on silently within the family, could lead to reckless and dysfunctional sexual behaviour in later generations, unsure how to cope with this taboo issue).<sup>53</sup> In the case of sexual trauma through abuse, a transgenerational transmission of psychological trauma could take place and this type of transmission can be destructive, implying the transmission of abuse. The chances are high that this sexual trauma is transmitted, for destructive heritage, as part of the transgenerational and secret, are very easily transmitted.<sup>54</sup>

With respect to Lot's daughters, two major transmitted elements are present. First of all, there is the threat of the rape by the men of Sodom, which is made even worse by the fact that their father, without any sign of remorse, offers them to be abused. Second, Lot appears as a traumatised man himself. We might view him as suffering from war trauma. In Genesis 14:11–12, we read how the cities of Sodom and Gomora are attacked by enemies while Lot lives there. The enemies kidnap Lot, and when Abr(ah)am hears of this, he sends out his men who attack the enemies and are able to bring Lot back. As if this was not traumatic enough, Lot has his house attacked by rapists (Genesis 19:4–9), he has to witness his home, Sodom, being destroyed (Genesis 19:24–25), with the loss of his sons-in-law and the sudden loss of his wife turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26). Lot has to flee, and is described as very anxious also once he left Sodom: he is too afraid to stay in Soar, and flees further into the mountains with his daughters (Genesis 19:28).

Besides these elements, it is possible that some elements in Lot's family system also were problematic. Lot's father died young, and Lot is portrayed as somehow inferior to Abr(ah)am, whom Lot had to live with after the death of his father. These family elements *might* have constituted additional difficulties for Lot, but Lot's major trauma is to be situated in his

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<sup>52</sup> de Becker, "Transmission," 58.

<sup>53</sup> de Becker, "Transmission," 58, he derives this from Ancelin Schützenberger (1999).

<sup>54</sup> de Becker, "Transmission," 61.



experiences of war, kidnapping and flight. Lot's wife also plays a particular role within the family. As we saw, she remains unnamed, and even when Lot proposes to give their daughters up for rape, the mother remains silent. Did she simply not hear Lot's proposal? Or does her silent passivity imply a carelessness for her daughters? Is her silence a reaction to a violent household, is she not heard, is she oppressed? Many things seem unclear concerning her personality, and her role within the family system remains mysterious.

All these factors taken together; it seems that we have to do with a complicated family system in which trauma circulates freely. De Becker, addressing the question of repetition of abuse, indicates some "elements of vulnerability" that could be risk-factors regarding this dangerous repetition.<sup>55</sup> One of these factors is the familial surrounding. The familial structure of the daughters of Lot is, to say the least, difficult and might have destructive consequences.

Kirsi Cobb proposes to view the sexual violence of the daughters towards their father as a "traumatic re-enactment" of the multiple traumas they had to undergo: the threat of rape, the view of their lost city, the loss of their men.<sup>56</sup> Transgenerational trauma should be added unto this equation. The daughters of Lot, especially through their father who had to undergo multiple traumas, probably received numerous transgenerationally transmitted psychological traumas. The theme of "loyalty amongst family members" plays a major role in this. De Becker shows how loyalty and transmission are closely related, for loyalty is closely related to the mechanism of giving/receiving, in that healthy loyalty seeks to balance giving or transmitting and receiving. Transmission is what is *given* inter or transgenerationally. Each generation has the task to situate themselves, within their family, regarding what they have received. If this did not happen, the consequences can be major: the children in fact have to pay the price for the non-transmission and carry out the task of their parent, which creates problems.<sup>57</sup> Through the mechanism of loyalty and a twisted, secretive transgenerational transmission, the children bear the major task of resolving their "family debts." The children have to take over the task of their parents, resolving secrets and traumas that are not theirs. As such, they sometimes become the parent of their own parent. This process of *parentification* is dangerous and destructive.<sup>58</sup>

Regarding the daughters of Lot, the theme of loyalty is present: in fact, we read how the daughters leave with father and mother their city that will be destroyed, thereby leaving behind the men whom they would marry. This could point at an almost exaggerated loyalty to their parents. Next, we could read the strange obsession of the daughters with getting pregnant from

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<sup>55</sup> de Becker, "Transmission," 47.

<sup>56</sup> Cobb, "Look at What," 214–20.

<sup>57</sup> de Becker, "Transmission," 64.

<sup>58</sup> de Becker, "Transmission," 53.

their father as an ultimate form of parentification. Becoming pregnant from their father, they now totally take up the place of their silent and unmovable mother. We might read the silence of the mother as a passivity regarding transgenerational processes, thereby perhaps shifting this task to her own daughters, who now, by becoming pregnant of their father, literally take up the place of their mother. This, of course, is a daunting reading. Another hypothesis concerning the daughters' obsession with becoming pregnant, is proposed by Kirsi Cobb, who reads this as an almost natural response to trauma:

The production of offspring seems to be the primary concern of the daughters... Under traumatic circumstances the preservation of the self becomes of primary importance and actions that may appear inconsiderate or even immoral to others can be explained via the survival behaviours in which a traumatized person often engages. However, in this case survival behaviour is directed not at the survival of the daughters per se but of their future offspring.<sup>59</sup>

The care about procreation might then stem from a natural insistence on the preservation of the self within traumatic circumstances. This reading, however, does not take away the fact that the daughters, by procreating with their own father, take up the place of their mother: (literal) parentification and traumatic reaction go hand-in-hand. Until now, biblical research did not pay much attention to the role of Lot's wife within this story, while the relation of the daughters to their mother might form the *crux interpretum* of this story. Indeed, the place of the mother and wife plays in family systems a highly important role, as the mother's attitudes of hesitation, indifference, collusion with the abuser, reflect or exclude reactions of commitment and support towards the child; these maternal attitudes also reflecting attitudes within the family system more broadly.<sup>60</sup>

It is precisely in this domain that biblical studies and the systemic understanding of abuse encounter each other. Through the systemic understanding of Lot's family, the plausibility and modality of transgenerational transmission of (sexual) trauma was enlightened, and the sexual violence of Lot's daughters could be read not only as a *traumatic re-enactment of their own (threatened) abuse*, but also as a *traumatic re-enactment of transgenerational trauma that was transmitted and, through loyalty and possibly parentification, brought to the outside*. These findings shed new light on the biblical story and its often-neglected violent aspects. The story of Genesis 19, in turn, might complete systemic views of abuse, in that it sheds a light on the dimension of will and responsibility. The question of *responsibility* is a major one, especially when speaking of re-enactment or transmission:

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<sup>59</sup> Cobb, "Look at What," 218.

<sup>60</sup> This is especially true in cases of incest, see Emmanuel de Becker, Stéphane Chapelle, "L'approche systémique de la reprise de contact entre l'enfant victime et le père incestueux," *L'information psychiatrique* 88.3 (2012): 215.

Of all the factors of vulnerability that contribute to the risk of repetition of the abuse, there is no reason to omit the subject's decision making and, simultaneously, their inner freedom. In absolute terms, *every individual has a field of decision for the acts* that he or she carries out towards himself or herself and towards others. This is not a value judgment, but a recognition of the status of responsibility. In the majority of cases, the *abuser is responsible* for the aggression he commits and repeats.<sup>61</sup>

The issue of transmission in no way weakens the violence and responsibility of the perpetrator; transmission could help to explain, though never justifies the re-enacted abuse. The daughters of Lot remained silent when they were portrayed as victims. However, when they re-enact or transmit trauma under the form of sexual violence, they speak, their words underlining their activity. The aspect of responsibility seems thus present in the text at hand, and could help to view the daughters, next to their *predisposition* through *elements of vulnerability* as guided by *choice, words and intentional deeds*, implying at once a certain fatality and responsibility.

### Results: Lot's Daughters as Victims and Offenders

Through the analysis above, I have explored two seemingly contradictory aspects of Lot's daughters: they are at once victims and offenders. Through the spectrum of "transmission" and their classification as "predisposed female offender," it is clear how their identity as victim led in some ways to them engaging in sexual violence later on, though not justifying this violent act. In a generalised way, then, we can describe the development of the daughters of Lot as follows:

Silent, subordinated, no consent, victim	→	Speaking, active, offender
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The fate of Lot, their father, has an inversed order. He is first presented as offering his own daughters up for rape, and then, at the end of the story, he gets himself raped by his own daughters. Lot's development could be described as follows:

Speaking, active, offender	→	Silent, subordinated, no consent, victim
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The development of 1) Lot and 2) his daughters are mirror images of each other, and both Lot and his daughters encompass the paradoxical combination of being both victim and offender. This almost ironical mirroring stresses the difficulty of a binary distinction between victim and

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<sup>61</sup> De Becker, "Transmission," 55 (my translation).

abuser. The problem with the victim–perpetrator binary within transitional justice concerning soldiers, was brought to attention by Sanne Weber:

This victim–perpetrator binary erroneously assumes that victims and perpetrators are homogeneous groups. In reality, there tends to be a ‘grey zone’ of people who became perpetrators after suffering crimes, who experienced harms after joining armed groups and became traumatized by violence or who were forced to commit crimes as part of self-defence groups or as child soldiers. This is especially true for protracted conflicts which produce cycles of victimization and revenge, leading to ‘horizontal victimization.’<sup>62</sup>

Weber criticises the binarity, as it excludes those people within “grey zones,” people who belong at once to the camp of victims and the one of perpetrators. While Weber’s criticism is directed at war contexts, I believe the same could be said for the story in Genesis 19. The story of Lot and his daughters, especially through this remarkable mirroring, shows how sexual violence puts many people in a grey zone. The over-emphasis upon the victim–abuser binary would exclude both Lot and his daughters as “true victims” as they at the same time identify as perpetrators. In Genesis 19, no victim is truly innocent, yet all of them suffer tremendous trauma. The reader thus walks a thin line between compassion and rage towards these “victims–abusers” and cannot quite choose a side.

The ideas of transmission, traumatic re-enactment and loyalty seem most important in understanding how these two conflicting identities go together. A *caveat* is needed, however, as the foregoing might give the impression that there is some necessity, or fatality at play. To the contrary, I would underline the importance of taking into account personal responsibility. Escaping binarity means opening the door for abusers to be healed of their traumas as victims, but it also means taking seriously the decisions and intentions that guided a person and led to serious consequences. The story of Lot and his daughters might be exemplary in this escape of binarity; Lot and his daughters exist within a grey zone, morally abject and yet understandable in some ways. The reader has to stand with the uncomfortable feeling of not being able to choose sides, and this uncomfortable feeling is perhaps the most authentic human response to the traumas both Lot and his daughters underwent.

## Conclusion

Reading the ancient story of Lot’s daughters from modern perspectives brings new insights to the difficult and violent text while also shedding light on some current issues. The story crushes the taboo surrounding female-on-male sexual violence, that, notwithstanding the increase of interests in the last years, remains a largely untouched topic. This taboo might stem from the

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<sup>62</sup> Weber, “Defying the Victim–Perpetrator Binary,” 267.

societal myth that men cannot be raped by women, for men are stronger than women and could not be forced to penetrate if they do not want to. A specific case of male rape was addressed here, namely “forced/made to penetrate” sexual violence – an understudied category of male rape. This paper also questioned the kinds of female sexual violence get attention: as we saw, the majority of research focusses on female abuse of children or inferiors. The story of Lot’s daughters forms an interesting counterexample, with women who violate a “superior,” older man.

The story of Lot’s daughters forms an interesting point of departure to address important questions about female-on-male abuse. It forms an uncomfortable example of sexual violence where choosing sides proves impossible, an uneasiness informed by the trauma and violence of both sides. Genesis 19 is a story of fragility, fragilised masculinity and awful sexual violence – a story *not* to re-enact, but to *react* to with careful consideration of male victims, female aggressors and the uneasy, but large, grey zone in between.

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