

Mid-Atlantic Popular & American Culture Association
Baltimore, Maryland
November 6-8, 2014

Area: Sexuality and Erotica

“Fifty Shades of Creep: Yet Another Masculinization of Female Sexuality”

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Second Wave Feminists have been calling for an empowered vision of female sexuality for decades. Adrienne Rich called for it in *Of Woman Born* in 1976, Riane Eisler called for it in *Sacred Pleasure* in 1995, Naomi Wolf called for it in *Promiscuities* in 1997, and more recently in the collection *Yes Means Yes!* editors Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti called for it in 2008. Women fiction writers have tried to respond to this call to create strong female characters who have strong healthy sexual desires, but the entrenched sexism and misogyny of American culture does not allow a true depiction of empowered female sexuality in fiction whether Young Adult fiction or adult fiction. Instead, what readers encounter time and time again is a masculinization of female sexuality. This masculinization manifests itself in different ways. It can be girls and women having sex like boys and men, but it can also simply re-enforce notions of the sexual double-standard which privilege male sexuality and see it as normal or demonize female sexuality and see it as either sick or dangerous. In E.L. James’ *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy (*Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Fifty Shades Darker*, and *Fifty Shades Freed*), she attempts to depict Anastasia (Ana) Steele’s sexual awakening and desires under the tutelage of BDSM (Bondage, Dominant, Submissive/Sadist, Masochist) Dominant Christian Grey. However, the portrait that she paints is not about female sexual empowerment. Instead, it is yet another

manifestation of the masculinization of sex and the story of a seemingly bright, educated woman tolerating and even basking in a disturbingly abusive relationship.

Unlike many Young Adult authors who limit female sexual desire to heavy kissing and some innocent touching between partners, James is much more explicit about foreplay and sexual arousal between Ana and Christian. He touches her breasts and nipples. He makes her come by touching her clitoris and her G-spot, but Ana almost always comes additionally on his command during sexual intercourse, and they climax together or almost at the same time—perpetuating the myth of vagina penetration by a penis as the ultimate sexual experience for women as well as men. Putting aside the BDSM sex they experiment with, the descriptions of Ana and Christian having “vanilla” or regular sex are often violent and seem unrealistic because of her lack of pain or discomfort. Additionally, again putting the BDSM sex aside, James often couples images of female sexual pleasure with images of pain. Both of these associations, of female pain with sex (rough sex and pleasure/pain images) as normal or desirable, hint at male rape fantasy (masculinization of sex—sex for male pleasure at whatever the cost to the female partner).

If one moves to the cultural manifestations of the masculinization of female sexuality in the James’ trilogy, they are even more pervasive and, likewise, fail to create a vision of empowered female sexuality. For example, her narrator, Ana, is uncomfortable talking about sexual anatomy, her own or his. She also reproduces patriarchal ideal of the female virgin and the sexually experienced man. She then adds to that by making Ana feel inadequate. Ana doesn’t see herself as attractive, and she isn’t affluent or particularly assertive. Christian, by

contrast, is described as stunningly beautiful, young, fabulously wealthy and successful, so the power inequality between them is further enhanced beyond sexual knowledge. Lastly, Christian is wildly jealous of anyone who comes in contact with Ana. Marriage is Christian's way to possess Ana absolutely—to make her *his* and mark her as *his* publicly. Thus, James does a couple of things by having Christian so jealous and possessive. She perpetuates the myth of one and only one true love, especially for women. Also by having some of Ana's admirers try to take advantage of her, Jose and Jack in particular, she rationalizes Christian's obsessive behavior, and it isn't just Ana's admirers that she needs to be protected from; ex-sexual partners of Christian's harass her (Leila and Elena), so she needs protection from them too. James has Ana make light of Christian's serious "stalker" tendencies and rationalizes his obsessiveness with Ana because of his troubled early childhood and the men and women who pursue her, but he is seriously creepy. Add on his sick desire to punish Ana whenever she seriously disobeys him, and Ana isn't a sexually empowered heroine; she is the willing victim of her own abuse—perpetuating, in a different way, the male rape fantasy that women want to be obsessively controlled and abused by their boyfriends/husbands—a masculinization of sex instead of a feminization of it (sex between two equal, respectful, tender, loving partners interested in mutual pleasuring and the avoidance of pain).

Despite James' sex scenes where there is foreplay and/or care is taken to ensure that Ana is sexually aroused before intercourse, there are others where she cannot possibly be aroused enough to find pleasure in the penetration described. For example, in the first book, Ana has just awoken and goes to find Christian in his office. They kiss briefly, and then he challenges her to either go and take a shower or to have sex with him on his desk. She chooses the desk:

With one fluid movement, he clears all the plans and papers off his desk so that they scatter on the floor, sweeps me up in his arms, and lays me down across the short end of his desk so that my head is almost off the edge.

“You want it, you got it, baby,” he mutters, producing a foil packet from his pants pocket while he unzips his pants. *Oh, Mr. Boy Scout*. He rolls the condom over his erection and gazes down at me. “I sure hope you’re ready,” he breathes, a salacious smile across his face. And in a moment, he is filling me, holding my wrists tightly by my side, and thrusting into me deeply.

I groan ... *oh yes*.¹

James has Christian marvel that Ana is fully lubricated for this sudden penetration despite the lack of foreplay, but this is just unrealistic. They have kissed briefly before he is “thrusting ... deeply” into her. The contact is just too brief for a real woman to be so sexually aroused that the kind of sudden penetration described would not be unpainful. Unrealistic too is Ana being capable of finding pleasure in the violent sex that follows the lack of foreplay—described after “thrusting ... deeply” as him “thrusting faster and harder” and “slam[ming] into [her]” to the point of orgasm.² This description is a masculinization of sex where Ana is just as quick to sexual arousal as Christian, implying that women experience sexual arousal just like men. Further, the rough intercourse described results in orgasm for both of them when a significant proportion of women don’t experience orgasm through vaginal penetration by a penis alone³ and when the lack of foreplay and violence of the sex seems more likely to result in Ana’s pain more than her pleasure, so again it is implied that women find sexual gratification the same way men do and/or from men being rough with them.

In book two, Ana and Christian have just eaten dinner at his club and are riding a crowded elevator down from the 76th floor to the lobby while he gropes her in the corner.

¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012. 371.

² *Ibid*.

³ Peter Gray and Justin Garcia. *Evolution and Human Sexual Behavior*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. 212.

Admittedly, Christian has been sexually suggestive all through dinner, but in the elevator, there is no foreplay, and yet James describes Ana as fully lubricated:

As the doors close, Christian briefly stoops down beside me to tie his shoelace. Odd, his shoelaces aren't undone. Discreetly he places his hand on my ankle, startling me, and as he stands his hand travels swiftly up my leg, skating deliciously over my skin—whoa—right up. I have to stifle my gasp of surprise as his hand reaches my backside. Christian moves behind me.

Oh my. I gape at the people in front of us, staring at the backs of their heads. They have no idea what we're up to. Wrapping his free arm around my waist, Christian pulls me to him, holding me in place as his fingers explore. *Holy fucking shit ... in here?* The elevator travels smoothly down, stopping at the fifty-third floor to let some more people on, but I am not paying attention. I am focused on every little move his fingers make. Circling around ... now forward, questing, as we shuffle back.

Again I stifle a groan when his fingers find their goal.

"Always so ready, Miss Steele," he whispers as he slips a finger inside me. I squirm and gasp.⁴

Despite Christian's assertion that Ana is lubricated and "ready," with the absence of any foreplay, this description just isn't realistic and again suggests that a woman experiences sexual arousal as rapidly as a man.

Again in the last book, Christian has learned that the fire at his company's headquarters is the result of arson, and he is scared for Ana's safety. They have been kissing, and Ana is aware that Christian has an erection:

Abruptly, he stops, stands up, and pulls me off the bed so that I am standing in front of him, dazed. He undoes the button on my shorts and kneels quickly, yanking them and my panties down, and before I can breathe again, I am back on the bed beneath him and he's unbuttoning his fly. Whoa! He's not taking off his clothes or my T-shirt. He holds my head and with no preamble whatsoever he thrusts himself inside me, making me cry out—more in surprise than anything else—but I can still hear the hiss of his breath forced through his clenched teeth.

"Yessss," he hisses close to my ear. He stills, then swivels his hips once, pushing deeper, making me groan.

"I need you," he growls, his voice low and husky. He runs his teeth along my

⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012. 435.

jaw, nipping and sucking, and then he's kissing me again, hard. I wrap my legs around him, cradling and holding him hard against me, determined to wipe out whatever's worrying him, and he starts to move again ... move like he's trying to climb inside me. Over and over, frantic, desperate.... His passion and his love is my undoing, and on cue I come, throwing my head back as my body pulses around him.

"Oh, Ana," he cries and he joins my climax, driving into me, then stilling and collapsing onto me.⁵

She cries out in surprise? Perhaps, but what about also in pain? James has emphasized the suddenness of Christian's assault, "with no preamble whatsoever." Only in porn are women so constantly ready for sudden and violent penetration. Pamela Paul, in *Pornified*, describes the perpetual sexually aroused state of the female porn star in the following description:

The porn star is always responsive; she would never complain about a man being late or taking too long to come. Her hair never gets trapped under his elbow and her thighs never tire. She is easily aroused, naturally and consistently orgasmic, and malleable.... She used to be afraid of sex.... Now she loves sex, she can't get enough of it; she can't get enough of sex with *you*.⁶

Most male-pleasure-centered porn depicts a masculinization of sex where the fantasy is that women are turned on by what gives men pleasure and that they have no conflicting or different sexual needs of their own. James manages to portray Ana as both having different sexual needs of her own (such as when Christian touches her clitoris or G-spot to bring her to orgasm) and as "getting off" the same way Christian does (through vagina penetration by his penis), so she is not quite so limited in her depictions of female sexuality as porn. But the perpetual lubricated state of Ana's vagina echoes the description of that of the porn star's and reflects the masculinization of sex in popular culture with vaginal penetration by a penis is the ultimate experience for both partners. It also mirrors Ana's transition from being a twenty-one year old virgin to a woman who embraces Christian "kinky fuckery"⁷ and can't get enough sex with him, confirming the

⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012. 72-73.

⁶ Pamela Paul. *Pornified*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006. 44-45.

⁷ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 34.

porn fantasy of a virgin transformed into a nymphomaniac. In fact, once Christian has deflowered Ana, they both comment on Ana's insatiable sexual desires.⁸

Another way James masculinizes sex is that in almost every description of sexual intercourse between Ana and Christian (despite previous orgasm or orgasms), Ana comes just before Christian or with him, often on command, as the following examples—chosen across the three books—illustrate:

“Come for me, Ana,” he whispers breathlessly, and I unravel at his words, exploding around him as I climax and splinter into a million pieces underneath him. And as he comes, he calls out my name, thrusting hard, then stilling as he empties himself into me.⁹

“Come for me, baby.” His voice is harsh, hard, raw at my ear, and I explode around him as he pounds rapidly into me.... He thrusts hard once more and groans as he reaches his climax, pressing himself into me.¹⁰

“Come on, baby,” he gasps. “Give it to me.”

His words are my undoing, and I explode, magnificently, mind-numbingly, into a million pieces around him, and he follows, calling out my name.¹¹

“Ana, no,” he grunts, trying to still me. But I want him too much, and I grind against him, matching him thrust for thrust.

“Ana, shit,” he hisses as he comes, and the tortured sound sets me off again, spiraling into a healing orgasm that goes on and on and wrings me out and leaves me spent and breathless.¹²

“Come for me,” he demands.

And I let go, my body obediently following his command. He holds me still as my climax rips through me and I call out his name.

“Oh, Ana, I love you,” he groans and follows my lead as he bucks into me, finding his own release.¹³

⁸ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 371. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 176, 249, 298, 307, 482. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 9.

⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 118.

¹⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 142.

¹¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011. 70.

¹² E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 154.

¹³ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011. 349.

Having Ana come with Christian emphasizes a male biased view of sexual satisfaction—that vaginal penetration by a penis is the ultimate experience and is orgasmic for both partners when for many women it is not. Having Ana come on command is merely a fictional device and ignores the physical sensations Ana would need to experience to come when Christian does.

In addition to James' descriptions of a masculinized female sexuality (women having sex like men and finding sexual pleasure in the same acts as men), James depicts rough sex as fun and often couples descriptions of female sexual pleasure with images of pain. Riane Eisler says that “the erotization of brutality and violence [happens when] both women and men learn to accept violent and coercive touch as not only normal but exciting.”¹⁴ This erotization of brutality and violence toward women or “the erotization of male violence”¹⁵ is what James creates in the sex between Ana and Christian. Again examples in the three books are not hard to find:

He moans low in his throat, eases out of me once more, then slams into me, and repeats this over and over slowly, deliberately—a punishing, brutal, *heavenly* rhythm [emphasis mine].¹⁶

That is, he is brutalizing her, and she finds it “heavenly.”

He gazes down at me in triumph and kisses me hard, then really starts to move—a *punishing, relentless* ... *oh fuck*—and I know it will not be long. He sets a pounding rhythm.¹⁷

Ana recognizes the “punishing,” “pounding” quality of the act, but she does object let alone recoil.

“My turn,” he murmurs, and flips me over so I am facedown on the sofa with my knees on the floor. He spreads my legs and slaps me hard across my behind.

¹⁴ Riane Eisler. *Sacred Pleasure*. New York: HarperOne, 1996. 223.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 229.

¹⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 246.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 69-70.

“Ah!” I yelp, and he slams into me.

“Oh, Ana,” he hisses through clenched teeth as he starts to move. His fingers grip me hard around my hips as he grinds into me over and over.¹⁸

Here it’s hard to miss the grinding, slamming, slapping, and yelping, all of which Ana accepts. All of these descriptions are violent, and yet James depicts them as not painful and as sexually pleasing to both Christian and Ana. As a masculinization of sex, these descriptions hint at male rape fantasy, the erotization of male violence: women secretly find pleasure in pain, women want it rough, women want to be raped, women enjoy rape. Conversely, when Christian offers himself to Ana as a submissive where she could eroticize male sexual pain, Ana finds the thought repellent: “The thought of me dominating anyone is appalling. The thought of dominating Christian is nauseating.”¹⁹ Ana, as a good woman, can’t erotize dominating or hurting Christian—though Christian can erotize dominating or hurting her. Elena Lincoln erotized dominating and hurting Christian, but she is repeatedly seen as a bad woman, a pedophile, a child abuser,²⁰ and the “Bitch Troll.”²¹ The implication is that good women don’t and shouldn’t eroticize violence, but men and perverted or sick women can.

Robert Jensen talks about American rape culture (another approach to talking about the eroticism of male violence and the masculinization of sex) in his book, *Getting Off*. He says,

In this patriarchy in which we live, men generally are trained through a variety of cultural institutions to view sex as the acquisition of pleasure by the taking of women. Men are trained to see sex as a sphere in which they are naturally dominant and women are naturally passive. Women are objectified and women’s sexuality is commodified. Sex is sexy because men are dominant and women are subordinate; power is eroticized.²²

¹⁸ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 399.

¹⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 322-323.

²⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 125, 158, 160.

²¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 425, 427, 429, 513.

²² Robert Jensen. *Getting Off*. Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2007. 48.

Jensen is talking about images in porn and popular culture, but his observations illuminate the world that James²³ has internalized and reproduced in her trilogy, though she is a woman. Christian repeatedly talks about having sex with Ana as “taking” her.²⁴ Christian is a BDSM Dominant who fucks female submissives. He thinks of himself as a serial sadist.²⁵ He fully acknowledges his objectification of women.²⁶ He pursues Ana initially to make her into his sixteenth submissive before he abandons that plan and attempts to form his first ever normal relationship with a woman. But Christian is obsessive about his possession of Ana. In the course of the three novels, he continuously reminds her that she is his: “‘You are mine,’ he whispers. ‘Only mine. Don’t forget it.’”²⁷ In the first book, he reminds her that she is his (“mine”) twelve times. In the second book, fifteen times,²⁸ and in the third book eighteen times²⁹—these utterances exclude moments when he calls her his wife, his Ana, his love, or another endearment. On one page at the start of the third book, he reminds her that she is his three different times:

“You are mine,” he breathes, and his teeth tug my ear lobe. . . .
Between each kiss he murmurs, “I. Want. You. So. Much. I. Want. To. Be. Inside. You. You. Are. Mine. . . .”
“Mine,” he whispers once more.³⁰

This dialogue is the start of a murmured conversation while they have sex in which he continues reminding her that she is *his*, her breasts, her vagina, her person, because she is legally married

²³ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 199, 121, 262, 288, 293, 318, 349, 350, 372, and 485.

²⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 119, 295, 316, 437, 483. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 65, 90, 271, 438. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 73, 316.

²⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 329.

²⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 69.

²⁷ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 119.

²⁸ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 27, 56, 79, 123, 168, 200, 260, 271, 292, 391, 392, 473, 516, 530.

²⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 10, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 88, 115, 145, 167, 193, 201, 293, 307, 349.

³⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 20.

to him now, “My Ana.... Wife My love, my life.... Mine.... Wife of mine.”³¹ James intends her depiction of Christian’s objectification and obsessive possessiveness of Ana as romantic and not abusive or psychotic, but it is seriously creepy.

In the second book, Christian arranges for Dr. Greene, a gynecologist, to come to their hotel room to give her birth control shot since she has not been consistent in taking her birth control pills. Ana starts to object to this plan, saying that it is her body to which Christian says, “It’s mine, too.”³² Instead of objecting about his deciding her method of birth control for her or objecting about his claim that her body belongs to him, she concedes the point” “Yes, my body is his... he knows it better than I do.”³³ James has Ana so internalize Christian’s possession of her that Ana relinquishes autonomy over her own body to him. Her body is his—and we are back to the idea that a woman can be possessed, acquired, taken by a man. James attempts to temper Christian’s obsession with possessing Ana by having her both affirm that she is his and by having her be nearly as equally possessive about him, of him being hers. However, their obsessiveness in possessing each other is a deeply disturbing example to hold up to both women and men about romantic relationships

The other blurring of pleasure and pain, pleasure and violence, the sexualization of female pain, or the “eroticism of male violence” occurs in descriptions of Ana enjoying sexual intercourse or orgasm:

He continues his sweet, leisurely torment, backward and forward.³⁴

³¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 21-25.

³² E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 168.

³³ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 168.

³⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 121.

My body convulses at the sweet, stinging bite [of the riding crop].³⁵

He doesn't stop his sweet, exquisite torture. I moan loudly.³⁶

His tongue tortures me, giving no quarter, no respite ... no reprieve. Titling my hips up, meeting and matching his rhythm, I am consumed.³⁷

I am sensation, everywhere—a sweet, sweet agony.³⁸

I want to straighten my legs and struggle in a vain attempt to control the pleasure. But I can't. My fingers fist in his hair and I tug hard to fight his sublime torture.³⁹

That “torment,” “torture,” and “agony” are the words James chooses to use and couple with female sexual pleasure is disturbing. Again the coupling of pleasure and pain, the sexualization of female pain, the eroticism of a man hurting a woman as pleasurable and painful both is highly problematic. It is a masculine pleasure-oriented association that is seen all too often in porn and that James reproduces through her main narrating character's consistently coupling the two experiences. Eisler says that “our entire culture is permeated by the erotization of cruelty and brutality to women, so much so that we have learned to take it for granted.”⁴⁰ James reproduces this sexualization of pain by blending female sexual pleasure with pain. She re-enforces the eroticism of male violence and the masculinization of sex.

James also internalizes patriarchal double standard ideas about sexuality which visualizes uninhibited female sexuality as dirty as a way to control what it finds dangerous.

Fundamentally, James appears to find female sexuality dirty and shameful or at least her main character's perception of it. One of Ana's favorite books is Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the*

³⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 323.

³⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 68.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 288.

³⁸ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 38.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 348.

⁴⁰ Riane Eisler. *Sacred Pleasure*. *op. cit.* 233.

d'Urbervilles, and in entering her relationship with Christian, she chooses Tess' debasement by Alec d'Urberville over Angel Clare's more noble approach as a model for their relationship.⁴¹ So she accepts sex with Christian on his terms as debasement, demeaning, humiliating, and shameful. This is followed by further references to sex as dirty and dark and of her being wanton.

I blink at him, recalling our very, very pleasurable and romantic and downright dirty morning in his [BDSM] playroom.⁴²

"I thought we were just having a bath." My pulse quickens.

"I want to make you good and dirty first."⁴³

Desire, dark, sleek, and wanton runs hot through my veins.⁴⁴

He makes me feel so wanton.⁴⁵

"Well, aren't you the wanton creature?"⁴⁶

Only the woman engaging in sex is seen as wanton, by both Ana and Christian. Christian is not described as wanton. Mostly Ana is referenced by herself and Christian as dirty. Only once does Ana reference Christian as dirty but in direct response to him calling her dirty:

"Why, Mrs. Grey, you have a dirty, dirty mouth." Christian feigns an offended expression, but I can hear his amusement.

"That's because I'm married to a dirty, dirty boy, Mr. Grey."⁴⁷

On one level, Christian and Ana are teasing each other by associating their enjoyment of sex as dirty, but on another level, female enjoyment of sex as dirty is the cultural outlook which James has her characters reproduce instead of using more celebratory and sex-affirming associations

⁴¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 95.

⁴² E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 504.

⁴³ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Freed*. *op. cit.* 290.

⁴⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 75.

⁴⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 270.

⁴⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 106.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 119.

with sex and sexuality. In talking about the Virginity Movement (a current sexual education program), Jessica Valenti, in *The Purity Myth*, comments that “sex-as-dirty and women-as-tainted messages are central”⁴⁸ in shaming girls and young women from any true and empowered exploration of their sexuality—a message that James reproduces in Ana seeing herself as dirty and wanton (tainted) even when she is trying to make light of it.

Christian is described as “naughty” and “wicked”—but these references are usually ways of describing his superior sexual knowledge (his “sexpertise”⁴⁹ as James has Ana call it).

“And you smell of you and me and sex,” he says, inhaling sharply. “It’s intoxicating.” He kisses me through my lace panties, while I gasp at his words—my insides liquefying. He’s just so ... *naughty*.⁵⁰

“What was mind-blowing [sex], Anastasia?” he prompts, a wicked gleam in his eye. “You want the list?” I ask.⁵¹

He gives me a wicked grin, the effects of which travel all the way down *there*.⁵²

He looks so wickedly tempting—unkempt, recently fucked hair, dark eyes dancing with erotic thoughts, his lips raised in a sexy, amused smile.⁵³

I bite my lip. Christian smiles at me, his eyes gleaming wickedly. He knows exactly what he is doing, sexy beast that he is.⁵⁴

Unlike Ana’s association with dirt and wantonness, which are tied to sexuality as sinful, Christian’s associations with naughty and being wicked are tied to his superior sexual knowledge which is seen for a man as natural and normal. Further, though Christian can be seen as Mr. Sexpertise, Ana on various levels associates her growing sexual knowledge with being a whore.

⁴⁸ Jessica Valenti. *The Purity Myth*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2010. 32-33.

⁴⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 107. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 45.

⁵⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 113.

⁵¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 346.

⁵² E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 110.

⁵³ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 127.

⁵⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 132.

Her subconscious repeatedly calls Ana a “ho” (short for whore) while she debates entering a Dominator/submissive relationship with Christian.⁵⁵ Her “inner goddess” wears “harlot-red” nail polish or “harlot-red” lipstick at various points.⁵⁶ Ana at first feels uncomfortable with the lavish gifts that Christian gives her and tells him she feels like he’s “paying [her] for sex”⁵⁷; later, in the second book, after the confrontation between Ana and Leila, one of Christian’s former submissives, Ana is upset by all that has happened and all the issues that she is being forced to confront. She retreats to the bathroom and pictures herself as a “gaunt, pink-eyes, blotchy-cheeked harridan.”⁵⁸ So instead of seeing herself become Miss Sexpertise or Mrs. Sexpertise as her sexual knowledge grows, Ana sees herself as a whore—the typical demonization of the sexually expressive female in our patriarchal and misogynistic culture.

In addition to such associations with female sexuality as dirty and Ana as wanton or a whore, James seems to find it difficult for her female narrator to talk about sex explicitly. She goes to great lengths to avoid the words “vagina” and “penis” in her descriptions of female and male sexual anatomy. James has Ana refer to her buttocks mostly as her “behind” or her “backside.” She is able to use words like “breasts,” “nipples,” and “clitoris.” She uses the word “vagina” almost always to reference the “sweet spot” on the front wall of her vagina but does not use the word “G-spot.” Mostly she references her vagina as her “sex,” “the apex of her thighs,” her “groin,” or “the summit of her thighs.” Christian’s penis is referred to as his “erection” or “his length.” Further, James has Ana locate her erotic sensations when she is sexually aroused in her belly instead of her vagina: “His voice runs right through me, desire and

⁵⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 107, 145, 252, 484.

⁵⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 157. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 472.

⁵⁷ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 394.

⁵⁸ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 338.

anticipation spawning in my belly,”⁵⁹ “everything south of my navel contracts,”⁶⁰ “my belly tightens swift and hard with carnal desire,”⁶¹ or “fire licking hot and high in my belly.”⁶² In a series of books devoted to explicit sexual descriptions, it is highly ironic that the author has internalized the cultural taboos toward depictions of female sexuality so much that she cannot have her main character use the proper names of the sexual anatomy she and Christian are using during sex or even the slang terms for them.

Another cultural manifestation of the sexual double standard that James reproduces, instead of countering, is the emphasis on Ana as a twenty-one year old virgin while Christian is fully experienced sexual man with very specific and exotic and eroticized sexual tastes (BDSM) which are no doubt as misrepresented as the “vanilla” (or regular) sex that Ana and Christian engage in. According to the Guttmacher Institute, 61% of American eighteen year olds have had sex and 71% of American nineteen year olds have had sex,⁶³ so the depiction of Ana as a twenty-one year old, college-going virgin is not very realistic. It serves more to perpetuate the patriarchal idea of female virginity and purity than to demonstrate an empowered female sexuality on Ana’s part. James increases the power disparity between Christian and Ana beyond sexual knowledge by making him a ridiculously good looking and wealthy business man at twenty-seven years of age—a man who earns a hundred thousand dollars an hour⁶⁴—and a man of varied skills from being an excellent pianist to an accomplished pilot and boatman while Ana consistently sees herself as inadequate.

⁵⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 482.

⁶⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 145.

⁶¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 103.

⁶² E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 137.

⁶³ Guttmacher Institute. “American Teens’ Sexual and Reproductive Health.” www.guttmacher.org/pubs/FB-ATSRH.html. May 2014.

⁶⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 109.

James also seems to try to temper Christian's jealous obsessiveness with Ana by having multiple men attracted to her and by her being the woman whom at least two of Christian's former sexual partners harass. Jose tries to force himself on a very drunk Ana at the start of the first book, and Jack Hyde attempts to sexually assault her in the second book and to kidnap and presumably rape her at the start of the third book, but he only succeeds in physically assaulting her at the end of the third book. Leila, one of Christian's former submissives, seeks her out and threatens her with a gun at her in the second book and comes to see her in the third book. Elena Lincoln, Christian's mother's friend who secretly sexually assaulted him as a teenager and made him into her submissive for a six year secret affair, becomes jealous of the relationship between Ana and Christian and keeps attempting to contact Ana despite Ana's repeated refusals and Christian's warnings for Elena to stop. So there are threats and/or dangers that Christian is trying to protect Ana from, but he consistently overacts and treats her like "a child or an asset" which Ana repeatedly calls him on,⁶⁵ but because she doesn't leave him for treating her this way, she effectively tolerates his behavior and makes excuses for it.

Not only does James masculinize female sexuality, she hyper-masculinizes male sexuality. Christian's penis is "impressive"⁶⁶ in size; Ana refers to it as "a fine specimen of man."⁶⁷ He is Mr. Sexpertise. He has the ability to achieve orgasm in rapid succession, without the usual refractory period, that an eighteen year old would envy. Often in the series, Christian and Ana finish a first round of sex only to have Christian ready to go again without any special

⁶⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 230, 150, and 154.

⁶⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 116, 135, 137.

⁶⁷ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 267.

effort on his or Ana's part to get him aroused and/or erect again.⁶⁸ So not only is Christian vastly more sexually experienced and knowledgeable than Ana, he is a super stud with a huge penis and an unusual ability to ejaculate in rapid succession. Perhaps to be expected in this hyper masculinization, Christian literally sexes Ana to the point where Ana passes out or loses consciousness.⁶⁹ Certainly sexual activity takes effort and energy, but it isn't as physically exhausting as James makes it appear for Ana—even with multiple orgasms and/or multiple rounds of sexual intercourse. This is the male fantasy of a man's sexual prowess being so virile that it wears out the female lover when the opposite is normally true—that a woman can be sexually pleased again and again and again while a man needs down time (the refractory period) before he can be sexually aroused again. It also re-enforces the ideas of the male as dominant/active and the female as passive—because active Ana is un-natural, she is overwhelmed and easily tired. There is also something creepy about a man's wanting to have sex with a woman until she passes out or becomes unconscious. Christian tells Ana after their first night together that he is not into necrophilia (sexual attraction to corpses—or in Ana's case—a passed-out girl) and that he likes his women “sentient and receptive”⁷⁰—but having sex with her to the point of her falling unconscious is disturbing. In the first book, he tells her, “Right now, I just want to tie you up and fuck you senseless,”⁷¹ and this is something that he does again and again. He may not “fuck her” when she is unconscious, but he “fucks her” until she is unconscious. It is disturbing. Why James would want to create such situations as a female author is mystifying. Men rendering women unconscious and doing them harm is a far too

⁶⁸ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 124-125, 441. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 318, 399-400.

⁶⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 121. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 247, 493. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 39-40, 118, 262, 349.

⁷⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 60.

⁷¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 318.

common reality. That James has Christian render Ana unconscious repeatedly sends a dangerous message to readers.

Further, James has Ana start to perform fellatio or oral sex on Christian at least seven times⁷²—not all of the descriptions end in his climaxing in her mouth. The first description of his coming in her mouth is the most detailed and is not realistic, echoing the male fantasy of nympho women who love to “give head” and are naturally, or perhaps un-naturally, good at it. James depiction of Ana’s oral skills echo Linda Lovelace’s performance in *Deep Throat* (the 1972 porn movie—where Linda finds out that her clitoris is oddly placed not in her vagina but in the very back of her throat, so she loves giving head and takes penises deep in her throat without having a gag reaction).

I push him deeper into my mouth, supporting myself on his thighs. I feel his legs tense beneath my hands. He reaches up and grabs my pigtails and starts to really move....

“Jesus, How far can you go?” he whispers....

I pull him deeper into my mouth so I can feel him at the back of my throat.... I suck harder and harder, pushing him deeper and deeper, swirling my tongue around and around.... He thrusts his hips again, his eyes wide.... I push even harder.... He cries out and stills and I can feel the warm, salty liquid oozing down my throat. I swallow quickly.⁷³

Even Christian is amazed that Ana doesn’t gag—asking her, after he comes, if she has a gag reflex.⁷⁴ Several things about this description are unrealistic and express the internalization of primacy of male sexual pleasure. First, that Ana can take his penis impossibly deep in her mouth without gagging, and second that he can thrust and pump his penis into her mouth and throat without her gagging when sucking a stationary penis can cause gagging. Additionally, the

⁷² E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 136-137, 266. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 68-69, 219, 388-389. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 178, 535-536.

⁷³ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 137.

⁷⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 137.

description of the semen “[slowly] oozing” down her throat as a pleasant experience is fantasy. The sudden ejaculation of semen in a woman’s mouth often triggers a gag reflex in and of itself.

The second description is much less detailed than the first—but Ana doesn’t gag from his thrusting into her mouth and throat or from swallowing his semen.⁷⁵ There are other scenes where she begins oral sex but only as a prelude to intercourse⁷⁶—again, no gagging on Ana’s part. The first time Ana performs fellatio on Christian is her first time ever doing such a thing—yet she is a natural—just like Linda Lovelace in *Deep Throat*. James’ depiction of Ana’s oral skills is more something out of pornography than the experience of real women performing fellatio—another manifestation of male-sexual-pleasure-bias instead of something that could realistically depict a woman wanting to pleasure a man in a way that is comfortable and/or pleasurable for her too.

Next, although Ana tries to make light of Christian’s possessiveness, his stalker actions are creepy. In the first book, Christian tracks her cell phone and is able to find her through it—though he has only seen her three times previously over a two week period.⁷⁷ He buys her a brand new Audi A3 because he doesn’t trust the car she has and has driven for three years.⁷⁸ He buys the company she works for because he wants to keep her safe.⁷⁹ He continues to track her through her cell phone and her car. He upgrades her airline tickets from Seattle to Georgia and from Georgia back to Seattle to first class and buys the seat next to hers, so that she doesn’t have

⁷⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 388-389.

⁷⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 266. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 68-69, 219. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 178, 535-536.

⁷⁷ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 62.

⁷⁸ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 261, 247.

⁷⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 328.

the opportunity to talk to the person next to her both ways.⁸⁰ In the second book, he buys all seven of the photographs of Ana that Jose has in his show, so no one else can buy them and look at her.⁸¹ He pays \$100,000 for a dance with her at his parents' charity dinner, so that no one else can dance with her.⁸² He gets her to move in with him and then to marry him, to protect her but also to possess her completely—so she is his absolutely. After his helicopter is reported missing and he has no means of communicating with his family or Ana, he refuses to stop and call them to let them know he is okay. He refuses to stop because he is desperate to get back to Seattle so that Ana will not spend the night alone in his apartment with her friend Jose without him being there. He lets his family members, Ana, and his staff think that he is dead because he is jealous of what might happen between Jose and Ana in his absence.⁸³ In the third book, they fight over her keeping her name, Ana Steele, at work to keep some distance from him and his influence, but he insists, rationalizing his insistence on the following explanations: “I want everyone to know that you’re mine” and “I want your world to begin and end with me.”⁸⁴ James has Ana excuse Christian’s obsessive protectiveness and jealousy by seeing it as romantic and by seeing it was the desperate desire for control from a man with a childhood history of chaos, abuse, and no control when it is really psychotic behavior. She also does readers the dis-service of re-enforcing the myth that the love of a good woman can cure a deeply psychologically scarred man. Characters, from Christian himself to Christian’s doctor-mother and his lawyer-father to his psychiatrist, Dr. Flynn, comment on Ana’s being the best therapy for Christian.⁸⁵ This re-enforced myth must be a slap in the face to every girlfriend or wife of a veteran suffering from

⁸⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 391-392, 476.

⁸¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 24.

⁸² E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 149, 182.

⁸³ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 462, 475.

⁸⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 145-146.

⁸⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 187, 516, 163-164, and 411.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or any other girlfriend or wife of a man with a profound psychological disability and is an unhealthy model to be giving readers.

Lastly, there are elements of his BDSM Dominator persona that are too creepy to overlook. Perhaps in Christian's BDSM playroom, pulling Ana's loose hair or braided hair to hold her in place or immobilize her or force her face toward his is acceptable within the confines of their "playing" Dominator/submissive, but Christian routinely grabs Ana's hair outside the playroom to hold her in place, immobilize her, and/or force her face toward his—and despite many characters calling Ana a strong woman (including Christian)—what strong woman lets her boyfriend or husband force her head into position by pulling her hair? It is stereotype not even worthy of Neanderthals today.

He grasps my hair at the nape in a fist and pulls gently, holding me in place. I cannot move my head. I am pinioned beneath him, helpless.⁸⁶

He grabs my hair, holding my head immobile. I cannot move.⁸⁷

He plants a soft kiss under my earlobe while his fingers tighten in my hair. Pulling my head back, he exposes my throat to his lips. His teeth skim my chin, and he kisses my throat.⁸⁸

In a beat, he grabs me by my hips and pulls me to him as my hands reach for his hair and his mouth claims me. He pushes me against the fridge, and I hear the vague protesting rattle of bottles and jars form within as his tongue finds mine. I moan into his mouth and one of his hands moves into my hair, pulling my head back as we kiss savagely.⁸⁹

He groans loudly, and suddenly his arms are around me, and his hand is in my hair, pulling my head up painfully so that my lips meet his insistent mouth. And we're kissing, my fingers knotting into his hair.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 119.

⁸⁷ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 121.

⁸⁸ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 427.

⁸⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 66.

⁹⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 328.

He pulls my ponytail back and kisses me....

“Sit.” He grabs my ponytail again and pulls my head back.⁹¹

He grabs my hips and positions himself, and I brace myself for his assault. But he reaches over me and grabs my braid near the end and winds it around his wrist to my nape, holding my head in place.⁹²

Rather than being romantic or even acceptable, it is gross and should be unacceptable to Ana or any woman desiring an abuse-free relationship. James seems to attempt to counter Christian’s willingness to man-handle Ana by pulling her hair by having Ana enjoying touching and even fisting her hands through Christian’s hair, but she is usually doing this in response to her passion for him or affection toward him and not in attempt to move his head or force his head into a particular position.⁹³

Additionally, Christian uses sex or sexual acts to “punish” Ana despite the fact that he agrees to abandon the idea of punishments at the start of the second book.⁹⁴ Perhaps the two most grievous are in the third book. In the first, Ana takes off her bikini top while lying on her chest, exposing her bare back, on the Southern French beach where she is the only woman on the beach wearing a bikini top. She falls asleep, and in her sleep, she turns over and exposes her naked chest. Christian’s “punishment sex” following this transgression is to cover her chest with hickeys and to leave metal handcuff mark welts on her wrists and ankles. Ana does not realize how she is being marked during the sex they perform, but she is furious about it afterwards, and yet she forgives him and accepts his rationalization for why he did it.⁹⁵ “Just ... just don’t take your clothes off in public. I don’t want you naked all over the tabloids. You don’t want that,

⁹¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 396.

⁹² E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 429.

⁹³ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 371, 479. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 69, 120, 386. E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 104, 173, 375, 465, 489-490, 495.

⁹⁴ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 36, 151.

⁹⁵ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 41-44.

and I'm sure your mom and Ray [Ana's stepfather] don't want that, either."⁹⁶ Though topless isn't naked, Ana accepts his restriction and reasoning. What remains unsaid is his obsessive possession of her. Early in the first book, Christian tells Ana that "[he doesn't] like to share."⁹⁷ What is his is his and only *his*. Christian will not share Ana with Jose (the original target of his non-sharing statement) or the media or anyone else. This is just another way to remind Ana that "You are mine.... Only mine. Don't forget."⁹⁸

Another disturbing incident of "punishment sex" (though these are not the only two) is the torture that Christian performs on Ana after she has disobeyed him by having drinks out at a bar instead of having drinks at Christian and Ana's apartment. Going out for drinks was the original plan for Ana and Kate, but Christian gets her promise to have drinks at the apartment instead of out. Ana suggests the apartment to Kate, but Kate convinces her to get one drink at the bar—which turns into several. Though Ana's outing at the bar with Kate, instead of being at the apartment, removes them from the break-in and attempted kidnapping of Ana by Jack Hyde, Christian is furious with Ana for disobeying him. The punishment sex happens when Ana and Christian are in the playroom; she is shackled and blindfolded. He repeatedly brings her to the point of orgasm only to withhold it. They are husband and wife at this point. He has dispensed with his idea of having her as a submissive. Punishment is supposed to be "off the menu" in terms of their relationship.⁹⁹ He has dispensed with safe words and has simply asked her to tell him to stop if anything they do sexually is too much for her:

And again he denies me. I want him so badly. I need him so badly. I close my eyes and

⁹⁶ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed*. *op. cit.* 29.

⁹⁷ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *op. cit.* 148.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 119.

⁹⁹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Darker*. *op. cit.* 151.

mutter a prayer. I can't help but feel I'm being punished. I'm helpless and he's ruthless. Tears spring to my eyes. I don't know how far he's going to take this.

"Please," I whisper once more.

But he gazes down at me, implacable. He's just going to continue. For how long? Can I play this game? *No. No. No—I can't do this.* I know he's not going to stop. He's going to continue to torture me. His hand travels down my body once more. *No ...* And the dam bursts—all the apprehension, the anxiety, and the fear from the last couple of days overwhelming me anew as tears spring to my eyes. I turn away from him. This is not love. It's revenge.

"Red," I whimper. "Red. Red." The tears course down my face.¹⁰⁰

Christian is horrified that Ana is so overcome that she uses the most urgent safe word instead of asking him to stop, and though Ana acknowledges this as torture several times after the actual act,¹⁰¹ she accepts this abuse and continues their relationship instead of fleeing from it.

For all the described above reasons and more,ⁱ which the confines of this paper do not allow me to enumerate, E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy is not a fictional portrait of empowered female sexuality. Instead it is a female recasting of what Jack Holland in *Misogyny* calls the common sense bigotry of our society (misogyny) which is "pervasive, persistent, pernicious, and protean," according to Holland.¹⁰² James creates a protean version of the misogynistic when she reproduces a masculinization of female sexuality instead of creating something truly female empowering and new. She creates a psychotic man who brutalizes the only woman he has ever loved, and she creates a woman who willingly accepts the abuse she is subjected to and finds his "stalker," creepy, tendencies romantic and excusable instead of frightening and threatening.

¹⁰⁰ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed. op. cit.* 248.

¹⁰¹ E.L. James. *Fifty Shades Freed. op. cit.* 250, 257, and 264.

¹⁰² Jack Holland. *Misogyny.* Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2007. 270.

Unfortunately, James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy is only one manifestation of our increasingly violent and misogynistic culture. Staggeringly, there have been seventy-four school shootings since Adam Lanza killed twenty children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012.¹⁰³ This May, in Santa Barbara, Elliot Rodger's murder of six people and his injuring of seven others ups the violence quotient by adding his distinctly misogynistic rage to his murderous violence. In 1988, Tracy Chapman's song "Why" asked "Why is a woman still not safe when she in her home?"¹⁰⁴ Twenty-six years later, William Falk, the editor of *The Week* magazine, reflecting on the Rodger's violence and shooting, writes about the experience of having his daughters, twenty-one and seventeen, leered at in front of him by a couple of drunk thirty-something men. He suggests that people who think that misogyny isn't a pervasive and debilitating force in our culture should

Try having a daughter. Witness grown men ogling her when she's still in high school. Live with the reality that she is not safe if she's on a college campus, in the Army, on the Internet, alone on a street, or even in the company of men she thinks she knows. No, it's not all men. But it's too damn many.¹⁰⁵

Falk is relating the misogyny of Elliot Rodger to the pervasive misogyny that allows boys and men to objectify females and think that girls and women are fair game to be leered at, propositioned in rude or insulting ways, stalked, and/or raped—or otherwise "taken" as a desirable commodities instead of human beings with the rights to say "no" and mean no as well as the rights to say "yes" and mean yes in mutually respectful encounters without pain and to be seen as complex people with ranges of characteristics and qualities beyond the ability to get boys or men off sexually. When one in five women on college campuses are the victims of sexual

¹⁰³ Ashley Fantz, Lindsey Knight, and Kevin Wang. "A Closer Look: How Many School Shootings since Newtown?" *CNN*. June 12, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/11/us/school-shootings-cnn-number/>.

¹⁰⁴ Tracy Chapman. "Why." *Tracy Chapman*. SBK Record Productions, Inc. 1988.

¹⁰⁵ William Falk. "The Week." *The Week*. Vol. 14, Issue 672 (June 13, 2014): 3.

assault,¹⁰⁶ we desperately need positive and non-violent examples of female sexual exploration with respectful, caring, and empathetic partners and clear separations between pleasure and pain, consent and coercion, and healthy relationships and abusive relationships. This separation, tragically, isn't seen in the *Fifty Shades of Grey* series or in the popular culture that surrounds us and continues to bombard women and men and girls and boys with images of misogyny and the masculinization of sex.

ⁱ Additional misogynistic topics that could be pursued are as follows:

—Ana feeling like Christian treats her like a child, reproducing the patriarchal view that a woman isn't an adult; she is a dependent, someone who can and should be treated like a child;

—Christian's repeated references to Ana having a "smart mouth"—just because she is educated and has some opinions of her own. For him, on some level, this seems to express the oxymoron of a woman as being smart—instead of the stereotype of the stupid and/or ignorant, passive woman—the perfect submissive. The use of "wench" to reference Ana is also dismissive;

—The use of the label whore to dismiss women as full and complicated human beings who deserve consideration beyond their sexual status: Christian's references to his mother as "the crack whore" instead of his "birthmother" (admittedly, Christian's birthmother may have prostituted herself to get drugs—but Christian calls her a crack whore also to emotionally distance himself from her), Grace calling Elena a whore after finding out about Christian and Elena's affair when he was an adolescent, Jack Hyde calling Ana a whore in preparation of stealing from her and Christian and possibly raping her (if he had succeeded in having her alone after the ransom exchange since that was clearly his objective at the SIP (in book two) and his attempted break-in and kidnapping (in book three));

—James also has Ana fulfill the stereotype of the deceitful female—who cannot be trusted—for good and bad reasons: Ana goes out with Kate for Cocktailgate instead of taking Kate to the apartment as she told Christian she would do, Ana's performance for Christian the morning after she tells him she is pregnant hides her true emotions to punish him for his behavior, and Ana's lying to Christian about Mia and the ransom;

—The many descriptions of Christian being fully clothed or at least with his pants on and only his fly open and having sex with a naked or nearly naked Ana imply that he doesn't care enough to reciprocate the exposure of nakedness while having sex with her, so it isn't worth dropping his pants. He fears being touched on his chest and back, yet it is his pants that are left on over and over again. It's isn't tender or romantic. It makes Ana a vessel of his pleasure and not someone worthy of the effort of disrobing. Another point here is that it ignores the physiology of sexual intercourse. Sex like that, even when Christian is wearing a condom, would result in Ana's natural lubricants on his pants—which is never described as an outcome. Add to that the sex when Ana is on the Pill or using the birth control shot, and there should be the combination of Ana's natural lubricants and his semen on his pants—but again this is not described as an outcome;

—There is all the language of Christian "pulling" Ana, "taking" her hand, "leading" her, "cupping" her chin, "ordering" her, and "commanding" her, and all the ways that he manhandles her like carrying her over his shoulder like baggage or a woman chosen for ravaging and swatting her ass;

—There are the repeated images of her curling herself in his lap or arms when she is grown woman, not a child;

—Ana's inability to verbalize out loud what she wants sexually re-enforces the idea that active or aggressive female sexual desire is unspeakable, taboo, deviant, instead of normal;

¹⁰⁶ Eliza Gray. "Rape: The Crisis in Higher Education." *Time*. Vol. 183, No. 20 (May 26, 2014): 22.

—Christian repeated musing over what he should or could “do to Ana” or “do with Ana” make him (the male) active party and her (the female) the passive party—the recipient of his actions—both sexually and otherwise—a reproduction of the gendered stereotype;

—James depicts men coercing women into having sex as normative. Despite the fact that Ana has repeatedly made Jose aware that what she is interested with him is friendship, he attempts to force her into a sexual relationship when she is very drunk—ignoring her verbal and physical protests—“no” means “yes”—sexual assault, even by a friend, is what men do—except that Jose is interrupted from assaulting Ana by Christian. Elliot (Christian’s brother) and Kate (Ana’s roommate) assume that Ana and Christian have had sex when Ana spends the night passed out in Christian’s hotel room because taking advantage of drunken and/or passed out women is what men do. Kate’s first sexual experience is when she is drunk and the boy is “rough” with her—rough as in rape rough?—again coercion is implicated. She wasn’t ready she tells Ana—implying that she wouldn’t have done it in her right mind—that she was coerced into doing it. Jack Hyde coerces sex from Elizabeth Morgan, his previous five Personal Assistants, and who knows how many other women. He intended to coerce sex from Ana on their trip to New York. He tries to after hours at SIP. The implication of the mattress, the drugs, and the duct tape that Jack had in the van or on his person when he attempts to kidnap Ana from her and Christian’s apartment is that he would kidnap her and rape her. In blackmailing Elizabeth Morgan and his Pas and attempting to kidnap Ana, Hyde crosses a line of coercion as normal in sexual relations between men and women to criminal behavior—but coercion is still the *opus operandi* that James describes for relationships between men and women;

—James repeatedly describes Christian in terms of predator images—again framing relations between men and women in terms of active and passive, predators and prey, hunters and the hunted, winners and losers, the empowered and the powerless, the knowledgeable and the ignorant;

—Doubtless there are other ways that James reproduces the misogyny of our wider culture that remain to be explored.