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Reading, Singing, and Viewing Rape

Uncovering Hidden Messages of Manhood and Womanhood in Popular Culture

Tammie Jenkins

Introduction

The history of rape is traceable to the early days of humankind. Perpetrators inflicted acts of sexual violence against women, girls, and in some cases other males in an effort to assert their dominance over a particular group. Once considered part of the spoils of war, sexual assaults served to punish and control such groups and rationales created to defend these actions. These narratives are entrenched in religious texts, classical antiquity (Greek and Roman mythology), as well as popular culture. For instance, the *Bible* describes the rape of Tamar by her half-brother, Amnon. After the assault, he became incensed and forcefully threw her out of his bedroom. She found refuge in the home of her brother, Absalom, where she lived the remainder of her days as a fallen woman. Stories like Tamar's appear in mythological narratives from ancient Greece and Rome. One narrative featured in both renderings is that of Philomela, a beautiful, young princess sexually assaulted by her brother-in-law, Tereus, King of Thrace. He then orders her to keep the rape a secret, but she refused to comply. For her insolence, Tereus, cut out her tongue and left her in the woods to die. Philomela survived her injury and

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sends her husband a tapestry depicting her sexual assault; hence, infuriating Tereus. To escape his wrath, the gods transform her into a nightingale, which placed her beyond his reach. Such stories were orally transmitted from one generation to the next as each endeavored to define or justify the use of violent sexual intercourse to subjugate individuals, specifically women and girls.

Subsequently, a dismissive culture developed that created conditions under which certain types of sexual assaults were justified or punishable by incarceration, death, or inheritance. In Roman law rape was not a criminal act, but an assault involving a kidnapped or one that left home without her father's approval. This offense did not bare the sexualized connotation present in today's discourses; instead, it was a type of offense in which perpetrators and victims received punishment if found guilty. The term rape received its current sexualized component years later and that definition remained the standard until 1927. For that reason, I use the phrase sexual assault and the word rape interchangeably in this essay to describe a sexual act a perpetrator penetrates a non-consenting victim for sexual gratification or as a form of control.

The mid-to-late twentieth century witnessed modifications in the meaning of rape that has been expanded to include incestuous, spousal, acquaintance, and statutory to list but a few. The extended delineation of rape became inclusive of females as perpetrators and males as victims. High profile cases such as Mike Tyson and Desiree Washington, Tupac Shakur and Ayanna Jackson, as well as Mystikal, who was indicted on charges of kidnapping and sexual assault in Shreveport, Louisiana. He previously served six years in prison for the sexual assault of a former hairdresser and theft. Cases like these have prompted the creation of new laws or contemporary interpretations of existing statutes to address such criminal activity as the larger society endeavored to understand the ramifications of antiquated understandings of sexual assault. With these changes in the law and the social climate of the larger society, the culture that had once supported sexual assault was changing to align with the times. The concept of rape culture, like sexual assault, is traceable to the beginning of humankind. The phrase first used by second wave feminists to bring attention to the prevalence of sexual assaults in the United States. Works such as Noreen Connel's and Cassandra Wilson's *Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women*, and Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* endeavored to raise the consciousness level of the larger society. Each text attempted to show that rape still occurs and affect females in the United States, across intersections of race, geography, and class in hopes of ending this type of criminal activity. Connell and Wilson used their texts to provide female readers with the psychological and legal protocols for after an attack as well as tips for protecting themselves against potential attackers.

Unlike Connell and Wilson, Brownmiller used first-person narratives to explore the ways that sexual assaults not only affect the victim, but also the perpetrator as well as the larger society. These texts were followed by Margaret Lazarus's

and Renner Wunderlich's groundbreaking documentary film *Rape Culture* in which men and women describe their sexual assault, in the context of victim and perpetrator, as a cultural and social issue. Through interviews with victims and perpetrators, Lazarus and Wunderlich demonstrated how these dynamics create narratives that normalize sexual assaults in larger societal conversations of gender and sexuality. This ethnographic documentary provided audiences with a voyeuristic understanding of the unwritten rules that contribute to rape culture and predatory behavior from the perspective of victims and perpetrators. These filmmakers' work was considered controversial at a time when the subject of sexual assault was still taboo. Connell and Wilson, Brownmiller, as well as Lazarus and Wunderlich texts examined the notion of rape culture as a social issue that enabled them to open a dialogue about sexual assault and its impact on victims, perpetrators, and society in ways that breathed new life into many of these take for granted assumptions such as laws had abolished the practice.

This article explores rape culture in literature, music, and film as three distinct case studies. For the purposes of this essay, rape culture is defined as an attitude of indifference that allow individuals or groups to accept sexual assaults (e.g., virtual, physical, mental, emotional, or social) or other carnal acts (e.g., consensual, non-consensual) as normal social behaviors. Employing Robert Stake's description of case study as "the study of a particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi), I utilize *The Bluest Eye*, *Blurred Lines*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey* to examine the ways that males are masculinized and female are objectified. To excavate and explain perceptions of sexual assaults in popular culture, I use critical pedagogy to conceptualize these discourses. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach used to deconstruct and explain social narratives (Aliakbari & Faraji, p. 77). This perspective enables individuals to use historical specificity and situated knowledge to reflect on the past in order to understand the present (Gruenewald, p. 4; Tirrell, p. 117). The current exploration uses critical pedagogy to discuss portrayals of sexual assault in popular culture and mass media culture. Additionally, I utilize narrative inquiry and narrative analysis to examine the ways that larger societal conversations of masculinity and femininity contextualize rape across intersections of race, gender, and class. In this essay, I use the following guiding questions: What are the hidden messages regarding rape embedded in *The Bluest Eye*, *Blurred Lines*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey*? How do these texts define manhood and womanhood in popular culture? In what ways does language and meaning construct or deconstruct narratives of rape in these texts? What is the role of critical pedagogy in these discourses? First, I present the narratives of rape in *The Bluest Eye*, *Blurred Lines*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Next, I explain definition of manhood and womanhood in popular culture. Then, I analyze and interpret the words and their attached meanings. Finally, I describe how critical pedagogy address these discourses.

Blue is Poor, Black, and Rural

Literary depictions of sexual assaults have been in existence for decades. The desire to raise the consciousness level of the larger society has drawn authors to use their texts to bring attention to social issues from equality to race relations to sexual orientation. James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* describes the notion of hidden transcripts as messages in which those in power use social positioning to marginalize subordinate groups (e.g., women, people of color, LGBTQ). Once these unwritten expectations are publicly, articulated oppressed populations are able to enter these conversations by introducing their narratives of lived experiences in ways that provide them with voice and agency. Such works have rarely shied away from explosive commentaries on the subject of sexual assault, domestic violence, or other problematic topics. Contemporary authors have begun using composite characters to retell real-world stories as fictionalize accounts encompassing the lived experiences or social realities of a particular group. Fictionalized stories like these permeate literary works as each author endeavor to revisit subject matters that was previously taboo.

In the contexts of *The Bluest Eye*, narratives of rage, lust, and control underpin the sexual assaults that occur in the lives of Cholly and Pecola Breedlove (Andrews, p. 141; Tirrell, p. 122). Set in rural Ohio circa 1940s, *The Bluest Eye* chronicles the life of Pecola and her immediate family. She is the novel's eleven-year-old protagonist and is the most victimized character in the story. Pecola experiences abuse in all facets of her life both at home and in the local community (Putnam, p. 36). Her father sexually assaults her, her mother physically abuses her, and her community abandons her. Each person charged with caring for Pecola has either violated her or ignored her and her experiences. Instead, she is isolated (physically, mentally, and socially) in the novel, her voice is absent from her narrative as a result the reader must rely on the retellings provided by the narrator. Silenced and marginalized, Pecola goes insane where she remains for the remainder of the novel. Pecola is the biological daughter of Cholly and Pauline Breedlove; yet, she refers to her mother as Mrs. Breedlove and her father as Cholly. This shows Pecola's disconnect from her family beyond bloodlines. She is an outsider who is othered in her home and like the rest of her family is isolated in their community, due to their low socio-economic status, prominent African facial features, and dark melanin skin tones.

Morrison integrates discourses of rape culture through the actions and dialogues of her characters. She uses Pecola, Cholly, Claudia McTeer, and their community to express larger social views surrounding sexual assault and its effects on the victims. Claudia is the narrator who provides Pecola with a voice through the retelling of her lived experiences from age ten to approximately twelve. Jennifer Gillan analyzes *The Bluest Eye* as a transgenerational narrative that disrupts hierarchal boundaries. She found that the characters lived experiences played a role in the interactions with other characters in the novel. Gillan concluded that

such discourses determined the power dynamics of such characters as evidenced by the relationship between the Cholly and Pecola. He did not have a traditional upbringing and did not receive the type of natural affection a child receives from his or her parents. He did have a maternal figure in Aunt Jimmy, but her love for him was marred in pity and obligation.

Whereas Darlene initiation of sex with him further his confusion and left him to determine the most appropriate way to show his positive emotion to another person, especially to his daughter. Unsure of how to express his parental love for Pecola, Cholly's twisted attempt at affection results in her sexual assault. He felt her natural affection towards him, but struggled with how to reciprocate the emotion as a result he sexually assaults her. In a moment of clarity,

Following the disintegration—the falling away—of sexual desire, he was conscious of her wet, soapy hands on his wrists, the fingers clenching, but whether the grip was from a hopeless but stubborn struggle to be free, or from some other emotion, he could not tell. (Morrison, p. 163)

In that moment as he experiences “the falling away of sexual desire” (Morrison, p. 163), Cholly's manhood is signified by his ability to dominant someone weaker than himself—Pecola. He realizes the presence of his daughter after coitus when he feels her “wet, soapy hands on his wrists, the fingers clenching,” his arms, but he is oblivious as to her rationale for such defensive tactics. As he stands and looks down at his daughter, he becomes conflicted by feelings of anger and affection. Confused, Cholly wants to comfort his daughter; however, he also wants to punish her for their encounter. Instead, he covers her body with a quilt, but leaves her unconscious lying where he violated her, and walks away. Pecola's womanhood emerges when she is over come with the pain of penetration and loses consciousness. She struggles to defend herself and to protect her virtue by struggling “to be free” (Morrison, p. 163); however, Cholly's indifference to her pain and presence subjugates Pecola. She slowly regains consciousness, traumatized by her recent sexual experience as she endeavors “to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her” (Morrison, p. 163). Her mother, Pauline, silently watches as her daughter slowly rises from the floor, but she does not question Pecola or Cholly.

Meanwhile, Cholly's mind travels to his youth as he relives his horrifying sexual encounter with Darlene, which releases feelings of animosity as he endeavors to understand the emotions (compassion versus hatred) he has for Pecola. He possesses an inability to love others that stems from his own arrested sexual development. One night,

When he was still very young, Cholly had been surprised in some bushes by two white men while he was newly but earnestly engaged in eliciting sexual pleasure from a little country girl. The men shone a flashlight right on his behind. He stopped, terrified. They chuckled. The beam of the flashlight did not move. (Morrison, p. 42)

The two men metaphorically rape Cholly during his liaison with a young woman. They sodomize Cholly with a flashlight which they aimed “on his behind” (Morrison, p. 42) and the guns in their hands while emasculating him with their laughter. Cholly is left humiliated and frozen in that moment. Filled with embarrassment and anger, he suppresses these emotions, which he mentally projects towards a young woman named Darlene and later, violently impels onto Pecola defenseless body. Tainted by an unfulfilled sexual release and internalized feelings of his own victimization, Cholly connects feelings love to intercourse, anger, and shame (Andrews, p. 141). These factors contributes to his inability to love his daughter parentally and to respond appropriately to her before and after the sexual assault. His feelings are further complicated as the towns’ people learn of Pecola’s pregnancy and the sexual assault. The truth emerges in the final pages of the novel as the narrator attempts to uncover the events leading to Pecola’s pregnancy, Cholly’s incarceration, and Pauline’s social isolation. The narrator wants to understand why the towns’ people are in an uproar regarding Pecola’s pregnancy. She discovers “little by little” and pieces the “story together” (Morrison, p. 188). The revelation begins with the discussion of a pregnant girl and her father, which the reader learns, is Pecola and Cholly respectively. One conversant asks, “What you reckon make him do a thing like that.” To which the respondent says, “Beats me. Just nasty.” This statement is countered with a speaker stating, “She carry some of the blame” (Morrison, p. 189). An unnamed individual makes a veiled attempt to defend Pecola by stating, “She ain’t but twelve or so” (Morrison, p. 189). However, their remarks raised questions regarding the fact that Pecola “didn’t fight him” (Morrison, p. 189). These exchanged concludes with each acknowledging to varying degrees that perhaps Pecola did attempted to defend herself again Cholly’s advances and resist her rape. From these conversations, the narrator learns that Cholly had sexually assaulted Pecola and is the father of her baby. Pecola receives the blame for the rape more so than Cholly, in both their community and in her family (Gillan, p. 288). Even though she was unable to defend herself due to her size, age, and relationship, against a grown man, the community and Pauline were unsympathetic to Pecola’s dilemma.

The Bluest Eye concludes with an epilogue in which Pecola engages in a conversation with an imaginary friend. Their exchanges provide readers with a more in-depth understanding of the events that immediately preceded and followed her sexual assault. Initially, Pecola denies that Cholly sexually assaulted her. She states, “He just tried, see? He didn’t do anything” (Morrison. p. 199). She later, acknowledges that Cholly did rape her twice and that she told her mother after the second incident. She says that Mrs. Breedlove did not believe her the first time severely punishes Pecola for spreading lies about Cholly. Her mother placed the blame for the sexual assault on Pecola while defending Cholly. The mistreatment and ostracism of Pecola damaged her in ways that she was unable to express which contributed to her mental breakdown. Pecola is now a mentally ill girl living on

the outskirts of town. She is the hyper-embodiment of Cholly's interrupted sexual encounter, emasculation, and finally, his death in prison (Andrews, p. 141; Gillan, p. 288). The degree of silencing surrounding sexual matters or taboos is part of the hidden history embedded in the sexually assault of both Cholly and Pecola. This is an issue that persists in the novel and demonstrates the depths of rape culture in the Black community. Morrison ingrains narratives of rape in the novel beyond sexual intercourse. This text uses "peripheral histories" (Gillan, p. 284) in which a third person point of view is used to present Pecola (Tirrell, p. 120), "as a scapegoat" (Gillan, p. 284) for her family and community. Her messages appear as interconnected moments of abuse in which Pecola is the receiver. She is sexually assaulted, physically attacked, and verbally violated all of which she internalizes while remaining silent and passive. Morrison uses coded language to construct her narrative and present rape culture as a communal interpretation of the events leading to Pecola's pregnancy and Cholly's incarceration.

The conversations transpire between several unnamed characters with each endeavoring to explain the reason for the sexual assault or place the blame of Pecola. These discussions provide limited sympathy for Pecola and justify Cholly's actions under the guise of "just nasty. I guess" (Morrison, p. 189). Meanwhile, left to her own devices, Pecola, copes with her increased isolation by ultimately escapes into her own mind. The role of critical pedagogy in the exploration of rape culture using *The Bluest Eye* rests in the employment of historical specificity to deconstruct social narratives as situated knowledge using a present day context. This enables practitioners to identify moments in Cholly's life that contributed to his sexual assault of Pecola as well as analyze their community's view of the incident over time. The suppression of the female voice is a common occurrence in rape culture and its narratives transcend from the written word to the spoken such as in popular music genres.

Erotic Speak with Euphemisms

Music plays a significant role in the lives of everyday citizens. The lyrics speak to them on an unconscious and personal level that enable individuals or groups to express their thoughts or feelings without fear of reprisals. Innocent songs such as *It's Cold Outside*, shows a man's concern for the health, safety, and well-being of the woman he is dating. Written in 1944 by Frank Loesser, this song appeared on the soundtrack for the film, *Neptune's Daughter*, in 1948. *It's Cold Outside* is performed as a call 'n' response conversation between wolf (male voice) and mouse (female voice). The wolf attempts to coerce mouse into spending the night with him, but mouse pretends to have reservations. She submits and justifies her choice by claiming intoxication. Similar songs such as Teddy Pendergrass's *Turn Off the Lights* and George Michaels's *I Want Your Sex* have entered the lexicon of popular culture with suggestive titles or lyrics that enticed listeners to explore their sexuality. The erotic was connotative in Pendergrass's title, but ex-

plicitly stated in Michaels's offering. In today's society, recordings primarily in the genres of hip-hop (including rap) and rhythm and blues have changed as the social climate of the larger society advanced (Stapleton, p. 219). For instance, *Indecent Proposal* a song in which a male singer propositions an unnamed female. He makes suggestive sexualize comments to her while asking her to dance a bachata, a sensual dance from the Dominican Republic and they end up making love. Contemporary offerings like Robin Thicke's *Blurred Lines* provides listeners with a blend of the sensual and the sexy by erasing the lines separating them. A blue-eyed soul singer, Robin Thicke takes "innuendo and double talk" (Lee, p. 359) to another level with seemingly innocent lyrics which he sings with a cheeky mischievousness. Accompanied Pharrell Williams, who provides supporting vocals as well as a free-style rap, by T. I., Thicke's *Blurred Lines* present audiences with conflictual sexual overtures ranging from consensual to coercion to sexual assault.

The lyrics cleverly veils the true intentions of the speaker. The male voice immediately shows interest in a young woman, but quickly indicates his sexual arousal. He pursues her in spite of another man showing her attention. Thicke acquires her attention and croons,

But you're an animal
 Baby, it's in your nature
 Just let me liberate you
 You don't need no papers
 That man is not your mate
 And that's why I'm gon' take you
 Good girl!
 I know you want it (repeated 2 more times). (*Blurred Lines*)

Although there is another man present, Thicke is able to persuade the woman that he is the better choice of the two. He verbally pursues her by suggesting that she is an independent woman who can make her own decisions, but is in need of saving from her other suitor. She is an "animal" unbridled and in need of control as indicated by the words "I'm gon' take you" (*Blurred Lines*). The hidden meaning derived from the words "take you" (*Blurred Lines*) is sexual in nature. Colloquial speech from the mid to late twentieth century ascribed "take you" to a female who has been sexually assaulted.

The stanza "I know you want it" (*Blurred Lines*) and its repetition indicates that Thicke is endeavoring to coerce the woman into an intimate encounter. He reminds her that she is a "good girl" (*Blurred Lines*) which suggests that she is a principled woman who adheres to social expectations regarding appropriate female behavior with an unfamiliar male. Yet, he relentlessly endeavors to obtain her consent. He invites her to pursue him by singing,

The way you grab me
 Must wanna get nasty
 Go ahead, get at me (*Blurred Lines*)

These lyrics turns the woman into the aggressor who is asserting her desire for him touch. He interprets her gesture as sexual and inquires whether she wants to “get nasty” (*Blurred Lines*) or not; hence, giving her permission to sexually pursue him by stating “go ahead, get at me” (*Blurred Lines*). Thicke endeavors to turn the tables by convincing the woman that she is the aggressor and he is passively following her lead in the line “go ahead, get at me” (*Blurred Lines*). He receives support from T. I. who offers an alternative, verbally suggestive approach to Thicke’s pursuit.

T. I. raps, “One thing I ask you, Lemme be the one you bring that ass up to” (*Blurred Lines*). The words “bring that ass up to” (*Blurred Lines*) is Black urban vernacular speak indicating sex. He continues, “I’ll give you something big enough to tear your ass in two” (*Blurred Lines*), he brags about his male endowment and indicates violent sexual penetration with the words “your ass in two” (*Blurred Lines*) that is a marker of forced intercourse in rape cases. At the conclusion of T. I.’s contribution to *Blurred Lines*, Thicke suggests that he has used a narcotic to induce consent from the young woman. He asks,

Baby, can you breathe?
I got this from Jamaica. (*Blurred Lines*)

Presumably they have consumed marijuana which is a popular product widely used in Jamaica. He implies that he has used this substance before to obtain consent from a reluctant partner in the words “it always works for me, Dakota to Decatur” (*Blurred Lines*). Tired of waiting, he states,

No more pretending
Cause now your winning. (*Blurred Lines*)

He is no longer accepting her excuses or refusal as indicated by the verse “no more pretending” (*Blurred Lines*). Thicke treats her hesitation as a type of sexualized game in which she is “winning” (*Blurred Lines*) and he refuses to lose. As a result, he has decided that he is having sex with this woman and that she is powerless to stop him. Assumptions such as these propel rape culture in the larger society.

The lyrics in *Blurred Lines* incorporates colloquialisms, which embraces traditional notions of manhood and expectations for women. The man is to ask and the woman is to refuse. He asserts his manhood each time he reminds her that she “wants it” (*Blurred Lines*), while she confirms her womanhood by her unspoken refusal to consent to sexual intercourse with him. Yet, the underlying narrative removes the man from that of pursuer to complicitous victim as Thicke presents the woman as the instigator in their sexual encounter. In this context, rape culture his invitation to get at him is used to mock her reluctance to engage in intercourse by reminding her that she is a “good girl,” while implying that she subconsciously “want it” (*Blurred Lines*). Through these words, Thicke implies that she want it and she wants it from him. This song includes a form of ver-

bal coercion in which the woman is an unwitting victim of acquaintance rape. While the man receives, support from a culture that places absolves him of any wrong doings. A close critique of the song's lyrics enables audiences to address gender normative elements used in the articulation of large social narratives regarding male/female relationships (Kubrin, p. 360). By challenging the verbal symbolisms presented in *Blurred Lines*, critical pedagogues are able to create new meanings based on their understandings of language and accepted meanings as well as their lived experiences. It illustrates an aura in which women are active participants in their sexual assaults and the men are blameless for taking advantage of them. This is a common theme permeating not only music, but also the big screen.

Kinky or Alternative Fetishisms

Cinematic offerings have long portrayed female characters as victims of sexual assault. Their imaginary plot-points have been used in films such as *Where the Boys Are?*, *Whore, I Spit on Your Grave*, and *The Accused*. Such works explore dichotomies of the good girl versus bad girl personas. While portraying potential outcomes for women who stray from larger social expectations for their gender. For instances, in *Where the Boys Are?*, Melanie meets a young man on spring break and loses her virginity. He brands her as easy and arranges for one of his male friends to have sex with her. When she refuses, he drags her into his hotel room and sexually assaults her. The evidence of her rape is in her torn clothing and demeanor in which she walks into traffic, hit by a car, and hospitalized. Presumably, she recovers physically from her external injuries, but her mental recuperation remains vague. Even though there are filmic and television renderings featuring male victims of sexual assault like *The Rape of Richard Beck* or *Outlander*, however, they are widely advertised in comparison to those with those with female victims.

Some movies have incorporated elements of romance to marginalize the sexual assault that female characters endure; one such offering is E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*. This film is an adaptation of James's "Fifty Shades" trilogy that chronicles the life of Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele. They meet by chance, but he actively and reluctantly pursues her. She is initially enamored with Christian, until he informs her that his interest in her is strictly for pleasure and punishment. She soon learns that Christian enjoys bondage during his sexual encounters in which he is the dominant and the woman is the submissive. This idea is foreign to Anastasia who has yet to have her first sexual encounter, which Christian finds unusual in that she is twenty-one years old. He tries to convince Anastasia to consider the life-style and introduces her to his red-room. This an area where he has his extravagant sex tools and the location where many of their encounters take place. He offers her a bedroom in a separate area where she is to sleep during her designated days per week. She is intrigued and confounded by

Christian's insistence on a signed non-disclosure agreement. Anastasia agrees to consider Christian's proposal and she gives her virginity to him.

Even though, Anastasia desires a more conventional relationship with Christian, he is resistant to the idea. He explains, "I don't do romance. My tastes are very singular" (*Fifty Shades*) and prefers to "fuck. Hard" (*Fifty Shades*), much to her chagrin. Christian presents Anastasia with a non-disclosure agreement and a sex contract that details her role as his submissive as well as his responsibilities as her dominant. She agrees to read the document and conduct research on Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission, and Sadomasochism (BDSM) to aid her in making a decision. During her investigation, Anastasia decides to experiment with the lifestyle by entering into a one-sided relationship with Christian. He remains emotionally distant and controlled even as he delivers sensations of pain and pleasure to Anastasia during each of their which becomes disheartening to her. Desiring more than Christian is willing to give, Anastasia seeks to use the contents of his contract to understand his reluctance to have a real relationship with her. She learns that he dated an older woman when he was a teen-ager, his mother was a drug-addicted prostitute whose pimp abused him, and that the Greys adopted him when he was four years old. The older woman, named Elena, a close friend of his mother. Elena introduced him to the BDSM lifestyle. He served as her submissive for six years. Since that time, he has been the dominant of fifteen other women, each of whom were chosen for him by Elena, but Anastasia was to become first that he had chosen on his own.

During their contract negotiations, Christian endeavors to entice Anastasia to engage in intercourse with him. She arrives wearing a form fitting red dress that zipped in back which pleased Christian. He attempted to place his hand around her waist and escort her to the conference room. She rebuffs and reminds him that this was a "business meeting" (*Fifty Shades*). She tried to downplay her attraction for him, but her body language to convey her desire for him. She bites her bottom lip, which Christian found arousing, and she spoke in a sensuous voice even at the conclusion of their meeting to express her urgent need to leave his presence. He contradicted her orally stated reservation by describing her physiological responses. Christian suggests Anastasia's body is attempting to lure him into a sexual encounter. He subtly implies that she is sexually aroused, by highlighting her body's response to the thought of his touch, although she has verbally expressed her disinterest. He states, "Your body tells me something different" (*Fifty Shades*) as if to imply that her oral "no" is a non-verbal "yes." Christian continues his seduction of Anastasia by stating that she is "pressing her thighs together" (*Fifty Shades*) and that her breathing as well as her complexion has changed.

Intrigued Anastasia taunts him, by proposing that they have sex on top of the table. Christian removes his necktie in preparation for a possible encounter; however, his plans halted when she collects the document and insists that she has to leave. She assures Christian that will review the changes to the contract and hopes

to arrive at a decision soon. He makes a final appeal in hopes of changing her mind, but she insists that she cannot stay. She departs much to Christian's dismay. Their game of cat and mouse continues to the climax of the film when Christian's fixation with rules, consequences, and punishment pervades his interactions with Anastasia as she continues her endeavor to normalize their connection. She constantly compares their union to that of individuals who are in committed romantic relationships. To which Christian asserts that he is "fifty shades of fucked up" (*Fifty Shades*) indicating that he is incapable of engaging in socially acceptable methods of emotional expressiveness. As a result, Anastasia asks him to punish her in the worst way possible. He complies. Christian instructs her to lay across a table and count with him as he delivers six lashes with a belt on her bottom. She obeys, counting as tears fall from her eyes. After the last blow, Christian attempts to comfort a despondent Anastasia. She rejects him and much to his surprise yells at him. Realizing her limitations Anastasia ends the relationship.

Christian is a self-made millionaire who possesses a feeling of insecurity that he curtails through his aggressive sexualized interactions with women. He uses his position as an attractive, young man to create hierarchical exchanges that place him in control of the women in his life. His behavior is a support in rape culture as vulnerability and emotional detachment, Christian has developed to protect himself against others. He is a confused man who has been a victim of sexual assault and is fearful of falling in love with someone. As a result, he uses the women in his life as an outlet for his feelings of inferiority that he unleashes through the practice of BDSM. The character of Christian represents the strong, independent man who is able to control his woman; however, negates that he uses violence and emotional detachment to do so. Whereas, Anastasia is a composite character featuring the hopes and dreams women embody. She labors under the illusion that she can change Christian and agrees to experiment with BDSM without committing to the practice via a signed contract. The relationship between Christian and Anastasia reflects a dialogical exchange in which verbal and non-verbal cues communicate narratives of control and marginalization. He declares his manhood through he remains limited regard for his sexual partner post-coitus, while her womanhood is challenged by her inability to separate emotion from sex. This deployment of power is evident in the verbal and physical sparring that occurs between these characters. Christian's dependence on dominating Anastasia in a one-sided relationship in which she willingly agrees to her subjugation, challenges traditional ideas of sexual assaults by interjecting romantic underpinnings into their narrative. Yet, Anastasia is able to use her lived experiences, linguistic skills, and body movements to assist Christian in unlearning years of inappropriate behaviors. Many may argue that rape culture supported the popularity of the film *Fifty Shades of Grey* by describing it as an erotic romance between Christian and Anastasia. Nevertheless, aspects of sexual assault are evident in James's novel as evidenced by the relationship between Christian and Elena as well as that of

Christian and Anastasia. Both Christian and Anastasia are victims of a rape in which their consent is highly questionable, but is justified by rape culture because they developed feelings for one another.

Rape Culture, Literature, Music, Film, and Critical Pedagogy

Rape culture, in this article, has been defined as an attitude of indifference that allow individuals or groups to accept sexual assaults or other carnal acts as normal social behaviors. The act of sexual assault is anchored in violence, capitalization, and commodification propelled by social media in which victims are eroticized and perpetrator are essentially blameless (McLaren, p. 2/7). These narratives are part of the images and dialogues currently portrayed in the larger society. For that reason, the current discussion explores the role of critical pedagogy in dismantling rape culture in ways that transcend intersections of race, gender, and class by encouraging practitioners to critically analyzing and interpreting these narratives in literature, music, and film. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach in which *currere* is instrumental in teaching individuals how to reflect on their own “educational experiences from a subjective and narrative perspective” (Kissel-Ito, p. 1) as a way of situating themselves in the narratives associated with rape culture. This enables them to understand their biases and attitudes towards sexual assaults by the presenting them with fictionalized accounts such as those in *The Bluest Eye*, *Blurred Lines*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

The use of inventive manuscripts create safe spaces where participates are able to freely engage with these narratives and establish an personalized sense of empowerment as each tackle the difficult task of understanding rape culture and its part in the perpetuation of sexual assault. Such works introduced participants to hybrid stories in which a sexual assault has occurred. Participants read, listen, and view each text to identify the victim and perpetrator in each work. Next, they are to interrogate each text and identify the underpinning beliefs that are present in each victim’s and perpetrator’s narratives lived experiences. Finally, participants learn to explore these narratives from multiple points of view using a variety of lenses. This staggered approach enable individuals to separate and collectively analyze the narratives presented in *The Bluest Eye*, *Blurred Lines*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey* in ways that facilitate meaningful discussion of rape culture and the meaning of sexual assault in a present day context.

The role of critical pedagogy in this context encourages the deconstruction of the language and accepted meanings placed on certain words by the larger society to discussion of sexual assault. This essay invites the reader not only to analyze the dialogue in a text, but also the symbolism to uncover the hidden messages communicated to their audiences. A philosophical perspective with roots in sociology, psychology, and education critical pedagogy urges practitioners to empower themselves through the use *currere*, social critique, and deconstruction of

larger social narratives. By reconceptualizing rape culture as an attitude and sexual assault a crime, critical pedagogy is instrumental in examining the changing climate of the larger society through literature, music, and film.

Conclusion

This article explored rape culture by using a novel, a song, and a film as three distinct case studies. In this article, rape culture is an attitude of indifference surrounding sexual assaults or other carnal acts held by individuals or groups normalized over time. Such views are in the narratives of the texts chosen for this exploration. *The Bluest Eye* presents sexual assault as Cholly's failure to reach his sexual maturity and Pecola as a victim of his internalized rage. It is upon closer review that the reader learns that Cholly, as a teen had been mentally raped and objectified by two white men. His sexual assault of Pecola enables him to reassert his manhood by dominating her during sex and blaming her for loving him. Whereas, *Blurred Lines* expresses the widely held belief that men are entitled to have sex with a woman he finds attractive regardless of consent. The slut-shaming tactics were used to her that she is supposed to say no, but she really is saying yes. By asserting that the female body is in need of a man to control it, *Fifty Shades of Grey* romanticizes rape as a complicated relationship between Christian and Anastasia in which rules and punishment are used to maintain his dominance and her subjugation. The role of critical pedagogy in these conversations is to provide safe-spaces for individuals to explore rape culture by developing an approach to deconstructing the underlying narratives associated with this notion using a present day lens.

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