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“Female Victimization in Popular Culture: Bella Swan to Rihanna, Taylor Swift, and  
Katy Perry”<sup>1</sup>

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Entering the second decade of the Twenty-First century, where are women in terms of sexual equality with men and freedom from violence? In the 48 years since Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystic*, the 51 years since the introduction of the birthcontrol pill, the 39 years since Title IX and the 38 years from *Roe vs. Wade*, where are we, women,—are we liberated or still bound by patriarchal stigmas and fantasies about female sexuality and power? Though much attention by Third Wave feminists has explored what female sexuality could be, popular culture, even created or propagated by women, all too often reflects male desire and male fantasies about female sexuality and not a genuine reflection of what uninhibited female sexuality could look like.

In Naomi Wolf's 1991 book, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*, she explained how the gains of Second Wave Feminism have been systemically undermined and eroded by the creation of a beauty standard that is virtually unobtainable and insidiously pervasive in our culture, American culture, and leeches

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that for the purposes of this paper, I have focused on the texts of the novels and songs. Although much could and should be done with the visual images from the movies and the music videos, especially in terms of the music industries highly sexualized videos, I didn't have time to treat those issues here.

from us to Western cultures in general and slowly even to non-Western cultures, via the media which now also includes the Internet. This super thin, super beautiful, super-breasted, youthful ideal makes women unhappy with their normal appearances from their faces to all aspects of their bodies. And distracted by their appearances, women are not pushing for the unachieved goals of the Second Wave: equal pay, equal representation in all occupations, child care funding, safety from domestic and sexual violence, punishment of sexual harassment, reproductive freedom, free exploration of female sexuality, etc. In the twenty years since publication of *The Beauty Myth*, the culture has been impacted by a “liberalization” during the Clinton years, only to be followed by the return to conservatism under George W. Bush, and we are currently assessing ourselves in the Obama years and wondering whether we will be plunged again into a conservative milieu under Herman Cain or Mitt Romney. Part of Wolf’s argument was that pornography has had a huge impact in creating and spreading this virtually impossible ideal and that the influence of pornography infiltrates everything from fashion models and fashion and women’s magazines, to women’s and men’s different ideas about gender and sexual pleasure, to violence against women, to the increased demand of plastic surgery, to competition among women trying to adhere to the ideal, to anorexia and bulimia. In the twenty years since publication, I am sure she would point out that the Internet, Reality TV, and cable have only increased the influence of pornography on all aspects of gender relations. Anna Holmes of the *New York Times* says that

on reality television, gratuitous violence and explicit sexuality are not only entertainment but a means to an end. These enthusiastically documented humiliations are positioned as necessities in the service of some final prize or larger benefit—a marriage proposal, a model contract, \$1 million. But they also make assault and abasement seem commonplace, acceptable behavior, tolerated by women and encouraged by men.

Thus, images of assaulting and abusing women are becoming normative and more integrated into the culture through these new media. Wolf was highlighting the victimization of women by the creation of the beauty myth, a myth that is supreme in industries where men dominate the top executive positions whether in fashion, Hollywood, beauty, dieting, or the like, but the new media have saturated it throughout far more of our culture.

While I find the victimization of women by men or male-dominated industries disturbing, in popular culture today, I am alarmed at the number and influence of female generated images of female victimization of women. Bella Swan, in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, is lied to, manipulated, and coerced by the boys in her life, Edward Cullen and Jacob Black. Clare Abshire in Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife*, is similarly stalked by Henry DeTamble, clandestinely meeting her 152 times as she grows from a six year old girl to an eighteen year old girl. Leona Lewis's 2007 hit song, "Bleeding Love," emphasizes her love as cutting her open so that she bleeds and bleeds. Rihanna has three songs out currently particularly relevant to this conversation, "S & M" and "Love the Way You Lie" (both versions with Eminem) that are made even more disturbing by her known status as a victim of violence at the hands of Chris Brown. Katy Perry's "E.T." likewise, with her refrain "Take me, ta-ta-take me/ Wanna be a victim/ Ready for abduction," is made even worse in its duet form with Kanye West. Even in Taylor Swift's "Mean," the imagery is of violence. The girl is being verbally and emotionally abused by her boyfriend, but the references to knives, weapons, and hits imply physical violence as well, and her response isn't to go to the police and get a

restraining order to stop her victimization and stop him from victimizing other girls once he done with her, but to say “someday” she will be famous and he will be stuck in the same small town as just a mean guy. That these images are so popular and are being created by women and influencing millions of women and men around the world is profoundly troubling. The success of these images seems to indicate that we have moved beyond a culture that internalizes and touts a women-destructive beauty myth to one which idealizes female victimization by men in some weird, perverted version of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* where it is glamorous to be abused instead of horrific and repugnant.

In Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series (*Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*), a series aimed at young adults, young female adults, Bella Swan is a human girl caught in a love triangle with the vampire, Edward Cullen, and the werewolf, Jacob Black. As a vampire, Edward has super senses; he is faster and stronger than any human being; even among vampires, he is exceptionally fast. Further, he has enhanced senses of smell, vision, hearing, and he can read people’s minds. Additionally, he is super attractive and can use his voice, smell, and eyes to seduce those around him. There is no major decision that Bella makes in the series that is not influenced by Edward and his powers. For example, in *Twilight*, when she agrees to go to Seattle with Edward, he uses his looks, his voice, and his eyes to get her to say yes; Bella describes the encounter with the following words:

We were under the shelter of the cafeteria now, so I could more easily look at his face. Which certainly didn’t help my clarity of thought.... His eyes were gloriously intense as he uttered [his] last sentence, his voice smoldering. I couldn’t remember how to breathe. (Meyer 84)

She agrees, of course. She is so overwhelmed by his powers, that she can't say the words and only nods in agreement (Meyer 84). Again and again, Edward influences her to make the decisions he wants her to make. At the start of *Eclipse*, he is determined that she should go to college, so determined that he forges her name and signature on a Dartmouth application (Meyer 22-23). He manipulates her into going to Florida, so she will be absent when Victoria returns to Forks (Meyer, *Eclipse* 48-49, 52-57). Even their engagement is a series of coercions. She wants to be a vampire, and though she turns eighteen and is a legal adult, he won't trust her judgment or authority to make this decision. When his father is willing to change Bella, Edward manipulates her by telling her that he will change her himself but only if she will marry him first. When Bella demands that they have sex before she becomes a vampire, Edward makes their marriage first a condition. To seal the deal, he kisses her out of rational thought; Bella describes the kiss and her lack of clarity of thought as follows:

His arms wrapped around me, and he began kissing me in a way that should be illegal. Too persuasive—it was duress, coercion. I tried to keep a clear head ... and failed quickly and absolutely. (Meyer, *Eclipse* 450-451).

This coercion is followed in the formal popping of the question where his beauty and eyes work to get the answer he desires, her agreement: “He looked up at me through his impossibly long lashes, his golden eyes soft but, somehow, still scorching” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 460). She obediently answers yes.

Jacob is little better than Edward. Jacob is not content to accept Bella's decision to date Edward. He uses his unhappiness, his pain, to get Bella to do things for him and to see him. Both of the times Jacob kisses Bella are against her will and are filled with violent images. The first kiss happens just after Jacob has declared his love and has

asked Bella to pick him instead of Edward. She has told him no, but he says that he will disregard her wishes and keep fighting for her.

[Jacob] still had my chin—his fingers holding too tight, till it hurt—and I saw the resolve form abruptly in his eyes.

“N—“ I started to object, but it was too late.

His lips crushed mine, stopping my protest. He kissed me angrily, roughly, his other hand gripping tight around the back of my neck, making escape impossible. I shoved against his chest with all my strength, but he didn’t even seem to notice. (Meyer, *Eclipse* 330)

Jacob ignores her here on many levels. She has told him that she loves Edward and will not pick him. He doesn’t care about what she wants or chooses. Additionally he is hurting her. She clearly is telling him not to kiss her, and he ignores that too. His kiss is violent. When she pushes him away, he either doesn’t notice or chooses to ignore this too.

The next kiss is worse. Jacob coerces the kiss from her by threatening to die in the upcoming fight unless she kisses him. So she asks for the kiss, though he knows he has forced her into it and he knows that she engaged to Edward (knowledge of her engagement is another manipulation on Edward’s part):

I held very still—my eyes closed, my fingers curled into fists at my sides—as [Jacob’s] hands caught my face and his lips found mine with an eagerness that was not far from violence.

I could feel his anger as his mouth discovered my passive resistance. One hand moved to the nape of my neck, twisting into a fist around the roots of my hair. The other hand grabbed roughly at my shoulder, shaking me, then dragging me to him. His hand continued down my arm, finding my wrist and pulling my arm around his neck.... His burning hand found the skin at the small of my back, and he yanked me forward, bowing my body against his.... My arms were already around his neck, so I grabbed two fistfuls of his hair—ignoring the stabbing pain in my right hand [broken from hitting him after the first kiss]—and fought back, struggling to pull my face away from his.

And Jacob misunderstood.

He was too strong to recognize that my hands, trying to yank his hair out by the roots, meant to cause him pain. Instead of anger, he imagined passion. He thought I was finally responding to him. (Meyer, *Eclipse* 526-527)

Jacob is assaulting her. He is angry and violent. He ignores every form of protest that she offers here, and if all this wasn't disturbing enough in terms of the glorification of violence against women, Bella actually turns from resisting the kiss to kissing him and realizing that she does love Jacob, so it's a rape fantasy scene. Bella's saying "no" really means "yes." Conscious, rational Bella, doesn't really know her own mind and needs to be sexually assaulted to realize that she likes kissing Jacob. I can't make up my mind which male character's abuse is the more repugnant, Edward's or Jacob's. Worse is Bella's inability to see what these boys are doing to her as forms of abuse, and she models her willingness to be a victim to millions of fans all over the world.

Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife* is aimed at an adult audience but was also a national best seller and has been made into a movie. As in the *Twilight* series, the question of Clare's agency over her own life and her choice to become involved with Henry is taken away from her. Between the age of six and eighteen, versions of Henry's older self visit Clare 152 times; after the first time, he begins giving her the date of his next visit, so that, eventually, Clare's childhood diary will list all of them. Knowing the date of Henry's appearances in the meadow means that she can anticipate them and be there for the meetings. When they meet in "real" time in Chicago in 1991, Clare is 20 and has not seen Henry for about eighteen months, but at their last meeting, Henry tells her that they will meet in Chicago (Niffenegger 426), so this information influences her choice of college. He has also told her multiple times that in his future, they are married (Niffenegger 11). When they meet, Henry is 28 and has not met the child Clare or the 20 year old Clare standing in front of him. Clare is stunned to find herself facing Henry in

the Newberry Library; though he doesn't know her, Clare is flooded with a range of emotions and memories about Henry:

“I'm Clare Abshire. I knew you when I was a little girl ...” I am at a loss because I am in love with a man who is standing before me with no memories of me at all. Everything is in the future for him. I want to laugh at the weirdness of the whole thing. I'm flooded with years of knowledge of Henry; while he's looking at me perplexed and fearful. Henry wearing my dad's old fishing trousers, patiently quizzing me on multiplication tables and French verbs, all the state capitals; Henry laughing at some particular lunch my seven-year-old self has brought to the Meadow; Henry wearing a tuxedo undoing the studs of his shirt with shaking hands on my eighteenth birthday. Here! Now! (Niffenegger 4)

In Henry's visits to Clare's childhood, though he waits to have sex with Clare until she is eighteen, he has stalked her most of her life, twelve years. What choice does Clare have? She has grown up loving him, knowing that someday she will be married to him. Is there any way for Clare to reject Henry so that she can have a relationship with another man? I don't think it is possible for her to reject Henry. Although she has sex with Gomez twice, she imagines him as Henry both the second times (Niffenegger 523-524), and the first time is so riddled with guilt over her “betrayal” to Henry, that she apologizes to Henry audibly in her sleep (Niffenegger 430-437). When Henry dies in 2006 at 43, he can't leave her alone. Though he insists in his letter to her that “when I am dead[,] stop waiting and be free. Of me—put me deep inside you and then go out into the world and live. Love the world and yourself in it” (Niffenegger 519), he counters all that by telling her that he will see her again one last time when she is in an old woman. So instead of moving on with her life and loving another man or multiple men, Clare waits; she will be 82 when the wait is finally over though she was 35 when he died. Clare like Bella has had her romantic fate determined for her by the man who is supposed to love and respect her. Clare like Bella has been manipulated into choosing her husband. Henry's time

traveling is a function of a chromosome irregularity, something called Chrono-Impairment (Niffenegger 312); it is a supernatural condition that allows him to influence the all too normally human Clare that is reminiscent of Edward's and Jacob's supernatural abilities that allow them to manipulate and dominate Bella. So once again in Clare, we see a woman embrace a stalking situation and refuse to see the abusive nature of the relationship. Instead, the deeply disturbing nature of the relationship, it is touted as romantic or as the cover quote attributed to the *Chicago Tribune* says, it is "a soaring celebration of the victory of love over time" (Niffenegger, Cover). Thus, again, female victimization is idealized instead of vilified.

Conversely and interestingly, in a current best selling novel by a British man, Eoin Colfer, *Artemis Fowl: The Atlantis Complex* (the seventh in the series), the fairy, Turnball Root, uses magic to bind the human woman, Leonor Carsby, to him so she will love him and marry him (279-283). The *Artemis Fowl* series features Artemis Fowl, a pre-teen and teenage human criminal mastermind and his interactions with the Fairy People. Though there are hints that a relationship might develop between Artemis and the fairy military officer, Holly Short, little has really developed by *The Atlantis Complex*; the backstory or challenge put to Artemis and Holly and their friends is provided by Turnball and his manipulation of Leonor. Unlike other depictions of human women being dominated and/or victimized by supernatural men, Turnball's act is seen as criminal, and, even worse, "black-magic" (Colfer 314). It is one of the many unscrupulous and illegal things that Turnball Root has done in his long criminal career which include robbing the First Pixie Prudential Bank, destroying half of Haven City and other crimes which have landed him in prison (Colfer 126, 159, 279). In this latest novel,

Turnball leaves a trail of destruction behind him: he steals control of the Mars probe, uses the probe to kill off Commander Raine Vinyaya and a shuttle of LEP troops, threatens Atlantis, and destroys the prison shuttle he and three of his men escaped on. He does all this so that they can reconvene at Turnball's Venice residence, steal a LEP shuttle, make it look like an ambulance, kidnap the warlock, Number 1, and force Number 1 to use his magic on Leonor to make her young again.

Artemis and Holly Short and their associates thwart Turnball's plans. Turnball's obsession with Leonor mirrors that of Edward's and Jacob's for Bella and Henry's for Clare. He uses his supernatural power on her to bind him to her, entrancing her (Colfer 283), and she can refuse him nothing (Colfer 286-287). He lies to her and keeps his real status as a criminal and a criminal prisoner hidden from her (Colfer 282-283). When he promises her that she can fly again, he knows it is a lie because he cannot risk the possibility that "she might fly away" from him (Colfer 287). However, the long separation of Leonor and Turnball because of his prison sentence has weakened his spell over her, and she has moments where she questions his hold over her (Colfer 287). At the end, Leonor realizes that their shuttle will explode and destroy not only themselves but the other captives and more—the umbilical conduit and part of the space hospital, the *Nostremius*, and she won't let it happen; she demands lease from the unnatural life Turnball has forced on her and pilots the shuttle into the Atlantis Trench where it can explode without harming Atlantis or the hospital (Colfer 346). Turnball chooses to accompany her, so they die together.

What Turnball does to Leonor is wrong (using black-magic to bind her and lying to her), but he is a villain, a selfish, murderous criminal. Perhaps it is romantic that he

loves so much that he is willing to use magic, kill as many people as necessary to complete his plans to be reunited with her forever, kidnap a warlock, and then die with her, but Colfer describes it all as criminal behavior. This portrayal is, then, radically different from Meyer's portrayal of Edward's and Jacob's behaviors and Niffenegger's portrayal of Henry's behavior—where the behaviors of Edward, Jacob, and Henry are, in fact, criminal but not treated as such.

There is a further difference between the Colfer, Meyer, and Niffenegger stories in terms of the female characters. In Colfer, Leonor breaks out of the spell enough to demand that it ends. She is an old woman, and she wants not eternal life but release and death. She gets to fly again, one last time. In Meyer, Bella is never able to see her Edward or her Jacob as abusive by using supernatural power over her. Though coerced into marrying Edward, she does so in *Breaking Dawn*, and then she realizes that being married to Edward is what she wanted all along, another rape fantasy cleaned up as a marriage fantasy (49). Similarly, in Niffenegger, though Clare knows that Henry has stalked her throughout her childhood and adolescences, she can't find anything wrong with his behavior and resigns herself to waiting for Henry from 39 years of age to some vague time in the future when she is an old woman and he will appear one last time—which turns out to be a 43 year wait, accomplished when she is 82. Clare never objects, never seeks an independent life. In the end, all these couples are reunited (Bella and Edward, Clare and Henry, Leonor and Turnball), but only Leonor realizes the dark nature of her relationship with her husband, suggesting that their love should never have existed (Colfer 345). Bella and Clare remain clueless about how they have been manipulated and coerced. So we are left with the ironic twist that a contemporary male author, Colfer,

chooses to write a love story between a supernatural being and a human woman where though the fairy uses the supernatural to dominate the woman, the human woman breaks away and chooses her own path. Whereas Meyer and Niffenegger, female authors, write parallel stories of supernatural men dominating human women—but the domination, the victimization is unbroken; the women are pawns of the men who have power over them, and they are content to be dominated.

Similar to Colfer, Stieg Larsson's international best selling Lisabeth Salander trilogy (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl who Played with Fire*, and *The Girl who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*) deals with human beings, albeit some with extraordinary skills and talents, but Larsson's unrelenting focus in the three books is to expose violence against women as the crime it is and to condemn anyone including government agency employees who work to cover it up. Because of Lisabeth's father's status as a high-profile, political informant to the Swedish Security Police, his abuse of his wife is covered up and ignored repeatedly. When Lisabeth stands up to him and sets him on fire, she is institutionalized, declared mentally incompetent, and put under guardianship. Despite these problems, Lisabeth forms friendships with a range of people from Mikael Blomkvist, the co-founder of the *Millennium* (a small but respected news magazine), and Dragan Armansky, the CEO of Milton Securities, and others including her friends from Hacker Republic, Mimmi Wu (part owner of Domino Fashion), and Paolo Roberto (the former boxing champ). She helps Blomkvist discover and expose a serial rapist and murder team in the first book. Though Martin Vanger kills himself instead of facing public exposure, his company commits to trying to pay restitution to the families of the girls he tortured and killed at Lisabeth's insistence. In the second book, Lisabeth and

Blomkvist in separate investigations begin to piece together Lisabeth's father's connection to a series of murders for which Lisabeth is blamed (Dag Svensson, a journalist working for *Millennium*, and Mia Johansson, his academic girlfriend, and Nils Bjurman, advokat and guardian of Lisabeth). Blomkvist comes to understand what the Swedish government has done to Lisabeth. Lisabeth goes to kill her father, Alexander Zalachenko, but she doesn't succeed and is nearly killed herself. Blomkvist manages to get to her and call in the police, and Lisabeth is treated in a small town hospital and also is held for trial. In the final book, Blomkvist with the aid of Armansky and some select people in the Security Police piece together the way that the Section for Special Analysis or "the Section" (a special unit of the Security Police) shielded Zalachenko from his many crimes. Blomkvist's sister defends Lisabeth in court where she is not only cleared of charges but her declaration of incompetence is revoked. The *Millennium* publishes not only an article on "the Section" but a whole book in addition to a work on sex trafficking begun by Dag Svensson and Mia Johansson who were murdered at the start of second book by Ronald Neidermann (Lisabeth's half-brother and Zalachenko's son and top henchman).

Larsson makes the point over and over that prostitutes are not treated like human beings with rights. Women who are prostitutes are usually forced into prostitution by men, and once they are prostitutes, they are abused and even killed, and because they are prostitutes, authorities rarely pay attention to what is being done to these women. As Svensson tells Blomkvist when he is trying to sell Blomkvist on his and Johansson's research,

It's a tremendous assault on human rights, and the girls involved [fifteen to twenty years old] are so far down society's ladder that they're of no interest to the legal system. They don't vote. They can hardly speak Swedish except for the vocabulary they need to set up a trick. Of all the crimes involving the sex trade, 99.99 percent are not reported to the police, and those that are hardly ever lead to a charge. This has got to be the biggest iceberg of all in the Swedish criminal world. Imagine if bank robbers were handled with the same nonchalance. It's unthinkable. Unfortunately I've come to the conclusion that this method of handling the problem would not survive for a single day if it weren't for the fact that the criminal justice system simply does not want to deal with it. Attacks on teenage girls from Tallinn and Riga [Eastern European cities] are not a priority. A whore is a whore. It's part of the system. (Larsson, *GwPF* 89)

In other words, these girls are collateral damage. The government turns a blind eye because if it had to deal with all the systems that tolerate or support prostitution, it would mean total restructuring to societal relations and organizations--too many "respectable" men are involved in the sex trade from viewing child pornography to engaging in sex with prostitutes to gross and vile acts of torture. Erika Berger, part owner of the *Millennium* and editor-in-chief, seals the *Millennium* commitment to Svensson's project with the following words, "The point we have to make is that [sex] trafficking is a crime against human rights and that these criminals must be exposed and treated like war criminals or death squads or torturers anywhere in the world" (Larsson, *GwPF* 92). This is Larsson's point, it doesn't matter how high-profile the sex offender is, he (or she) is a criminal and liable for his (or her) actions, and it doesn't matter if the girl or woman is a prostitute or a college educated woman, she has rights and recourse through a responsible and accountable legal system. So Larsson, a Swedish man, condemns the abuse of women and points it as anything but romantic in stark contrast to books by Meyer and Niffenegger.

But negation of prostitutes' basic civil rights has consequences for all women. If a woman can be labeled a prostitute (whore, hooker, slut), she is dismissed by society.

Agneta Sofia Salander, Lisabeth's mother is repeatedly dismissed as a "whore" by Zalachenko's handlers in "the Section" (Larsson, *GwKHN* 89, 90, 492) and by Zalachenko himself (Larsson, *GwPwF* 600, Larsson, *GwKHN* 42). When Erika Berger takes over as editor of the newspaper *Svenska Morgon-Posten* (*SMP*), Peter Fredriksson, a man she does not recognize from her past, stalks her to expose her as a "whore" (Larsson, *GwKHN* 397-403) by stealing a video tape of Erika, her husband, and another man having sex along with other sexually explicit materials that would ruin Erika's professional reputation by reducing her to the sexual status of "whore." In his stalking of Erika, Fredriksson sends her crude e-mails where he calls her a whore among other things (Larsson, *GwKHN* 229, 251, 302), and he spray paints a wall outside her home with the word in "three-foot high letters" (Larsson, *GwKHN* 317). Fredriksson is thwarted by Lisabeth and Susanne Linder, an agent from Milton Securities. Fredriksson does manage to get a report the *Millennium* was about to publish exposing highly suspect business practices of Magnus Borgsjo, *SMP*'s CEO and member of the board; when Borgsjo confronts Erika about the report, he calls her a whore twice (Larsson *GwKHN* 407-408). Larsson is emphasizing that when men want to dismiss or trivialize women, they seek to label them as whores whether the men are white collar workers like Fredriksson and Borgsjo or policemen or criminals. Lisabeth, herself, is painted in the media as a violent, drug-taking, lesbian (Larsson, *GwKHN* 22, 48, 188-191) and in her court cases the prosecution attempts to discredit her by saying that she is a prostitute (Larsson, *GwKHN* 499-501).

Although Larsson portrays many men in the series negatively as misogynistic pigs (in his kinder treatments) and as perverted, abusive sadomasochists or as child/woman

raping criminals (in his harsher treatments), he also includes a wide range of men who look at women as human beings and have a great deal of respect for their female co-workers (Blomkvist, the male employees of the *Millennium*, Armansky, Advokat Holger Palmgren, Criminal Inspector Jan Bublanski, Superintendent Torsten Edklinth, and others).

Larsson depicts the abuse of women in a range of forms (the emotional and physical abuse of a husband to his wife, sexual abuse from rape to coerced prostitution, across classes from the elite Vangers to poor prostitutes who are essentially slaves (an underclass that even the police ignore) to the trivialization of women as reducible to a sexual function (whores) and, therefore, dismissible as illegitimate. There is no room in the Larsson's or Lisabeth Salander's universe for a romanticization of abuse. Abuse is abuse and should be punished by legitimate means, and if and when legitimate means fail, by whatever means are necessary. Again in stark contrast to Meyer and Niffenegger, Larsson creates a heroine who won't tolerate abuse and stands up not only for herself but also helps free other women from abusive situations every chance she gets (her mother, Harriet Vanger (Larsson, *GwDT*), Geraldine Forbes (Larsson, *GwPwF* 55-64), Lisabeth's blackmail of Niklas Hedstrom if he ever victimized another Milton Security client like he did the "famous female singer" (Larsson, *GwPF* 322-324), and Erika Berger (Larsson, *GwKHN* 351-394).

In popular culture, aside from notable exceptions, so pervasive is this image of female victimization that the ideas of love, pain, and wounding for women are articulated as normative. Leona Lewis' popular song, "Bleeding Love," begins by saying, "Closed

off from love/ I didn't need the pain." From the beginning, love and pain for women are equated. Her love for her lover is cutting her open so that she bleeds:

My heart's crippled by the vein  
That I keep on closing  
You cut me open and I

Keep bleeding  
Keep, keep bleeding love  
I keep bleeding  
I keep, keep bleeding love  
Keep bleeding  
Keep, keep bleeding love  
You cut me open

The chorus repeats four times. Naomi Wolf makes associations with violent, misogynistic pornography and female, slasher, horror films and then takes those associations further to the dismemberment of women's bodies through self-imposed plastic surgery to attain the beauty ideal in her chapter, "Violence" (218-269). I can't help seeing an acceptance and even expectation of female mutilation in terms of female-male relationship in Lewis's lyrics. I am also reminded that Bella Swan can find nothing attractive about herself when she is a human, despite other people telling her to the contrary. Only as a vampire does she find herself beautiful enough, special enough to be with Edward (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 403, 479, 667). What is the message here to human girls and women who have no hope of being transformed into a vampire? "You must transform yourself into something more than you are." How? The only answer that seems to be available to mortal women is plastic surgery. Bella Swan cannot be named Swan for nothing. The reference to Hans Christian Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" must be obvious; the duckling isn't a duckling at all but a cygnet who transforms into a swan, far more beautiful and majestic than any duck. Normal human girls are inadequate

as they are and must suffer for both love and beauty, and both Lewis and Meyer emphasize these messages.

There are two versions of Eminem and Rihanna's "Love the Way You Lie." The first appears on Eminem's CD *Recovery*, "Love the Way You Lie"; the second appears on Rihanna's CD, *LOUD*, "Love the Way You Lie (Part II)." Perhaps Rihanna's intention is to bring attention to the difficulties that domestic violence victims, particularly women, face in leaving abusive partners by singing about it after her 2009 assault by boyfriend Chris Brown, but neither version features the female character extricating herself from an abusive relationship. Thus, the songs can be seen as condoning women's taking abuse and men's abusing women. In the first version, Rihanna's chorus starts the song:

Just gonna stand there and watch me burn  
But that's all right because I like the way it hurts  
Just gonna stand there and hear me cry  
But that's all right because I love they way you lie  
I love the way you lie  
Ohhh, I love the way you lie

The song opens, thus, with the female protagonist in a bad relationship where the lover seems to enjoy watching her suffer (whether burning or crying), and it is all okay because she likes it. Eminem's verse describe his conflict: loving his girlfriend and hurting and hating himself for doing this to her, but he is unable or unwilling to break out of the violent cycle. The song ends with the following threats:

Told you this was my fault, look me in the eyeball  
Next time I'm pissed I'll aim my fist at the drywall  
Next time there won't be no next time  
I apologize even though I know it's lies  
I'm tired of the games I just want her back  
I know I'm a liar if she ever tries to fuckin' leave again

I'ma tie her to the bed and set this house on fire.

He apologizes and makes promises that he knows he can't keep, and the prospect of her leaving him evokes a grisly murder threat—one too often repeated in real life. As *New York Times* reporter, Pam Belluck, notes in an article about New York city women murdered by partners, “Nationally, [40 percent of women murdered] were killed by current or former husbands or boyfriends.... When they were killed by their husbands, one-third of the time [New York city] women appeared to be trying to end the relationships.” Further, Belluck highlights that women murdered by former partners are often killed brutally: “they are likely to be punched and hit and burned and thrown out of windows.” Given these very real consequences, assault and murder, the ambiguity of neither female or male character breaking the cycle of violence of Rihanna's songs is just problematic. Further, women are in the most danger when they are trying to escape abusive relationships, so both versions of the song suggest, the brutal murder of the female character. Women are being abused, and we need stronger and louder explicit condemnations of such actions, not just weak messages that can be interpreted as resignation or tolerance of them.

The weak message or the ambiguous message should be seen as particularly dangerous when a 2009 “survey of 200 teenagers by the Boston Public Health Commission [found that] 46 percent said that Rihanna was responsible for what happened [between her and Chris Brown]; 52 percent said that both bore responsibility despite knowing that Rihanna's injuries required hospital treatment” (Hoffman). The incident was provoked by Rihanna's seeing a text on Chris' phone from another woman, where upon he struck her several times in a fit of anger. That fans reject Rihanna as a victim or

find both equally responsible is influenced by hip-hop culture, says Trica Rose of Brown University: “It is in the air that hip-hop breathes... the celebration of a stereotype of an aggressive, physical, often misogynistic masculinity that often justifies resolving conflict through violence (Hoffman). When Rihanna’s and Eminem’s ambiguous endings are contrasted to the two other songs about abusive relationship by women that come to my mind, “Earl Had to Die” by the Dixie Chicks and “Independence Day” by Martina McBride, the contrast is stark. In both of those songs, the women have had enough and kill their abuser. They get out of the relationships instead of leaving the story with the continued victimization of the woman. Both songs are 1990s songs (1999, Dixie Chicks, and 1993, McBride), so they are closer in timeframe to the Wolf publication date, and though they are both of the country western genre as opposed to pop, perhaps they are part of that large discussion by women and about women that Wolf’s book tries to address but is also addressed by works as disparate as Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* and Ridley Scott’s *Thelma & Louise* both from 1991.

In the second version, “Love the Way You Lie (Part II),” Rihanna acknowledges her lover as bad but loves him anyway in the first verse:

On the first page of our story  
The future seemed so bright  
Then this thing turned out so evil  
I don’t know why I am surprised  
Even angels have their wicked schemes  
And you take that to new extremes  
But you’ll always be my hero  
Even though you’ve lost your mind

The same chorus follows which says, essentially, that she likes being hurt by him. She goes on to say in the second verse, “You feed me fables from your hand/ With violent words and empty threats/ And it’s sick that all these battles/ Are what keeps me satisfied” which is repeated by the chorus and the song ends. So the protagonist in the song is in a bad relationship where the lover is crazy, goes to extremes, lies, is violent and threatening, and seems to enjoy watching her suffer (whether burning or crying), and it is all okay because she likes it. “Love the Way You Lie (Part II), again has the female character unable to leave the abusive relationship: “So maybe I’m a masochist/ I try to run but I don’t wanna ever leave/ Til the walls are goin’ up/ In smoke with all our memories.” As difficult as it is to hear or imagine a woman choosing to stay in an abusive relationship, the male role in the duet is also troubling because he won’t do anything to stop the abuse. While he can acknowledge the relationship as “destructive” and that they are “two psychopaths,” he won’t get help and the abuse will continue.

You hit me twice, yeah, but who’s countin’?  
I may have hit you three times, I’m starting to lose count  
But together, we’ll live forever, we found the youth fountain  
Our love is crazy, we’re nuts, but I refused counsellin’  
This house is too huge, if you move out I’ll burn all two thousand  
Square feet of it to the ground, ain’t shit you can do about it  
With you I’m in my f-ckin’ mind, without you, I’m out it

This delusional and threatening assessment of their relationship is followed by the chorus where she is hurting and he knows he is hurting her but she likes it; she likes being hurt. Though Rihanna may be highlighting the difficulties women and men may face breaking out of abusive patterns, the fact that neither the female nor the male character in either version of the song can do more than acknowledge her/his status in an abusive relationship seems to suggest that abusive relationships are normative and to be endured.

Unlike the abuse and violence in popular novels and music lyrics, violence against women is not glamorous or romantic. Even 20 years ago,

In the United States, 21 percent of married women report physical abuse by their mates. One and one-half million American women are assaulted by a partner every year.... Studies repeatedly show that at least one woman in six has been raped, and up to 44 percent have suffered attempted rape. (Wolf 115)

Given the very real violence against women, it is disturbing to find so many popular images of women attracted to abusive partners or incapable to identifying how they are being treated as abuse.

While one could read Rihanna's "S & M" as a female sexual empowerment statement, the associations between sex and violence are too pervasive in our culture for me to find it as such. The chorus is as follows:

Cause I may be bad, but I'm perfectly good at it  
Sex in the air, I don't care, I love the smell of it  
Sticks and stones may break my bones  
But chains and whips excite me

The juxtaposition of "sticks and stones may break my bones," an image of violence, with sexual excitement isn't convincing; it associates the two together as does the lines "Oh, I love the feeling you bring to me, oh, you turn me on/ It's exactly what I've been yearning for, give it to me strong/ And meet me in my boudoir, make my body say ah ah ah/ I like it-like it." The "give it to me strong" part is problematic; women get it too often too strong, sexual assault. Images of violent sex have increased in our culture. Wolf says:

In the 1980s, when many women were graduating with professional degrees, anger against women crackled the airwaves. We saw a stupendous upsurge in violent sexual imagery in which the abused was female.... The upsurge in violent sexual imagery took its energy from male anger and female guilt at women's access to power. Where beautiful women in 1950s culture got married or seduced, in modern culture the beauty gets raped. (136-137)

Unlike the abuse and violence in movies, popular novels, and music lyrics, violence against women is not glamorous or romantic. In 1992, “the National Women’s Study estimated that at least 12.1 million women have been the victims of rape at least once in their life and found that 61 percent of the victims said they had been raped as minors” (Johnson).

Naomi Wolf, quoted previously about violence and women was examining 1980s culture and images; Madonna had burst onto the music and music video scene with her debut album in 1983, *Like a Virgin* in 1984, *True Blue* in 1986, and *Like a Prayer* in 1989 to be followed by more than seven other albums ending with *Hard Candy* in 2008. Madonna certainly wasn’t the first to emphasize female sexuality in her lyrics and videos and costumes, but she kicked it up with blatantly hyper-sexualized lyrics, images, and costumes (“Justify My Love,” for example,) that have had profound influences in the industry and encourage young, female, popular singers to imitate or try to outdo Madonna’s benchmarks, hence, the centerfold qualities of both Rihanna’s and Katy Perry’s CD “art” for *LOUD* and *Teenage Dream*. But in trying to out sexualize each other, the kind of sex they advocate is too linked to male definitions of female and male sexuality as defined by the pornography industry where too often women are visualized being degraded, raped, dismembered, and worse. “S & M,” therefore, isn’t about free exploration of female sexual arousal and fulfillment; it is another projection of what men want to hear that women want, so they can justify “giving it [to a woman] strong” or forcing a woman to have sex.

Meanwhile, “Mean,” another popular song by Taylor Swift, is about a woman in an abusive relationship although not as violent as the one suggested by the Rihanna and Eminem lyrics. It is implied that the abuse is verbal and psychological, through his words, but the repeated references to material objects and physically knocking and hitting blur this point:

You, with your words like knives  
And sword and weapons that you use against me  
You, have knocked me off my feet again  
Got me feeling like I’m nothing....  
Well you take me down,  
With just one single blow

Being “knocked off” one’s feet and “taken down by a single blow” could be metaphors for being psychologically knocked and taken down, but since the lyrics don’t say that explicitly the violence done to the woman in the song appears both emotional and physical. Though the protagonist says “the cycle ends right now,” the chorus advocates a vague and delayed changing of status of the female victim of the relationship:

Someday, I’ll be living in a big old city  
And all you’re ever gonna be is mean.  
Someday, I’ll be big enough so you can’t hit me  
And all you’re ever gonna be is mean.  
Why you gotta be so mean?

She doesn’t stand up against him; she doesn’t end the relationship; she doesn’t go to authorities to intervene on her behalf; she doesn’t document him as abusive to protect herself or others. Though the song can be seen as a documentation of sorts, the message to listeners is that girls should put up with abuse with quiet superiority because of their faith that they will “someday” be more successful than their abusers. It is this quiet suffering that bothers me. She doesn’t like the abuse like Rihanna, but she is hesitant to

do anything formal about what is being done to her. Victims of abuse become double victims: they are the victims of emotional or physical violence and they are the victims of public opinion that too often tolerates or turns a blind eye to inappropriate male behavior. This happened to Rihanna when Chris Brown fans blamed her for his violence. Women are ashamed to call attention to themselves by reporting the crimes because they fear they will be blamed, whether for physical or psychological abuse, sexual assault or rape, or sexual harassment. Wolf says that “women blame themselves for triggering ‘violations’ [or inappropriate male behavior]” (43), and the situation is compounded when it is rape because there is shame associated with public knowledge that the woman in question is not “pure” or a virgin, and there is still a tendency to blame the woman for somehow provoking the incident. David Johnson points out that the National Women’s Study showed that “more than 70 percent of the victims said they were concerned about their families discovering that they were raped, about two-thirds said they worried they might be blamed for being raped.” Swift loses an opportunity in “Mean” to really urge girls and women to meaningfully challenge psychological and/or physical abuse and to encourage girls and women to document abuse formally—to protect themselves and other girls and women from similar treatment. Staying silent and/or putting up with abuse is too often deadly.

If we shift back to the novels, Bella is too in love with her abusers to identify their actions as abuse, so readers accept what Edward and Jacob do to Bella as normal, romantic even. In *The Time Traveler’s Wife*, Clare is physically assaulted by Jason Everleigh when she is sixteen in 1987. She is covered in bruises on her back and thighs

from the assault, and there is a burn mark on her right breast (Niffenegger 95, 103). Despite her family being “posh” and her father being a lawyer who could easily navigate the legal formalities to prosecuting Jason, Clare turns to Henry. They take Jason to the woods and bind him to a tree with duct tape. Clare then cuts off most of his clothing and uses black magic marker to detail the events of her “date” with Jason and then calls all the girls she knows and gives them the location of where to find Jason with one friend instructed to cut him loose (Niffenegger 93-103). So Clare has publicly humiliated Jason and made sure all the girls she knows know what he is capable of, but the punishment is informal. Law enforcement has no record of Jason as abusive. Hopefully, all the girls in town will steer clear of a known girl beater, but he will go to college some day, and what will he do to the women he dates there? The inability to identify abusive tendencies, the inclination to forgive abusive tendencies, the silence of victims, and the avoidance of formal charges are all things that need to be made part of the public dialogue—not glamorized in songs and novels.

Katy Perry’s popular song, “E.T.” for “extraterrestrial,” equates her “boy” to a supernatural being that resonates with the images of male domination of Meyer and Niffenegger. The song opens with the lines, “You’re so hypnotizing/ Could you be the devil/ Could you be an angel.” The supernatural hold over the mortal girl continues with the lines, “You’re so supersonic/ Wanna feel your powers/ Stun me with your lasers/ Your kiss is cosmic/ Every move is magic.” The human girl is helpless to the supernatural, and she yields to him absolutely:

Kiss me, ki-ki-kiss me  
Infect me with your love and

Fill me with your poison

Take me, ta-ta-take me  
Wanna be a victim  
Ready for abduction

Boy, you're an alien  
Your touch is foreign  
It's supernatural  
Extraterrestrial

The stuttering even seems to mirror Bella's inability to think coherently in Edward's presence when he is using his powers on her. But more than that, this "victim" sees the love as toxic ("poison") but is not strong enough to reject it or fight against it. When Perry's song is coupled with the duet with Kanye West, it becomes more problematic. He answers her chorus the second time with the lines that include the following:

Tell me what's next, alien sex  
I'ma disrobe you, then I'mma probe you  
See I abducted you, so I tell ya what to do  
I tell ya what to do, what to do, what to do.

He is going to take off her clothes and rape her and tell her what to do because she is his prisoner. The glorification of female victimization is only enhanced by the duet lyrics. Do women want this? Do men want this? Even if they don't, how do they respond and internalized such powerful images of female victimization?

I don't know what to conclude from this exploration of texts. These images are having a staggering influence world wide, and they are not images of female empowerment or positive images of female sexuality. They are images of female abuse and victimization and of women accepting and even wanting that abuse instead of resisting it and/or fighting against it. Is it another form of backlash—of women

internalizing not only a beauty myth that is unrealistic and distracting but a status in relation to men as victims or people to be controlled (servants and/or slaves)?

In Riane Eisler's 1987 book, *The Chalice & the Blade*, she traces out two models of societal relations. She argues that the partnership model was predominant in most prehistoric societies and is characterized by worship of the goddess (the great mother goddess of all life) and linked relationships between people modeled on a mother's loving and supportive relationship toward her children. This was evidenced in Neolithic societies such as Catal Huyuk to later Minoan Crete. This partnership model was replaced by a dominance model which is characterized by male violence and domination of women, children, and other men and was first spread throughout Europe by the Kurgans but embraced by the Greek, the Roman, and Christian leadership—and continues today. She argues that we are capable of recognizing destructive and poisonous qualities of the dominance model and of making the conscious choice to return to the partnership so that human society can reach its fullest potential in emphasizing love, tolerance, and respect for all. Eisler echoes Wolf's concerns about pornography and a backlash against women because of the successes of the women's movement.

Specifically, she says the following:

Ideologically, our world is in the throes of a major regression to the woman-hating dogmas of both Christian and Islamic fundamentalism. There is in literature and film an unprecedented barrage of violence against women, of graphic portrayals of woman-murder and rape compared to which earlier literary violence (of a *Taming of the Shrew* and a *Don Juan*) pales to insignificance. Also unprecedented is the current proliferation of hard-core pornography that, through a multi-billion dollar industry, blares out into the home from books, magazines, comic strips, movies, and even cable television the message that sexual pleasure lies in violence, in the brutalization, enslavement, torture, mutilation, degradation, and humiliation of the female sex. (Eisler 153)

The Internet has further added to this distribution of hard-core pornographic images. Although both women and men are working to build more equitable and caring organizations and institutions across the globe, there are also large cultural and political forces that stand in the way of respect and dignity for all human beings. Consciously and unconsciously the success and proliferation of texts (whether novels, movie versions of those novels, songs, and the music videos of those songs) by women which idealize female victimization, male dominance, and abuse of women seem to be not so much of a backlash as an acculturation. Far from creating the “new myths... in which human beings are good; men are peaceful; and the power of creativity and love... is the governing principal” (Eisler 203), these texts embrace relationships where men are violent toward the women and the women either put up with the pain, or worse, cannot recognize that they are being harmed.

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