

**Entertainment or Oppression:  
Media Depiction of Domestic Abuse**

By  
Tula Batanchiev

A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to the  
Department of Communication  
Boston College  
December 2008

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	4
<b>CHAPTER ONE – Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>CHAPTER TWO – Literature Review: Media Framing of Domestic Abuse</b> .....	9
<i>Stereotypes in Film and TV</i> .....	11
<i>Stereotypes in Journalism</i> .....	15
<i>Stereotypes in Lyrics</i> .....	19
<b>CHAPTER THREE – Film: The Abuser and the Abuser’s Wife</b> .....	23
<i>Hegemonic and Feminist Criticism of Film</i> .....	26
Female as Maternal/Family-Oriented.....	27
Female as Homemaker.....	29
Female as Weak and Dependent/Male as Dominated.....	30
Female as Faulty.....	37
<i>Fantasy-Themed Criticism</i> .....	39
Male as Aggressor.....	40
Male as Hero.....	41
Female as Damsel in Distress.....	43
Meaning to the Madness.....	43
<b>CHAPTER FOUR – Broadcast Journalism: “The Hoopla Surrounding News”</b> .....	45
<i>Feminist Criticism of Broadcast News</i> .....	49
Victim-Blaming.....	50
Male Exoneration.....	53
Female as Weak/Pitied.....	54

What It All Means.....	57
Findings: Content Analysis.....	58
<b>CHAPTER FIVE – Lyrics: Women’s Problems Put to Song.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<i>Feminist Critique of Lyrics.....</i>	<i>62</i>
Female as Weak/Male as Dominant.....	63
Female as Maternal.....	67
Female as Faulty.....	68
<i>Fantasy-Themed Criticism.....</i>	<i>70</i>
Male as Aggressor.....	70
Female as Damsel in Distress.....	71
Female Overcomes.....	72
Meaning to the Madness.....	74
<b>CHAPTER SIX: Discussion.....</b>	<b>75</b>
References.....	80
Appendix A.....	85

## ABSTRACT

Domestic abuse affects at least one million women in America each year, according to the U.S. Department of Justice (as cited in Byers, Shue & Marshall, 2004, p. 43). For this reason, it is necessary to uncover the gender stereotypes in the media and analyze the way abused women are represented. Using a hegemonic and fantasy criticism, the stereotypes in film, broadcast news, and song lyrics were uncovered. In the representative sample of analyzed film artifacts – *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy* – it was determined that the films, although said to give power to women, ultimately depict the female as weaker and faulty and the male as dominant. In the broadcast news segments, my research has shown that some television news is biased against women – most noticeably news from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The segments analyzed often depicted these women as faulty for their own abuse, pitied them, or exonerated the abusive men from full blame. By analyzing eight different song lyrics – two from four distinct genres – it was apparent that females are often depicted as overcoming their abuser while maintaining their depiction as weak, which seems paradoxical. These three chapters combined establish the seriousness of media’s misrepresentation of women who are abused and necessitate more research in this area of study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Domestic abuse has been and continues to be a major problem, not only in the United States, but around the world. According to the United States Department of Justice, domestic violence – whether physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological – is apparent in homes regardless of their socioeconomic status and location ([Www.ovw.usdoj.gov/domviolence.htm](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/domviolence.htm), Retrieved December 12, 2007). Although men can and have been the victims of domestic abuse, the majority of violence occurs against women, usually by their male counterparts. Scholarly work has also shown this to be true. A. Browne (1993) in “Violence against Women by Male Partners: Prevalence, Outcomes, and Policy Implications” estimates that 21 percent to 34 percent of women will be abused by a partner at some point in their lives (as cited in Byers, Shue & Marshall, 2004, p. 43). Additionally, in 1995, the United States Department of Justice estimated that “at least one million women experience domestic violence each year; of these women, 20% experience three or more assaults in a six-month period” (as cited in Byers, Shue, & Marshall, 2004, p. 43). Currently, 3 million women are abused annually by a husband or boyfriend ([Www.endabuse.org/campaigns](http://www.endabuse.org/campaigns), Retrieved Nov. 1, 2008). These findings show that domestic abuse incidents have increased three-fold in the last 12 years. More recently, there were 1,090 newly reported instances of domestic abuse in 2007 according to the Abused Adult Resource Center ([Www.abusedadultresourcecenter.com/stats.htm](http://www.abusedadultresourcecenter.com/stats.htm), Retrieved Nov. 1, 2008). These statistics – which consist of only the accounts of domestic violence that have been reported – showcase the pervasiveness of domestic abuse against women.

With this said, the media’s influence in representing violence continues to shape society’s reaction to such events and the people involved. George Gerbner, mentioned for his findings

regarding violence on television, established cultivation theory in his Cultural Indicators Project (Stossel, 1997). By constructing a systematic content analysis of television content and formulating questions about viewer's social realities, Gerbner compared the perceptions of violence among light and heavy viewers (Stossel, 1997). In summary, Gerbner's study found that the media makes substantial contributions to our conception of social reality (Stossel, 1997). As a result of heavy television viewing, a sense of insecurity and vulnerability is connected to desensitization and naturalization of violence in real life (Stossel, 1997). Gerbner's study, although criticized for being too pervasive in what categorizes violence, has created a theory that affects many other areas (Stossel, 1997). If nothing else, Gerbner proved that the media does and has affected the way people see the world (Stossel, 1997). This is why the media's influence in its depiction of domestic abuse may shape society's reactions to these female victims and the circumstances around the abuse.

The issue of female representation in the media has long been analyzed and critiqued. Often, violence against women, whether sexual or otherwise, has become popular media entertainment. Given the staggering statistics regarding the occurrence of domestic violence and the ability of the media to alter the perceptions of its viewers, it is vital that the media represent cases of domestic violence against women in an unbiased fashion.

Nancy Berns (2001) discusses domestic abuse discourse in her study titled "Degendering the Problem and Gendering the Blame: Political Discourse on Women and Violence", saying "Analyzing popular representations of social problems is important because individuals draw on these sources when constructing their understandings of issues such as violence against women" (p. 263). According to Gamson (1992) and Kellner (1995), people use the media most often in order to form an understanding of social issues (as cited in Berns, 2001). Kellner (1995) suggests

that the media “helps shape everyday life, influencing how people think and behave, how they see themselves and other people, and how they construct their own identities” (as cited in Berns, 2001, p. 263). Berns elaborates, saying:

Newspaper columns, magazine articles, films, made-for-TV movies, television special reports, and talk shows are all public arenas where images of domestic violence are constructed, debated, and reproduced. From these resources, individuals construct their own conceptions of what is normal and acceptable (Berns, 2001, p. 263).

Therefore, the focus of my study is to demonstrate how films, news reporting, and music lyrics that depict or discuss domestic violence further complicate female stereotypes by both representing women in their stereotypical roles as the weaker and inferior gender and categorizing them as faulty. By using a hegemonic and fantasy-themed criticism, I have analyzed the films *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy*, eight news segments airing between 1970 and 2000, and eight songs from four different genres to showcase how females are constantly degraded – thereby represented as powerless and weak – and thought of as faulty; the males, however, are represented as dominant and heroic.

Chapter two of this study investigates the previous findings in all three mediums, outlining the stereotypical representation of both men and women in the media and how this has affected viewers’ and readers’ perceptions. Chapter three uncovers the feminist and fantasy-themed criticism of the films *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *Enough*, establishing the following themes: female as maternal, female as homemaker, female as weak/male as dominant, female as faulty, male as aggressor, male as hero, and female as damsel in distress. Chapter four analyzes seven news segments with a feminist criticism, establishing victim-blaming, male exoneration, and female as weak/pitied as the central themes. Chapter five analyzes eight song lyrics, two from each of the following genres: country, pop, rock, and rap/hip hop. Analyzing these songs

using a feminist and fantasy-based critique, six major themes emerged: female as weak/male as dominant, female as maternal, female as faulty, male as aggressor, female as damsel in distress, and female overcomes. The different analytical factors for each medium were necessary, as some mediums represented certain themes more so than others. Chapter six generates a discussion of the findings of the three analytical chapters in this study and offers suggestions for future studies.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**Literature Review:**  
**Media Framing of Domestic Abuse**

With the rise in domestic abuse in recent years, the way women are portrayed in the media may affect the greater population (Berns, 2001). Scholarly research has shown that media stereotypes misrepresent women and create a false sense of reality (Alat, 2006; Consalvo, 1998; Myers, 1994). Scholarly study has established that there is a judgment that results whenever an abusive relationship is made known, which has created the impression that women should know better, women should be smart enough to know the danger involved in staying with an abuser, and thereby women are partly at fault for the abuse (Byers et al, 2004; Consalvo, 1998; Jones, 1994). Unfortunately, this judgment is misplaced.

Additionally, scholarly study reveals the media's placement of blame is typically based upon the victim's behavior and appearance (Jones, 1994). Often, it's the domestic abuser's wife who is victimized – in more ways than one (Jones, 1994). Ann Jones (1994), in her criticism of placing the blame on the victim in her book titled *Next Time She'll Be Dead*, suggests common assumptions people share to solve domestic abuse: a cleaner house, less back talk, less nervousness and more agreeability expressed by the wife, or a wife's duty to be more attractive for her husband – if she could lose weight, wear lipstick, smile more often, maybe he wouldn't beat her (p. 149). If nothing else, this only exemplifies how women are expected to fit a certain mold. It's well known that there is an increased emphasis on a women's physical appearance (Glascock, 2001). Implying that a woman would be less of a target if she appeared more attractive only furthers this stereotype.

Additionally, public perception of domestic abuse reiterates that men and women abuse one another in equal amounts (Jones, 1994). Jones bolsters the argument of skewed public

perception by giving examples from different studies and a *New York Times* article about family violence (Jones, 1994). Jones (1994) insists that “their research continues to mislead the public and policy makers alike and to mask the real nature and severity of male violence against women” (p. 155). Additionally, the way society has gendered the blame – blaming the female victims for their abuse – and degendered the problem – discussing family abuse – distorts the violence against women and frees men from the blame (Berns, 2001).

Jones (1994) also points out that the police and prosecutors are often reluctant to help battered women – which Jones titles the “do-nothing policy they know best” – because these women rarely press charges and often go back to their husbands or boyfriends (p. 140). Even though changes have been made in state and municipal law to enforce arresting men who batter women, Jones (1994) says that by believing that the problem is her own doing and the solution is hers to decide upon, the criminal justice system is freed from blame. In essence, as Jones (1994) points out, social institutions and people in general believe these myths not because they want to blame the victim but because they don’t want to blame themselves. The truth, however, is that studies have confirmed that women do follow through on pressing charges when given the littlest help with the legal system (Jones, 1994).

Likewise, scholarly work has shown that women and men are unequal, especially with regards to job success and domestic responsibilities (Glascock, 2001). Bernice Lott (1981) acknowledges that stereotypical traits of men and women are what establish gender roles (as cited in Putnam, 1982). Therefore, women’s inferiority in the working world impacts the way all females will be judged (Glascock, 2001). With regards to women stereotypically shown to be the motherly figure, it is these same women that are most frequently criticized if involved in an abusive relationship. The media portrays mothers with children in abusive relationships as

inconsiderate of their offspring, which assumes women have a greater parental responsibility than men for the children they share (Ashcraft, 2000; Glascock, 2001; Michelle & Weaver, 2003). This again reiterates the stereotypical portrayal of women.

### *Stereotypes in Film and TV*

Scholarly study has confirmed that this bias has spread to television and film (Cavender & Jurik, 1998; Consalvo, 1998; Glascock, 2001). Glascock (2001) in his study titled “Gender Roles in Prime-Time Network Television: Demographics and Behaviors” focused his study specifically on the perceived gender stereotypes seen on television shows. He found that males are more likely to be bosses than their female counterparts while females are mostly depicted in the media as married or assuming a parental role (Glascock, 2001). Glascock’s (2001) study indicates that gender roles on television are still visibly present. Males on television are depicted as stronger and more physically aggressive while females were shown to be more verbally aggressive (Glascock, 2001).

Additionally, Gray Cavender and Nancy C. Jurik’s in-depth qualitative analysis of *Prime Suspect* – a PBS television series that portrays Jane Tennison as the detective chief inspector – titled “Jane Tennison and the Feminist Police Procedural” demonstrated that although Tennison is a female in a majority male field, which the feminists enjoy, the overall plotline of the movie revolves around murdered young women (1998). Cavender and Jurik continue, saying “And although Tennison is successful, she is only a small cog in a big patriarchal wheel, a wheel whose spokes are male detectives who seem to care little about the victims” (1998, p. 27). Ultimately, the study reinforces the fact that “the media are a central vehicle for the dissemination of culturally dominant images of gender. Hegemonic images of masculinity and

femininity are conveyed to the millions of viewers who everyday turn on their sets to watch hours of TV programming” (Cavender & Jurik, 1998, p. 11).

Lisa M. Cuklanz and Sujata Moorti (2006) also noticed gender inequities on *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* in their study titled “Television’s ‘New’ Feminism: Prime-Time Representations of Women and Victimization.” By watching episodes of *Law and Order: SVU* and analyzing them using a feminist critique, the researchers found that although the show tries to break away from certain stereotypical traits of women, it creates an image of women as victimizers and monstrous mothers creating a “misogynistic feminism” (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006, p. 318). Likewise, the depiction of feminine traits are often misrepresented (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006). Cuklanz and Moorti (2006) explain:

SVU departs from most other prime-time fare in several important ways. It fits solidly within the historically masculine detective genre while deliberately focusing on a subject of primary interest to women. It positions itself as a dramatic series with feminist sympathies, addressing a subject that was long a focus of feminist activism. It is uniquely issue-oriented, building its emotional and dramatic appeal from a political issue rather than focusing on an eponymous protagonist (such as Cagney and Lacey). SVU highlights power in gender relations, including within the family, and provides evidence of “rape culture” as a potential factor in the commission of the crime. Yet in many instances the real victims are men and patriarchal institutions. Enfolded in the feminist perspectives on sexual assault are problematic depictions of feminine characteristics (p. 317).

Recent scholarly research has also found that domestic abuse has been misrepresented on television shows and movies. Mia Consalvo’s study of the depiction of domestic abuse on *Cops* titled “Hegemony, Domestic Violence and *Cops*: a Critique of Concordance” furthers the theory that television may be biased (1998). The study, through the use of Celeste M. Condit’s critique of concordance, analyzes the show *Cops* with regards to the domestic violence portrayed (Consalvo, 1998). By using the theory of hegemony, the study showed that women involved in

domestic disputes or abuse on *Cops* are often shown as faulty victims, reiterating that males are superior to their female counterparts (Consalvo, 1998).

The effects of watching these biased programs have also been researched, particularly with respect to the perception of women, in the psychology field. Edward Donnerstein (1980) examined the effects of watching aggressive erotica on his male participants in his study titled “Aggressive Erotica and Violence against Women.” Donnerstein (1980) found that the participants that were shown the aggressive- erotic film versus those who were given an erotic film or a neutral film showed more aggression overall while also showing an increased amount of aggression towards females after viewing. Likewise, Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod (1984) in their research titled “The Effects of Multiple Exposures to Filmed Violence against Women” studied male undergraduate men who were shown five movies of violence against women. This was done in four phases: “an initial prescreening, a film viewing session, a simulated rape trial, and an extended debriefing” (Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod, 1984, p. 135). After the viewings, these young men had fewer intense emotional reactions to the films and thought them to be less violent and less degrading to women, reinforcing the fact that prolonged exposure to violence against women can and has changed men’s perceptions of women (Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod, 1984).

In a similar vein, Daniel Linz, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Adams (1989) conducted an experiment titled “Psychological Desensitization and Judgments about Female Victims of Violence,” which tested psychological desensitization in 63 male undergraduates. The group was split into a control group and an experimental group; the experimental group watched a two-hour video which depicted violence against women while the control group watched non-violent programming (Linz, Donnerstein & Adams, 1989). Afterwards, both groups were exposed to

violent programming (Linz, Donnerstein & Adams, 1989). The researchers found that those exposed to the original violent programming had slower heart rates while watching the following violent clips than those who were in the control group (Linz, Donnerstein & Adams, 1989).

Such experiments have also been conducted on women. Philip Schlesinger, R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash, and C. Kay Weaver (1992) wrote a book titled *Women Viewing Violence* in which various women were presented with several film and television shows where women are being abused or mistreated. Responses to these shows were diverse: “Viewing television violence may, for some women, involve the recreation of a painful and dangerous personal experience; for others, it approximates a feared event; and, for others still, it is merely the depiction of a relatively abstract and distant act” (Schlesinger, Dobash, Dobash & Weaver, 1992).

Carol Krafka, Daniel Linz, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Penrod (1997) also have studied the effect of film on women’s perceptions of female victims in their research titled “Women’s Reactions to Sexually Aggressive Mass Media Depictions.” Women viewed one film everyday for four days in one of the following three groupings: sexually explicit, sexually explicit and sexually violent, and mildly sexually explicit and graphically violent (Krafka, Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod, 1997). The study found that those in the last grouping were far less sympathetic towards a victim of a rape than the other two groupings (Krafka, Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod, 1997).

Ultimately, while psychology studies have indicated that those who view violence against women ultimately become manipulated by those viewings and may change their perception of women who are abused or raped, communication research has offered that a bias against battered

women is also represented in television and movies. Therefore, more research needs to be done specifically regarding battered women's representation in film.

### *Stereotypes in Journalism*

Additionally, scholarly research has shown that journalism and its reporting on domestic abuse are biased. Studies, such as Ann Jones (1994) and Michelle and Weaver (2003), have demonstrated that the language used in journalism frames women as guilty of their own abuse and often asks women to justify their actions, which absolves the abuser of taking full responsibility for his abuse.

Zeynep Alat (2007) also conducted a study of print journalism, titled "News Coverage of Violence against Women," which showed that news coverage of violence against women in Turkey's four mainstream newspapers depicted women in a negative light, emphasizing them as faulty (Alat, 2007). Additionally, the study found that women were blamed for the crimes committed against them while the male aggressors' responsibility for the violence was often overlooked or diminished (Alat, 2007). Alat (2007) also discovered that women are often placed "at the bottom of the social hierarchy" and society "honors women as mothers and wives but provides them with no power" (p. 297). This study only reiterates the stereotypical ideas that are often portrayed in the media regarding gender roles.

Likewise, by analyzing political magazines such as *The National Review* and men's magazines such as *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, Nancy Berns (2001) established that there are two main strategies that people use when discussing domestic abuse: they make it seem as though men are being beaten by the women in their lives just as much as women are beaten by men – when in actuality the majority of victims are women (Pozner, 1999) – and they blame the female victim for her abuse.

Jones (1994) also discusses two such examples where newscasters and anchors have displayed bias against women who were abused. An interview on *48 Hours* with Dan Rather and Tracey Thurman, a victim of domestic abuse, demonstrates this bias (Jones, 1994). Rather, after listening to Thurman discuss how she lives in constant fear that her ex-husband will come back and attack her, asked Thurman “Why not move away? Why not get a long, long way?” (Jones, 1994, p. 130). Jones (1994) argues that asking a woman who has been abused why she hasn’t left places judgment; it implies that the abuse will stop if the victim leaves and by not leaving the victim is, in essence, to blame for their abuse. What Jones (1994) noticed as most striking about Rather’s question was the fact that Thurman *had* left and yet still had to explain why she hadn’t. Ultimately, Jones (1994) argues, that “this exchange [which] takes place remarkably often on television talk shows and news programs – as it did on “48 Hours” – heavily influences the way the public think about battered women” (p. 132).

Additionally, Jones (1994) cites another case where the abused woman, Karen Straw, faced trial after the death of her husband, Clifton, who had repeatedly beaten her. After two years of abuse and little to no help from the authorities, Straw killed Clifton after he raped her at knifepoint in front of her children (Jones, 1994). The report on WCBS by reporter Bree Walker went through the trial, showed pictures of Straw, the courthouse, and interviews with Straw’s attorney, Ann Jones herself, and Madelyn Diaz, who also killed her abusive partner (Jones, 1994). After the report concluded, an anchorman – Jim Jenson – asked one question: “Why would one murder her husband instead of just walking away?” (Jones, 1994, p. 135). Jones (1994) commented on this, saying “The question was particularly remarkable, for it didn’t match Bree Walker’s report or the circumstances of Karen Straw’s life at all” (p. 135). What was more astonishing for Jones (1994), however, was that Walker began to discuss a list of reasons why

Straw may not have walked away, when in fact she *had*; she had left, and her husband found her. With Jenson's question, Jones (1994) insists that "Clifton Straw's violence and terrorism disappeared in that puff of rhetoric, utterly overlooked. Vanished too was the public issue reporter Walker had presented, magically replaced by the personal problem of another dumb woman" (p. 135).

In "Framing Domestic Violence Fatalities: Coverage by Utah Newspapers," Cathy Ferrand Bullock (2007) looked at Utah newspapers coverage of women who have been killed at the hands of their husbands/boyfriends. She discovered that domestic abuse in journalism often discusses women being dominated by their male counterparts and likewise assuming the blame for this abuse; this reinforces the patriarchal status quo and enabling white, upper-class males to assert their power (Bullock, 2007). Bullock (2007) also insists on the necessity of reframing news coverage in order to "acknowledge domestic violence's roots in socially acceptable subordination of women by men" (p. 54).

Additionally, Marian Meyers (1997) noted that the news rarely depicts abused women as survivors. In her book titled *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame*, she analyzed news coverage of domestic abuse and discovered that news represents females as "passive victims who do not fight back or take the actions to protect or defend themselves" (Meyers, 1997, p. 8). She discusses how print or broadcast journalism reinforces the notion that there is a certain place for females in society and that the news represents females in a biased light in order to conform to the roles society has formulated for women (Meyers, 1997). Meyers (1997) also found that the news "positions the female victim as deviant and deserving of condemnation if she in any way appears to have disregarded or flouted socially approved gender roles and expectations" (as cited in McManus & Dorfman, 2005, p. 44).

In this case, scholarly research proves that not only do gender roles play an important part in the unrealistic depiction of women in the media, but these same depictions have now given license to men to beat the women in their lives. Meyers (1994) in her study titled “News of Battering” found that news coverage of a woman who was killed by her husband resorted to myths, assumptions, and stereotypes rather than addressing the social structure and stereotypical gender roles of control as a possible motive. While the blame of domestic abuse highlights the gender inequities in both the media and in perceptions of the events, this could be the cause of reinforced stereotypical gender roles and cultural norms of society (Myers, 1994).

Language used about domestic abuse is also pivotal in the frame that the abuse is given. Scholarly work has discovered that the language used for domestic abuse must be changed in order to create an unbiased reporting of the abuse. By developing three different versions of a newspaper article in which a woman was beaten by a man, Sharon Lamb and Susan Keon (1995) in their study titled “Blaming the Perpetrator: Language that Distorts Reality in Newspaper Articles on Men Battering Women” found that the language of an article can affect how the reader views the assailant with regards to the extent of guilt and the punishment that is acceptable (Lamb & Keon, 1995). The news article that demonstrated shared responsibility by the victim and the perpetrator saw a much less stringent punishment for the assailant (Lamb & Keon, 1995). These findings only reiterate why closer studies of media bias important. If the portrayal of domestic abuse is continually depicting a sharing of blame, it may lead society to place less stringent punishments on the male attackers and exonerate him from full blame.

Additionally, by analyzing the language used when discussing domestic abuse in his study “Naming Knowledge: A Language for Reconstructing Domestic Violence and Systematic Gender Inequity,” C. Ashcroft (2000) found that the way that the media addresses domestic

violence has an impact on how others perceive said violence. The study showed that this language has silenced many women and limited the reach of women activists (Ashcroft, 2000). By broadening the language used to describe and discuss domestic abuse against women, Ashcroft (2000) suggests that this will open much needed channels of communication.

Together, these scholarly studies have identified that the language used to report domestic violence in print media has affected the way the public views this abuse. Both the language used and the frame in which women are depicted could ultimately cause a biased representation of these women in the media as a whole.

### *Stereotypes in Lyrics*

Although many scholars have and continue to study lyrics for their effect on individuals, little research has been compiled specifically regarding domestic abuse. However, limited information has been provided in the communication field regarding song lyrics specifically; fields such as sociology and psychology have explored this area with more vigor.

One such study in the sociology field titled “The Perception of Relationship Violence in the Lyrics of a Song” by Jennifer P. Maxwell (2001), found that those who have been victimized by domestic abuse view and interpret lyrics differently than those who have not. Maxwell (2001) played Natalie Merchant’s 1995 song “I May Know the Word,” for participants of the study. She then conducted interviews, created questionnaires, and used Q methodology in order to gauge how respondents felt about the song (Maxwell, 2001). She found that those who had some sort of victimization in their past thought the song was a “literal representation of rape, battering, and sexual assault,” while those who had no history of abuse interpreted the song as “a more abstract conflict over decision making” (Maxwell, 2001, p. 640). More importantly, the study

determined that music has a tremendous ability in enabling victims to finally name their experience as abuse (Maxwell, 2001).

Additionally, a study conducted by Brook Bretthauer, Toni Schindler Zimmerman, and James H. Banning (2006) titled “Feminist Analysis of Popular Music: Power Over, Objectification of, and Violence Against Women” used a content analysis of 20 songs on Billboard’s Hot 100 chart between the years of 1998 to 2003. The researchers discovered that popular music elicits six distinctive themes: “men and power, sex as top priority for males, objectification of women, sexual violence, women defined by having a man, and women as not valuing themselves” (Bretthauer, Zimmerman & Branning, 2006, abstract). Likewise, the study also found that the messages communicated by male artists often belittle or devalue women and condone violence against them (Bretthauer, Zimmerman & Banning, 2006)

Often, these studies center on how violent lyrics affect the actions of those who listen to them, particularly with respect to violence against women (Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks, 2003; Brunner, 1993; Brunner, 1995; Fischer & Greitemeyer, 2006; Wester, Crown, Quatman & Heesacker, 1997). Although there have been numerous studies, the results have been inconsistent.

One such study titled “The Knower and the Known: Exploring Issues of Violence against Women in Popular Music” by Nancy Brunner (1993) addressed that these song lyrics not only affect the actions of those who listen to them, but also the mindsets. Brunner (1993) assigned a project to her students regarding the images of women in music. One student discussed the gender inequities found in such lyrics, specifically in heavy metal songs like Metallica’s “Master of Puppets” (Brunner, 1993). Ultimately, the implications of this project were staggering.

Brunner explains, “Students often saw women as deserving of their situations and often saw no need to problematize what I read as victimization” (Brunner, 1993, p. 4).

Another such study that examined the effects of song lyrics – “Music and Aggression: The Impact of Sexual-Aggressive Song Lyrics on Aggression-Related Thoughts, Emotions, and Behavior Toward the Same and the Opposite Sex” by Peter Fischer and Tobias Greitemeyer (2006) – demonstrated that there is a correlation between aggressive song lyrics and how men and women view both their own sex and the opposite sex. By measuring aggressive behavior, the study found that men who listened to misogynous song lyrics often felt more aggressive towards women while women who listened to men-hating songs often felt more aggressive towards men as compared to those who heard neutral song lyrics (Fischer & Greitemeyer, 2006).

Likewise, Craig A. Anderson, Nicholas L. Carnagey, and Janie Eubanks (2003) found similar results in their study titled “Exposure to Violent Media: The Effects of Songs with Violent Lyrics on Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings.” By examining college students specifically, the researchers found that those exposed to more violent music felt more aggressive as compared to those who heard nonviolent songs (Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks, 2003). These effects were seen regardless of the genre of songs: rock, humorous, non-humorous (Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks, 2003).

While Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks (2003) studied rock music, Wester, Crown, Quatman & Heesacker (1997) took a different approach. The three researchers looked specifically at sexually violent rap music and its affect on aggressive or violent behavior in their study titled “The Influence of Sexually Violent Rap Music on Attitudes of Men with Little Prior Exposure” (Wester, Crown, Quatman & Heesacker, 1997). By selecting a sample group of 60 undergraduate males from a small Midwestern university and exposing these males to either

“gansta” rap music, lyrics, both, or none, the researchers found that no increase in negative attitudes toward women occurred (Wester, Crown, Quatman & Heesacker, 1997). Those participants who were given lyrics alone or lyrics with music did not have any more aggressive feelings towards women than the control group (Wester, Crown, Quatman & Heesacker, 1997).

With these studies in mind, it is obvious that there is a need for more research in this field, specifically with regards to lyrics and domestic abuse.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Film: The Abuser and the Abuser's Wife

Given the stereotypical depictions of women in television and film, it seems necessary to conduct an analysis of films specifically focusing on abused women. Films, especially those regarding domestic abuse, have the ability to be extremely rhetorical because of their impact. They narrate the tale of an abused woman struggling to find peace. With this in mind, they create an imaginary world that the viewer can witness and experience. It seems necessary, then, that an analysis of films regarding domestic abuse be conducted.

In making the decision of which artifacts to choose for this course of study, a film that established domestic abuse as its central theme was necessary, as both *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy* do. Although films such as *The Color Purple* and *The Burning Bed* also came to mind, the focus of the paper was on spousal abuse; thereby, each film selected must establish this as the primary plot. Although *The Burning Bed* also shares this in common with the two films selected, I choose the most well-known and recent films. In both representative artifacts, the depiction of abuse is the main focus, allowing the viewer to travel with the female protagonist to safety only to be fooled by a false sense of security. The establishment of an ongoing struggle between wife and husband was pivotal in analyzing the gender stereotypes and likewise placing the blame. With this established, I selected *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy* as the two artifacts to be analyzed.

Both *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy* are films that share a common thread: a damaging abusive relationship. Regardless of the 11-year gap in release dates, the time difference has not changed how both men and women are stereotyped. Men, in their characterization as either the aggressor or the hero, are depicted as the stronger, more intelligent characters, while the women – the victims – are portrayed as weaker, dependent, less intelligent,

and more emotional while still maintaining stronger family ties. Ultimately, however, the female is categorized as the faulty party, even after she succeeds in killing her husband.

*Sleeping with the Enemy*, released in the United States in 1991 by 20th Century Fox, is based on the novel by Nancy Price, produced by Leonard Goldberg, and directed by Joseph Ruben (*Sleeping with the Enemy*, 1991). Both readers of the novel, those who enjoy thrillers, and fans of Julia Roberts, the film's protagonist, were the main audience for the film. Roberts' fame in the '90s made her an icon to women, and consequently spurred the film's success. In comparison, *Enough*, released in 2002 by Columbia Pictures, produced by Irwin Winkler, and directed by Michael Apted, established its popularity in Jennifer Lopez's celebrity (*Enough*, 2002). It's safe to assume that both films sought a mostly female audience which ranged from teenagers to middle-aged adults. Interestingly enough, although both films sought a female audience, they were both directed and produced by males; males are therefore the creators of the message while female viewers were targeted.

In the introduction to *Sleeping with the Enemy*, the audience is introduced to Laura Burney (Roberts) and her husband Martin (Patrick Bergin), a seemingly perfect couple. The audience quickly realizes, however, that Martin's obsessive need to control his wife creates commotion and distress in their household. After the audience is made aware of Martin's abusive and compulsive tendencies and Laura's apparent unhappiness, the plot is moved forward with Laura's staged death. As far as Martin knows, Laura has drowned. The audience knows, however, that Laura has traveled to the Midwest where she rents a house, meets and begins a relationship with a new man, Ben (Kevin Anderson), gets a job at the local library, and starts a new life. Although she has left Martin far behind her, she still feels a sense of paranoia at his eminent return.

Back in Massachusetts, Martin begins to question his wife's sudden death. With enough research and manipulation, Martin finds out Laura's whereabouts. He also uncovers her newfound relationship with Ben who works as a drama teacher at a nearby college. With this information, Martin surprises Laura in her home. Ben and Martin get into a physical altercation, causing Ben to be injured. Unfortunately, Martin underestimates his wife's strength: She shoots him as he advances toward her, thus ending her former life of fear and paranoia.

Although *Enough* ends in a similar outcome, with Slim (Lopez) eventually killing her husband Mitch Hiller (Billy Campbell), the film establishes a different course of events. Slim, a struggling waitress when she meets Mitch, quickly falls for the "knight in shining armor." When Mitch exposes the real reason behind a male customer's flirtations with Slim – he apparently made a bet with his friends that he could sleep with her – the pair begins a relationship. From then on, the audience sees a happy family. The couple weds, buys a nice house (albeit in an interesting course of events), has a child (Gracie), and maintains stability over several years. The tides suddenly change, however, when Mitch, who had seemed to be a respectable man, becomes a beast. In an instant, he changes from fatherly do-gooder to crazed lunatic who demands to have what he wants, when he wants it.

Slim, through the support of her friends, stages an escape. She takes Gracie with her, thus beginning her endless run. The pair travels from location to location in order to escape Mitch's grasp. Slim and Gracie seek comfort in Joe (Dan Futterman), a former boyfriend whom Slim finds herself romantically interested in again, and even momentarily stay at his residence. With the support of Joe and Ginny (Juliette Lewis), a fellow waitress from the dinner, Slim begins taking classes with a self-defense coach and plans out the perfect murder. After all her time spent

in fear, Slim has finally become brave. She breaks into Mitch's new home, confronts him, and, after an intense fighting scene, kills him.

### **“I’m a man, honey. There’s no contest”: Hegemonic and Feminist Criticism of Film**

In evaluating the films *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy*, a common theme arises of both men and women replicating stereotypical gender norms. Characters in both films represent the “normal” and desirable actions and appearances of both men and women in society. These two films, in their depiction of females as the weaker sex, establish hegemony – the superiority of the “white, heterosexual man in dominant culture” thus allowing for a feminist critique of the artifacts (Foss, 2004, p. 159). Sonja Foss, in *Rhetorical Criticism*, states that feminist criticism analyzes “how women and men, femininity and masculinity, are depicted in an artifact” and, in this case, supports an ideology of domination of the white male over the female (Foss, 2004, p. 158-9). The differences between men and women are often thought to be a direct result of the culture of the time; in this case, the culture reinforces the superiority of males over females (Foss, 2004, p. 152).

In addressing the stereotypical breakdown of the films, it is important to realize that while women are generally portrayed as weaker, the men, whether it be the hero or the aggressor, are represented as dominant. The characterizations are thereby separated into categories. Females are shown as maternal/family-oriented, as homemakers, and as weaker than/dependent on their male counterparts. Males, on the other hand, whether portraying the aggressor or the hero, are characterized as dominant. Likewise, a general theme of “passing the buck” is apparent; the female is continuously seen as faulty through subtleties in dialogue and action while the male is exonerated from full blame.

### *Female as Maternal/Family-Oriented*

Both Slim and Laura are depicted throughout their respective films as maternal and family-oriented. Laura, who has been out of contact with her mother (Chloe) for some time, still feels the need to talk to her mom. When Laura calls her mother from a payphone to hear her voice – she could not talk to her for fear that Martin may find out her location – she seems deeply saddened that she cannot communicate with her. Although holding her hand over the receiver so that Chloe could not hear her on the line, Laura tells her mom that she loves her and misses her, an action that ultimately portrays her as family-oriented. Additionally, Laura mentions her mother on several occasions throughout the film, even telling a stranger on the bus that she is going to the Midwest because she wants to be closer to her mother. Ultimately, Laura risks everything to visit Chloe and, although disguised, this ends up costing her dearly. The fact, however, is that Laura would risk her life in order to spend time with her mother. Moreover, although Laura has no children, she often plays the role of mother to her own mother who was left blind and paralyzed after a stroke. When Laura visits her mother in her nursing home, she fetches her water and sees to her needs, much like a mother would in taking care of their infant. In this sense, although Laura does not have any offspring of her own, she is still shown as the nurturer.

Lopez's character in *Enough* establishes close family bonds in much the same way. In the opening credits of the film, the audience sees Slim bending over to pick up a baby rattle on the floor for a customer's child. This choice alone reiterates the creator's influence in making Slim maternal. Eventually, when Slim gives birth to Gracie, this only intensifies. When the family is shown on the beach, the audience sees Slim playing with her daughter, hugging and kissing her,

while Mitch is looking off into the distance, mentally excluding himself from his family.

Likewise, Slim is the only one shown tucking Gracie into bed.

Slim's love for Gracie is unparalleled and it can be said that Gracie is the sun in Slim's solar system, the center of her universe. Slim constantly thinks of Gracie first, a fact the film expresses in numerous ways. First and foremost, Slim doesn't leave Mitch right away because she doesn't want to deprive her daughter of her father. A later discussion between Ginny and Slim reiterates that Slim does not want her daughter to be tainted by Mitch's abuse, as it has been shown to have damaging effects, reaffirming her concern for Gracie over her concern for herself (Michelle & Weaver, 2003). All that matters to Slim is Gracie's safety. When Gracie is dribbling a basketball on the dock and Slim loses sight of her, her initial reaction is fear and panic. Her fear subsides when Gracie is found, but her first words are "Didn't I tell you to stay close?" (*Enough*, 2002). The most important aspect of Slim's motherly side comes out during a car ride where Gracie is asleep. Slim tells her sleeping daughter how she only wants to protect her, how she would gladly take away any pain or harm that would ever be caused to her. In this instant, she is depicted and forever holds the position as a loving and caring mom, one who would do anything possible to protect the life of her child.

Ultimately, while both women are continuously depicted as family-oriented, their male counterparts are lacking in family interaction. Even Mitch, who is a father, is rarely depicted as the loving parent that Slim is shown to be. Surprisingly, Mitch's mother is only shown throughout the film as talking and meeting with Slim, not her son. Although the viewer is told that his mother has spoken with him through her conversations with Slim, it is never shown. Likewise, Martin is never seen talking to or shown with any family members; his family is never mentioned in the entire film. While the films portray the females as motherly and concerned with

family, the men are lacking in ties with their families, which only reiterates what Alat (2006) and Glascock (2001) were asserting when they addressed the media's representation of women as motherly and men more concerned with work.

### *Female as Homemaker*

Stereotypically speaking, a women's job is in the home and both films only help to establish this. Laura and Slim are the only two characters in the film who are constantly depicted in the kitchen. When their husbands are in the kitchen with them, it is either because they are fighting or because they are kissing. Needless to say, the male is, save one instance, never shown to be in the household kitchen by himself. (It is necessary to note, however, that Slim's fatherly figure, Phil, owns a diner and therefore is depicted in the kitchen there, but this is seen as business not pleasure.) In that one instance, where Ben attempts to cook for Laura, his pot roast catches on fire, which only reiterates that it is a women's job to cook for the men in their lives, as men find difficulty in cooking successfully. Additionally, Mitch is incapable of even turning off the coffee pot when he leaves the house, which also pinpoints a male's inability to be domestic. Cooking, however, is not all that is included in a woman's duties; cleaning is also important. Both women, after leaving their husbands and purchasing or renting their own homes, are shown fixing and cleaning their new residences.

With regards to Laura and Martin specifically, he constantly reaffirms the notion that a woman's place is in the home throughout their marriage. At one point in the film, Martin escorts Laura to the bathroom where he scolds her for not making sure everything was "as it should be" (*Sleeping with the Enemy*, 1991). Martin has decided that it is Laura's responsibility to make sure the household is organized and clean, that the towels in the bathroom are aligned, that food is on the table, and that the cupboard is meticulously organized. At one point in the film, Martin

walks into the kitchen and asks a cooking Laura what she is making for dinner. After he expresses his pleasure in her decision, he goes outside to talk to a gentleman with a boat, leaving his wife cooking. This reiterates a woman's duties as homemaker while her husband has the leisure of doing what he pleases.

Additionally, Martin recalls a time when Laura was late bringing dinner to the table six months ago, when her mother had apparently died. The fact that he remembers that day not as the day her mother passed away but as the day dinner was late to the table is telling. When Laura mentions that the library wants her full-time, Martin refuses to let her accept the position stating, "What about our home? Don't you love our home as much?" (*Sleeping with the Enemy*, 1991). Their home, in Martin's opinion, takes precedence over any outside work that Laura may do.

Slim also portrays the role of housewife, even telling the audience of her duties during an argument with Mitch. "I cook, I clean for you, I take care of your kid," Slim screams at Mitch (*Enough*, 2002). She is shown picking up Gracie's blocks, cooking dinner, cleaning dishes, and other duties that society routinely associates as a woman's job. Mitch, however, is never seen in the kitchen with her unless the two are fighting, whether verbally or physically or they are eating at the dinner table with the kitchen in sight. These depictions therefore assert that a woman's place is in the home, a stereotypical notion of female responsibility and duty.

#### *Female as Weak and Dependent/Male as Dominant*

The women in both artifacts are continuously shown to be the inferior party to their male counterparts, whether that includes their abusive husbands or their knights in shining armor. Through representing the male as either the hero or the aggressor and representing the women as irresponsible, unintelligent, or dependent, the common theme of male dominance is apparent throughout, whether subtly or more obviously.

All women represented in the two artifacts are shown to be dependent on their male counterparts. They are the caretakers but never the breadwinners. This can be evidenced in career choice alone. Slim worked as a waitress (Mitch's friend Robbie ultimately believes this makes Slim stupid) before Mitch came along. Laura, on the other hand, worked at the library part-time only because Martin allows her to spend mornings outside the home. Both women work typically female jobs that do not allow for a lucrative career. The men, however, both have high-paying careers. Martin works with investments, has a nice office, and a secretary while Mitch owns his own company.

In this sense, money is no object to both Martin and Mitch. Martin offers an investigator \$20,000 if he could find Laura's mother. Mitch, on the same token, offers to buy a house from a man who isn't selling. Apparently, Slim and Mitch found a house they liked, and Mitch sought to buy it even though it wasn't on the market. Mitch then tells the man how his family would be better in a smaller place now that his kids are grown and assures the man that the price he is offering is way above market value. When the man looks at the offer on the slip of paper, he is astonished. "You're crazy!" he says to Mitch (*Enough*, 2002). Mitch's only response is, "Just think how miserable one determined crazy person can make you ... miserable today, miserable tomorrow, basically miserable every day until the day you sell" (*Enough*, 2002).

Although this situation seems outlandish, it only emphasizes the fact that Mitch and Martin are financially stable while Laura and Slim, without their husbands' financial support, would never be able to survive. When Slim leaves Mitch, Mitch freezes all the money in her accounts. She then has to resort to borrowing money from friends and eventually seeking out her real father who is extremely wealthy to ask him for money. She even alludes to the fact that she didn't have enough money to bury her mother when she died, reiterating her financial instability.

Therefore, if money is supposedly linked to power, then the power lies solely with the male. Mitch even makes this explicit in an argument with Slim. He says, “I make the money here so it’s my rules” (*Enough*, 2002). This is paramount in establishing women’s dependence and inferiority. When Laura eventually leaves Martin she tells Chloe, “I’m making my own money now,” which establishes her ultimate independence, at least financially (*Sleeping with the Enemy*, 1991).

Although financial dependence is one element, the films also portray women as inferior and men as dominant in other ways. Laura and Martin’s relationship is very one-sided; everything is on his terms. Martin decides that they will go sailing, and even though he “asks” Laura, he is ultimately telling her, exhibiting his authority. Even the way Martin refers to Laura – as Princess – is notoriously degrading. When and how often the couple has sex is also on his terms. Laura, however, doesn’t do anything to confront the situation. When Martin shows Laura the bathroom and asks if everything is as it should be, she realizes the towels are not aligned and fixes them. When she walks out of the room, she thanks Martin and courtesies. The mere fact that she thanks him for pointing out something that she needed to fix, when he is capable of fixing it himself, only highlights her inferiority to him.

Similarly, Slim finds herself in the same situation with Mitch. It begins with the couples wedding photo. Slim is depicted in the middle in her white dress with the groom’s men in black tuxedos and top hats surrounding her; there are no bridesmaids. It’s interesting to note that this is the only photo of their wedding that is shown, which evokes male dominance as Slim is the only woman with five men. Likewise, the top hats that the males wear are only emphasizing that they are heads taller than Slim, making them the more dominant parties and her the smaller and ultimately weaker individual. Unlike Martin and Laura, Slim makes an advance to Mitch when

he is in the shower, asking if she can join him. He, however, asserts his dominance and refuses her advance, telling her that he has to go back to work. This only reiterates what was said earlier regarding Martin; everything is on the male's terms, and the woman is left with what she gets.

When Slim eventually finds out Mitch has been cheating, she kneels on the floor, looking over Gracie's scattered blocks. Mitch enters the room and stands over her. The scene is pivotal in addressing male dominance because Mitch, towering over Slim, has all the power. When he apologizes for his actions, Slim quickly forgives him, fitting herself into his arms, like a child would fit into the arms of a parent. He has the control; all he has to do is apologize and she will run back to him.

Mitch's character is painfully aware of the dominance he has over his wife. When Slim confronts him at the conclusion of the film, asking him to fight, he is astounded. "You want to fight me? Man to man?" he asks (*Enough*, 2002). When she answers with "Woman, Mitch" he is puzzled and asks, "How does this work for you?" (*Enough*, 2002). Mitch says that it would be no contest between the two of them, asserting his belief that he would definitely win out in any fight against a woman. Mitch's concern is only a testament to his belief that women are not as strong or cannot fight as well as men, therefore he feels that they are the inferior gender.

Possession is also a key element in establishing dominance in these relationships. Throughout *Enough*, Mitch stakes his claim on everything that the two of them supposedly share. When the couple gets married, the first question Mitch asks Slim is, "You gonna give *me* babies?" (*Enough*, 2002). He doesn't ask when they will have children together as a collective unit, but asks when she is going to give *him* children, implying that they are his possessions. Additionally, when Slim and Mitch are arguing, Slim refers to things under Mitch's possession as well. Slim says, "I take care of *your* kid," which implies that Gracie doesn't belong to her, that

Gracie is, in some way, his alone. Additionally, when Gracie is born and Mitch is holding her at the hospital, he says, “She looks just like *my* baby pictures” (*Enough*, 2002). Gracie looks like him therefore she is his possession. When Slim asks Mitch to bring Gracie over to her so that she can see her too, he continues to hold onto her, far from Slim’s grasp. This amplifies his dominance over her; even their child is talked about as his child.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the women in these films – who ultimately succeed against their aggressor – are shown as the exceptions. The police officer at the end of *Enough* summarizes this well, saying “Looks like you’re one of the lucky ones” (*Enough*, 2002). The use of the word “lucky” implies exception. What the officer doesn’t say, or rather what he doesn’t have to say, is that more often than not women are killed by their husbands or are continuously abused by their husbands until their death. In this sense, women never escape from the cloud of male dominance. The fact that Laura and Slim did fight back and succeed makes them unique, which only reiterates that a woman’s success against her husband – although the most empowering moment in both films – is most likely impossible for the average woman.

Men, however, are also portrayed as sexually dominant in the films. When Laura and Martin have sex, it is more Martin’s choice than Laura’s. He undresses her, kisses her, grabs her from behind, and takes her into the bedroom, where the audience can visibly see her displeasure, especially in the scene after Martin apologizes for hitting Laura. Although she puts on a smile when he is looking, when his eyes are turned away from her, her facial expressions display unease and disgust. Her body language and the fact that she covers herself up with the blanket after he is finished, removing herself from his view, only further mirror this. Likewise, Martin gets up and leaves after he has finished, portraying Laura as his sexual prize, something he owns that he can use and then leave when he pleases.

When Mitch is caught cheating on Slim he reiterates this theme, saying, “It’s not that our sex life hasn’t been good, it’s been great, Slim, but I’m a man and men and women have different needs. Darcelle is willing to take care of that and maybe that’s better for everyone” (*Enough*, 2002). Basically, he instructs her to get used to his cheating because he is a man and his desires are paramount; he must be satisfied first and foremost. In this sense, he asserts his power and dominance, telling her that this is how it is going to be and that she better get used to it because he makes the rules. Likewise, he makes Darcelle into his sexual object, as he does continuously with women throughout the film on several occasions: with Darcelle, with a one night stand the audience sees him with the night Slim breaks into his house, and with Lucy, the woman he calls after his one night stand leaves. His women are his possessions, his objects; they don’t mean anything to him, but he uses them for what he needs.

Even though the main characters portray the stereotypical weaker and dependent female, so too do the supporting actresses. Ginny also works as a waitress and refuses to let Slim leave the restaurant to go back to school. Likewise, Laura’s mother is dependent in a different sense; she requires constant supervision and caretaking because she is incapable of doing even the smallest tasks by herself. Additionally, Ginny and Slim’s discussions in the beginning of the film portray Ginny as a stereotypical female who puts males on a pedestal. When Slim is hit on by a “cute” customer, Ginny says, “When a guy like that who is cuter than you actually likes you ...” in her attempt to persuade Slim to give him a chance. She puts this customer on a pedestal because of his looks, reiterating that because Slim isn’t as attractive, she should be grateful that a man as good looking as he is would be interested in her. Because she places Slim as inferior to this good-looking man, she establishes a notion that women who are less attractive should be hopeful to get a male who is “cuter.” Perhaps what the film is really trying to say is that when

women marry out of their league, they should be happy with what they get; in this case, what Slim gets is beaten, making her inferior in both attractiveness and power to her dominant husband.

Moreover, two supporting actresses in *Sleeping with the Enemy* cement a female's inability to make appropriate decisions. The nurse that Martin talks to in the nursing home exhibits the weaker portrayal of women by falling for Martin's ploy. In flirting with her, Martin expresses his dominance and greater intelligence, and obtains the information that he wants. She is not smart enough to know better, or so the film depicts, telling Martin that she would be happy to let him know if Laura's mom receives any visitors. Moreover, Laura's mom, Chloe, is easily swayed by the "police officer" who questions her in hopes of finding her daughter. In actuality, it is Martin, who changes his voice and pretends to be the police officer. Chloe, therefore, tells the "police officer" about Laura's whereabouts, disclosing personal information about Laura to Martin without even realizing it. In this sense, the film portrays women as intellectually inferior; Chloe was irresponsible in disclosing information to someone who she didn't even know. She didn't she even ask for identification or a badge. Based on Chloe's misjudgment, Martin gets what he wants, which establishes his dominance over her.

Although these examples consistently paint a picture of male dominance, it must be noted that white heterosexual male dominance is what is being continuously discussed and reiterated, thereby reinforcing hegemony (Foss, 2004). Both male aggressors and male heroes in the two films are white, heterosexual males. The only gay individual portrayed was a drama teacher that Martin mistakenly thought was Ben. In this scene, the gay male is depicted as scared and uneasy, a victim to Martin, and thereby weaker than Martin. Phil, Slim's boss and father figure in

*Enough*, is a prominent non-white character. Mitch points this out when he refers to Phil as a “rug head,” reiterating stereotypes about people of color and their inferiority to whites.

### *Female as Faulty*

The question, “Why doesn’t she leave” implies judgment – a worthy victim would want to find a way out, and since the females in these cases do not, they are perceived by society as unworthy victims (Jones, 1994, p. 130). The supporting characters of both films establish the same sort of judgment when referring to the actions of Laura and Slim. Rather than highlighting the fault of the male aggressor, these characters conform to society’s initial response in blaming the victim for their husband’s abuse.

The audience’s first initial taste of this blame happens when Laura is traveling on a bus after finally leaving Martin. The woman sitting next to her on the bus offers her an apple and the two begin a brief conversation. During this conversation, the woman asks, “How long did you stay with him?” (*Sleeping with the Enemy*, 1991). Although this seems innocent, it implies that Laura had the option to leave at any point during those three years, but she stayed. Although the woman asks how long Laura stayed with Martin, she insinuates that Laura should have gotten out of the relationship earlier. Even though the woman says that she thinks Laura is brave, Laura thinks of herself as a coward, which the film subtly portrays her to be.

Mitch’s mother also places the blame on Slim for her son’s violence. When the two meet the day after Mitch punches Slim and his mother sees her bruises, her initial reaction is that Slim must have provoked Mitch. She therefore insinuates that he is incapable of being violent without provocation. She asks, “What did you do? What did you say to him?” which places the blame on Slim while implying that her son is perfect and would never harm her unless he was, in some way, forced to do so (*Enough*, 2002). These questions are startling, placing the blame quite

obviously on the victim. Although she is his mother, and therefore may have a biased opinion of her son, this in no way justifies her questions. The female is typically the one who is blamed (Bullock, 2007; Consalvo, 1998; Jones, 1994; Michelle & Weaver, 2003)

The issue of legal action also comes into play during *Enough*. Ginny, Slim's coworker and friend, asks Slim why she hasn't gone to the authorities, to which Slim replies that Mitch is the father of her child and she refuses to put him in jail. In this sense, Slim bares the responsibility for not getting help sooner, for not leaving or pressing charges when she could have. Even when she goes to a police station, she leaves before the police officer can even finish his statement. Although this may be the film's way of showing the flaws in the legal system when abuse is concerned, it does so in a way that ultimately makes Slim look like the faulty party.

A lawyer Slim sees later in the film echoes these assumptions; he tells her that she had multiple chances to put his abuse on file, yet did not follow through. In this sense, she made it impossible to obtain corrective legal action. "It's too late, there isn't anybody who can help you," the lawyer says (*Enough*, 2002). With this reaction, he places the blame on her as much as Ginny placed the blame on her for not reporting Mitch's abuse to the police.

Moreover, it is easy for other characters in the film to place blame on Slim because Slim also places the blame on herself. "I'm sorry kid. It's my mistake. Mommy's just a big idiot," Slim tells Gracie (*Enough*, 2002). The rhetorical decision made by the writers and director to have Slim say this emphasizes that the abuse that befalls her is her fault. She is, after all, a big idiot.

Although it is easy for a viewer to place immediate blame on Martin and Mitch, the films subtly detract the blame from them and focus it on Laura and Slim. The women are portrayed as

faulty because of their inability to leave their husbands sooner and somehow necessitating the violence that confines them. Through these subtleties, women are faulty and men are thereby exonerated of full responsibility for their actions.

### **Once Upon a Time: Fantasy-Themed Criticism**

Although both films seek to reinforce gender stereotypes in today's society, they also can be analyzed using narrative criticism, in specific a fantasy theme. A fantasy theme, developed by Ernest G. Bormann, is "designed to provide insights into the shared worldview of groups" (Foss, 2004, p. 109). In this case, fantasy creates a themed message for its audiences (Foss, 2004, p.109). In Bormann's unpublished essay "How to Make a Fantasy Themed Analysis," he insists that although a fantasy theme is usually misconstrued to mean a false sense of reality, fantasies are "creative and imaginative interpretation of events" ( as cited in Foss, 2004, p. 110). Therefore, although fantasies may be removed in location and time from a certain series of events, they "provide compelling explanations for experiences" and establish a "way of making sense out of an experience" (Foss, 2004, p. 111). Fantasy themes, however, vary; even though they are deemed to be a "credible interpretation of an experience," they are also "organized and artistic" (Foss, 2004, p. 111).

In this vane, a fantasy theme is used to analyze both films in order to establish the fight between good and evil – the male aggressor hurts the innocent female, the innocent female finds a male hero, the male hero helps the innocent female succeed against her aggressor. Much like the women depicted in popular romance novels, Slim and Laura, the damsels in distress, are in need of a savior, who comes in the form of handsome male protagonists. Therefore, the two films both portray bipolarity in male characterization: male as the aggressor and male as the hero

while the females are continuously portrayed as the damsels in distress who cannot possibly help themselves.

### *Male as the Aggressor*

Both *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy* represent one male lead as the aggressor; in these cases, Mitch and Martin play these roles respectively. Both characters assert their control over their female partners by emotional and physical abuse, knowingly forcing their wives to remain by their side due to their immense power over them. The females in these situations are unhappy and wish to start over, but are incapable of doing so because of their husband's domination. Martin once told Laura that they "will always be together," that he would not let her live without him, reiterating her inability to leave him (*Sleeping with the Enemy*, 1991). Laura, in her discussion with an elderly woman on the bus after her "death," tells of Martin's promise that he would punish her if she ever tried to leave him, also noting that "his punishments were terrible" (*Sleeping with the Enemy*, 1991). Martin would beat his wife under any circumstance, although he vehemently declared that he received no joy in doing such. He stooped so low as to beat his wife when she returned from paying her last respects to her "deceased" mother; although the audience knows that this is false, that Laura really just moved her mother out of one nursing home and into another, the fact that Martin abused her because she wanted to go to her mother's funeral is outlandish and cruel, only amplifying his brutality.

On the same token, Mitch also portrays the villain. He tells Slim, "Do you have any idea how bad things can get? I am and always will be a person who gets what he wants, and I still want you. You can either accept that or you can fight it; which way do you want to go?" (*Enough*, 2002). He promises to make Slim's life a living hell, and through the work of his henchmen accomplishes that goal quite well. He has Slim followed wherever she goes, with or

without Gracie. He does not seem to care if Slim is hurt or injured in this process, as he declares that “If I can’t have you, no one will” and promises Slim that the police will find Joe (her ex-boyfriend and reinstated love interest) floating in Lake Washington (*Enough*, 2002). With these meager examples, it is clear that both aggressors assert their control over their women using force and violence.

### *Male as the Hero*

The heroes in both films serve a key purpose: They save the innocent female from her unfortunate fate. Ben in *Sleeping with the Enemy* and Joe and Phil in *Enough* represent these heroes by supporting and helping Laura and Slim respectively. Unlike their oppressive counterparts, these men truly care about Laura and Slim and therefore will assist them in any way possible, even if it involves physical confrontation, which it ultimately does in both films.

With Ben’s comical introduction – he is singing songs from *West Side Story* while watering the lawn outside Laura’s new house – he establishes his kinder and less domineering side. Ben helps Laura obtain a job at the library, unlike her former husband who refused to let her work because it would be detrimental to his control over her. Ben is constantly juxtaposed with Martin throughout the film; he is more caring and considerate of Laura versus Martin’s abusive and controlling qualities. Ben cares about Laura’s well-being and helps her make a new life for herself. Even though Laura tries to push Ben away, he remains faithfully by her side, waiting for her to open up to him. Although he knows that she has been wronged in the past, he never pushes her to reveal her past life, only asking for her name. Ben even helps Laura fashion a disguise so that she can visit her mother without being recognized. Ben was Laura’s introduction into happiness, in a truer, more authentic sense; he was the first one to make her genuinely smile after her abuse with Martin. In all cases, Ben is Laura’s hero. He even saves her from Martin at

the conclusion of the film, even though Martin hurts him and causes Laura to protect herself without Ben's help. He helps her transition into her new life, allows her to love again, and protects her when she needs protection and comfort. He is, for all intents and purposes, her knight in shining armor.

In *Enough*, Slim's protectors are Phil and Joe; much like Ben in *Sleeping with the Enemy*, Phil and Joe offer support and comfort to a frazzled, paranoid, and frightened Slim. Phil truly cares about Slim, something that even Mitch notes on the day of their wedding. He has, for much of her life, been a father to her; he even walked her down the aisle on her wedding day. He is the one who helps her leave Mitch, the one who uses his contacts to make sure that she and Gracie have a place to stay after Mitch finds her at her motel, and the one who is a constant source of support for Slim throughout her experience.

Although Phil is Slim's father figure, Joe is her knight in shining armor. The two rekindle their old relationship throughout the film, and it's clear that Joe cares more about Slim and Gracie than anything tangible in his life. He even risks his life in hiding them at his place when Mitch sends his henchmen to locate her whereabouts. After sustaining a knife at his throat and destruction of his home, he still visits Slim and Gracie, knowing full well of the risk involved. When Slim needs to turn to someone, she turns to him. When Slim is questioned as to why she choose to turn to him, she says that she had tried to think of the last time she felt safe and she saw his face. This summarizes their relationship well; he is her source of protection from her abuser, a sense of security and safety. With his help, and other males whom she meets along the way, she is able to confront Mitch and kill him.

### *Female as the Damsel in Distress*

In both films, the viewers are confronted with an abused woman, one who is terrified of her husband and his control over her. Both Laura and Slim exhibit fear and paranoia; fear and terror in regards to the abuse and paranoia when they finally flee, half expecting their husbands to pop out of any corner. When Laura and Ben are kissing on the stairs and she pushes him off of her, crying, his reply is, “What did he do to you?” acknowledging that her husband has scarred her with his menacing and abusive control. Laura, having been abused for over three years, carries the fear and paranoia with her when she finally leaves Martin. She changes her name and is reluctant to trust Ben. Slim is also paranoid; she plans elaborate escape routes so that Mitch can’t follow her, changes her name, keeps her phone calls under a minute so that, as far as she knows, they can’t be traced, and looks into every precautionary measure to avoid being attacked again. She is, nevertheless, fearful of Mitch and what he may do to both her and the people she loves. Both protagonists are, without a doubt, fearful and distressed, looking for help wherever they can find it; ultimately, this fosters the need for a hero.

### *Meaning to the Madness*

By representing females in a stereotypical light, both *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy* indicate that women are inferior and should therefore be thought of as less important than their male counterparts. By establishing juxtaposition between the fragile female and the aggressive male, females are shown as helpless, dependent, and weak – comparatively speaking – thus generalizing women to a class that is lower than men. This only reiterates hegemony; the white male is, in fact, superior where society is concerned.

Additionally, both films portray the female protagonist as the helpless damsel in distress, one that does not have the ability to overcome her husband until other males persuade her or help

her to do so. Both films romantically reinforce the female as stereotypically weak and, even though she eventually establishes dominance at the conclusion of the film, it is only with the help of her knight in shining armor (and, in Slim's case, monetary funds from her father, Jupiter) that she is able to do so. If nothing else, this furthers the gender stereotype that exists throughout the films: Females are incapable of helping themselves and therefore they need the help of another male in order to regain the sense of determination and drive needed to combat their attackers. What plays out as fairytale, with one man staking his claim through abuse while another man fights for her honor and helps the damsel through her harshest moments, ends up reiterating that women are inferior and that men, either through force or support, are dominant. It seems necessary, however, since film and television are often linked, to analyze how abused women are represented in television as well.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Broadcast Journalism: “The Hoopla Surrounding News”**

Since television’s inception, researchers of the medium have debated its impact on its viewers. Proponents of television supported its potential for sharing information about places and people, for being both therapeutic and informative (Bianculli, 1992). David Bianculli, one such proponent, (1992) addressed TV’s ability to be a “window on the world,” in his book titled *Teletiteracy* saying, “TV provides an opportunity to cut across cultural, ethnic, economic, and educational lines” (p. 90). The critics, however, took a closer look at its destructive nature, emphasizing that viewers may see a skewed perception of the world; the way reality is represented on television may shape viewer’s opinions based on what they watch (Stossel, 1997).

The introduction of television as a source of news coverage – as the Roper study suggests – has occurred in the last 45 years (Dominick, Sherman, & Messere, 2000). After the surge of television news popularity in the ‘80s, competition among the stations established the necessity for high ratings; ratings became a means for survival and profit for news stations (Dominick, Sherman, & Messere, 2000). With this new trend, “the hoopla surrounding news was not unlike that which accompanied the premiere of a new motion picture” with newscasters becoming “younger, more daring, and even ‘dashing’” (Dominick, Sherman, & Messere, 2000, p. 190). With each station’s newfound attention to ratings and a trend toward the sensationalism of television journalism, a closer look is required of news topics that have the capacity of being misrepresented. This chapter will therefore investigate the way in which anchors and reporters on television news discuss domestic abuse crimes using a feminist and fantasy-based criticism.

In conducting a criticism of broadcast journalism, it was necessary to search for relevant and current footage of domestic abuse on the five major news stations – ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, and FOX. Using the *Vanderbilt News Archive*, terms such as domestic abuse, domestic violence,

and battered women were used. Seven clips of reports about domestic abuse – two from the 2000s, two from the 1990s, two from the 1980s, and one from the 1970s – were selected and each segment was analyzed accordingly. In an attempt to see if the bias has been consistent, has been more prominent recently, or has lessened throughout the decades, broadcasts were selected from these different decades. Television interviews with female victims were allowed as well.

The most dated clip, the 1979 NBC segment titled “Wife Beating,” emphasizes the threat women face with regards to domestic abuse. Reporter Gerard Harrington visits Michigan’s largest shelter for battered women called Safe House. In a secret location, Safe House offers support to those women fleeing batterers, specifically those with children. One woman, Cindy, travelled to the house from Kentucky. Harrington discusses what the shelter provides, including counseling, referrals, and legal help. Kathy Fiorillo – a former battered wife, as her title suggests – discusses the positive impact the house has on helping women reach a decision of whether to return to their abuser and seek help or file for divorce. Another interview with a husband – Harry Connick – whose wife and son had fled and went to Safe House indicates his sadness and worry for their disappearance. He insists he never beat his wife and that Safe House should never have allowed her to enter their shelter. Kathy Fojick, an employer at Safe House, insists on their need to believe another adult’s description of the abuse.

The two segments from the 1980s also showcase abused women as the cornerstone of their interviewing. In the 1986 NBC segment titled “Battered Wives,” Tom Brokaw discusses a plan to change the approach police take to answering domestic disputes. The police have previously tried to stay out of domestic disputes. Lisa Meyers investigates this, interviewing Tracey Thurman, a battered wife. Thurman talks about her abuse, telling Meyers how her husband broke her neck and stabbed her repeatedly. She had complained about his previous

abuse 11 times to the police, but nothing ever changed. She was awarded \$2 million; the government felt that Torrington police did not protect her from her abuser, causing her serious harm. Meyers discusses Connecticut's domestic violence law – the toughest in the country – that now requires police to make an arrest at the scene of a domestic dispute if there is evidence of violence. Abused women insist that unless the abuser goes to jail, the beatings will continue. The 1983 NBC segment titled “Special Segment (Battered Women)” specified the increase in unemployment as a possible reason why there was a sudden increase in domestic abuse. Connie Chung interviewed several battered women who have left their abusive partners and found comfort in a community shelter. One woman recalls her own personal experience about her abuse. Congress is deciding whether or not to fund these shelters, since many of them are barely capable of caring for the women that they intend to help. Ruth Curry, a YMCA director, says that they are unable to help 80 percent of those seeking their aid. Sixty-five million dollars would go toward shelters while another six million dollars will be there to train police. One victim discusses how the shelter and counseling for her husband has helped save their marriage.

The two segments from the 1990s both discuss domestic abuse and progress that the government or local officials have been taking to decrease its occurrence. In the 1996 NBC segment titled “Domestic Abuse,” the clip discusses the new bill before Congress making it illegal for anyone who has been charged with domestic abuse to obtain a handgun. The segment then discusses the story of Earlene Jackson, who was shot in the head by her husband 10 years ago when the story was aired. It then gives a statistic that two out of three of the women killed each year by their domestic abuser were murdered by a gun. The bill has passed in the Senate, President Clinton supported the bill, and Newt Gingrich stated that he believed the House would also pass the bill before it adjourns. However, the problem with the bill, as the segment indicates,

is that there is no database of domestic abusers that could be utilized to look people up when they want to purchase a weapon. The 1997 segment titled “Domestic Violence (Part I)” begins with Tom Brokaw announcing the recent charge against Thomas Welsh, a former Olympian, for the abuse of his wife. Brokaw then introduces the NBC series regarding domestic abuse that will be continuing in the coming days. The topic for this particular broadcast looks specifically at Memphis, Tenn. where the police, who had been frustrated that domestic abuse had not decreased even after abusers were convicted, have begun to change their approach. Now, when the police are called to the scene, doctors will come along with them to treat the victims with medical help; it was noted that often women never seek medical attention because those abused are fearful that it will provoke another attack. Likewise, a new court has been formed to handle domestic violence incidents, where the alleged abusers are arraigned the next day. The punishment is either a fine, jail time, or a 12-week course where the abuser is taught how to control their anger. There are also counseling sessions for battered women and their children.

The most recent segments – those taking place in the past three years – both discuss the rise of abuse and some of the causes or preventative measures that can be enacted to reduce the abuse. The 2006 NBC segment titled “Hurricane Katrina / Gulf Coast / Battered Women” discusses the most recent victims of Hurricane Katrina – the abused women. The segment explains how abused women have found it more difficult to leave their abusers now that their homes have been demolished. The segment interviews Dale Standifer, a director at a New Orleans shelter for battered women. Because of the storm, two of the three shelters have been destroyed, leaving women with very little options. Likewise, an anonymous interview with an abused woman believes that men are more stressed now because of the rebuilding process, causing their frustration levels to rise and for a rise in domestic abuse to be the effect. The

interviewer blames the storm for the increase in violence, specifically her own husband who has recently started hitting her and threatened her at gunpoint. Standifer also admits that women have told her that prior to the storm there was never violence but now, a year after Hurricane Katrina, they are being abused. Likewise, with the court system backlogged, some women have given up on the justice system. The more recent NBC clip from 2007 titled “Domestic Violence/ CNN Center Shooting / Grisby Interview” discusses the murder of Clara Riddles by her abusive boyfriend. Apparently, her boyfriend – 17 years Riddles senior – had a prior murder conviction in Florida, something her mother didn’t know. In the segment, an interview with her mother, in which her mother admits having no knowledge that her daughter was in danger, was followed by an interview with Nancy Grigsby from the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Grigsby explained what women, like Riddles, should look for to prevent involvement with an abusive man. She also discusses domestic abuse as an epidemic and mentions that society has not put a majority of energy into counseling for men who are abusive.

These seven clips, summarized above, are the representative sample of broadcast news segments, which were analyzed with a feminist and fantasy-themes criticism in mind. Broadcast journalism roots itself in the idea that it is without prejudice. It has been concluded, however, that the news is not free from bias.

### **“Sign of the Times”: Feminist Criticism of Broadcast News**

Using both a feminist critique and a narrative critique, I looked at the seven selected news broadcasts. In an attempt to analyze the broadcasts in terms of a feminist critique, I am coding each segment in the following manner: If some sort of blame is implied (i.e. questions of how long she has been in the relationship, why she didn’t leave earlier, discussion of the warning signs she should have seen, how long the abuse has been going on, etc.), this falls under the

category of Victim Blaming. If the aggressor is portrayed as only partially at fault and excuses are used in his defense (i.e. he was on medication, he had a rough day, she provoked him in some way, etc.), these falls under the category of Exoneration. If sympathy is used when the victim in concerned (i.e. the use of the words tragedy, poor, pity, apology, or any negative words that describe the abuse), this falls under the category of Pity. Additionally, if the victim is portrayed as a survivor or displayed in a positive light (i.e. good for her, it takes a tough women to make it through this, etc.), this is categorized as Survivor. Additionally, any emphasis on words should be noted and likewise categorized as unnecessarily biased. Likewise, visual aspects are coded as well. If a reporter on the scene acts sympathetically to a victim (i.e. holds her hand, consoles her) or if the victim is shown as emotional (i.e. crying, weeping, sobbing), this is categorized as Visual Pity. If the woman is shown as powerful or victorious this is coded as Visual Survivor. Additionally, if the woman's family members are seen doing anything such as the previous two codes, they is coded in that category. If the alleged male abuser is depicted as emotional (i.e. crying, sobbing, and wiping his eyes) this is coded as Visual Exoneration. I did not, however, code Visual Victim-Blaming because I could not think of a definition that would be suitable. After serious contemplation, I decided it would be best not to code for it at all. After the seven reports were watched and coded, the categories were analyzed using a feminist and narrative critique. The succession of category frequencies explains that bias is prevalent in television news, perhaps as prevalent as print journalism.

### *Victim Blaming*

Victim blaming was prevalent among several clips in the representative sample, although it was more prevalent in the most recent clips. For example, the piece entitled "Domestic Abuse/ CNN Center Shooting / Grigsby Interview" on CNN gave many insights into the bias against

women (CNN Evening News, 2007). Shirley Riddles, the mother of Clara who had been shot by her boyfriend – Mann – was interviewed regarding any prior knowledge to Mann’s police record. Shirley admitted that she and her family had no idea about his legal offenses. Shirley says, “We all thought that man was OK” (CNN Evening News, 2007). Reporter Veronica de la Cruz then begins telling viewers how Mann had been convicted of murder in another state and had prior convictions for sleeping with a minor and car theft. She ends this laundry list of offenses, saying “Something else her family *didn’t* know,” emphasizing the *didn’t* (CNN Evening News, 2007). This immediately implies judgment – judgment against the family for not protecting their child. Instead of blaming Mann for Clara’s death, de la Cruz has implied that the family’s ignorance of Mann’s history made them culpable for his actions. Additionally, the text on the screen also implies this judgement. At one point, it says, “Family describes Mann as soft-spoken and mild-mannered” and at another point it says, “Family says never knew about Mann’s criminal past” (CNN Evening News, 2007). This would seem acceptable, except that it appeared after Shirley was on the screen, when the interview with Nancy Grigsby was in progress.

Likewise, in the interview with Nancy Grigsby from the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Grigsby explained what women should be looking for in order to prevent themselves from getting involved with an abusive man (CNN Evening News, 2007). De la Cruz opens this segment by saying, “Prevent your daughter from getting involved with the wrong guy” (CNN Evening News, 2007). This also implies judgment against the family of Clara Riddles, emphasizing that their ignorance regarding Mann’s past has cost them their daughter. Grigsby also says that it’s not easy to tell which man is going to be violent but oftentimes its men who have “all the things that we teach young girls are sort of desirable” (CNN Evening News, 2007). This, unfortunately, takes blame away from the man and puts it on the woman and her

family; it implies that they should have known better than to get involved or let their family member get involved with this man. Grigsby also noted that mothers should talk to their daughters and make sure their daughters are dating good people (CNN Evening News, 2007). Grigsby says “When everyone looks the other way, it’s likely to escalate,” implying that if the mother had seen it or paid attention sooner, then her daughter would still be alive (CNN Evening News, 2007).

Additionally, in the “Hurricane Katrina” segment on NBC, many of the people interviewed discussed how many women refused to leave their homes after the storm regardless of the severity of the abuse and how women were reluctant to testify against their abusers (NBC Nightly News, 2006). Reporter Campbell Brown says, “Many who fled the storm refuse to uproot again” (NBC Nightly News, 2006). Later, she also comments, saying “Some victims have given up entirely” (NBC Nightly News, 2006). Tania Tetlaw, one interviewee, says, “They would rather go back to the batterer and risk their lives” (NBC Nightly News, 2006). The phrase “gave up” was repeated several times, making it seem as though these women were partly responsible for their abuse because they didn’t do anything to stop it (NBC Nightly News, 2006).

The depiction of fault in earlier years has not been as striking, but still visible. For example, in the 1996 NBC clip titled “Domestic Abuse,” Lisa Meyers interviews Earlene Jackson, who had stayed with her abuser for 10 years (NBC Nightly News, 1996). Meyers says, “She *finally* left him for a shelter this summer,” emphasizing finally (NBC Nightly News, 1996). This implies fault on the part of Jackson. Additionally, the 1983 NBC clip titled “Special Segment (Battered Women)” tries to firmly go against blaming the victim, showing a conversation between a hotline and an abused woman where the hotline operator says, “It’s not your fault. He hit you, it’s his fault” (NBC Nightly News, 1983). Reporter Connie Chung negates

this a second later, saying “Whoever may be at fault ...” (NBC Nightly News, 1983). This also implies that some blame must be set aside for the victim, or that the abuser is not completely responsible for the abuse he inflicts.

### *Male Exoneration*

Additionally, male exoneration was pervasive in the segments chosen. Specifically, this occurred in the “Hurricane Katrina” segment when multiple interviewees consistently used the storm and the stress because of the storm as an excuse for the increase in abuse (NBC Nightly News, 2006). Campbell Brown says, “The chaos from Katrina’s still rubbing nerves wrong and putting women at higher risk for domestic abuse” (NBC Nightly News, 2006). Likewise, an abused woman anonymously interviewed as “Marie” says, “Stress levels went up and some people were able to deal with it and some people weren’t” (NBC Nightly News, 2006). These two statements give men an excuse for becoming batterers. Additionally, another interviewee talks about how many women in New Orleans admit that there normally wasn’t violence in their relationships, but because of the storm their husbands or boyfriends have suddenly become violent. The NOPD police chief also lists off several factors, including losing everything, dealing with insurance companies, contractors, and FEMA, for possible reasons why men would become violent. Instead of chastising these men, the segment explains their behavior and thereby exonerates them from full blame. Much like this segment, an earlier segment on NBC titled “Special Segment (Battered Wives)” followed a similar format of bias when it addressed the economic downfall and high unemployment ratings as a reason for the rise in abuse (NBC Nightly News, 1983).

This bias also plays a part in the 2007 segment regarding the death of Clara Riddles. De la Cruz asks Nancy Grigsby from the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, whether

society is doing enough to address the issue of male anger, saying that there are shelters for battered women but no such resources for abusive men. This again implies that a male's inability to be civil with his wife or girlfriend is not just his problem but a societal problem that is not all his fault. Grigsby agreed with this sentiment, saying, "When there are consequences, men have an opportunity to change," implying that as a society we have enabled abusive men to continue doing what they do (CNN Evening News, 2007).

Exoneration was also seen in the 1997 piece entitled "Domestic Violence" on NBC where Tom Brokaw referred to domestic abuse as a "sign of the times;" this makes it seem as though the violence is normal and a natural progression (NBC Nightly News, 1997). Additionally, Judge Ann Lew Day says, "Somebody didn't just become an abuser over night. I think it's a mindset that's got to be changed and I as a judge don't know how to do that" (NBC Nightly News, 1997). This implies that there needs to be something done, but that the problem is too large to deal with correctly, thereby giving men a scapegoat for their abuse. Additionally, the "Wife Beating" segment on NBC portrayed the abuser crying on camera at the fact that his wife had gone to a shelter and not told him where she was going; he also said that his wife had mental issues, had made up the abuse, and that no shelter should have believed her (NBC Nightly News, 1997). Although we as an audience will never know what the real circumstances behind their relationship is, it is also unlikely that a woman would claim domestic abuse and travel to a shelter if she did not feel threatened in some way. By showing her husband crying on camera, and by allowing him to say that his wife has mental problems, it exonerates him from full blame.

### *Female as Weak/Pitied*

The view of women as weak is overwhelmingly shown in news coverage, whether a woman who had been abused is shown with bruises or marred in some way or a survivor is

shown crying while discussing her abuse. Rarely ever was a woman seen as confident or powerful.

In the most dated segment, the 1979 piece titled “Wife Beating,” a woman – “Cindy” – in the shelter is shown as weak. She refuses to give her real name, scared of her husband finding her, and has turned away from the camera at all angles. She speaks softly and delicately, her features are not shown to the camera, and she refuses to allow reporters to show anything but her back in the segment. Her inability to live her life appropriately is pitied and therefore depicted as weak.

In the segment titled “Special Segment (Battered Women)” on NBC, the reporter discusses these battered women as “desperate” (NBC Nightly News, 1983). B-roll, as the footage is referred to in broadcast journalism, depicts body bags and medical gurneys with injured women on them entering an ambulance. Footage is also shown with a woman crying while talking to police (NBC Nightly News, 1983). Additionally, one woman who is now going back to her husband after he has had counseling was crying on camera, telling reporter Connie Chung how beneficial the shelter was for her (NBC Nightly News, 1983). In this case, even though the problem was resolved, the woman was still depicted as weak (NBC Nightly News, 1983).

Another segment titled “Battered Wives” on NBC was the worst with regards to pity (NBC Nightly News, 1986). It depicted several pictures of Tracey Thurman, a woman repeatedly abused by her husband, with stitches and bruises. The segment discussed her trauma; after 11 attacks by her husband, she is now paralyzed on one side and left with little sensation on the other (NBC Nightly News, 1986). Thurman is shown throughout the b-roll in a hospital bed with tubes coming out of her nose, mouth, etc. Her neck was broken and she is wearing a neck brace in the photos as well. The segment also compared Thurman in a photo at 25-years-old – before

her attack – and after with the injuries she has sustained. The camera follows her as she proceeds down her driveway, barely able to walk, slouching and limping because of her injuries. Another shot of a woman in the Connecticut shelter also shows her with a broken nose and stitches. As the most visually graphic, this segment leads to the most sympathy for the victims, Thurman especially.

A segment titled “Domestic Abuse” on NBC also depicted visual pity within the first few seconds of the broadcast with the graphic that accompanied the title of the segment. A man and woman are depicted with a firearm in the foreground and the male slapping the female in the background. Likewise, the segment also showed a body bag exiting a home with the statistic that stated: 1500 women die every year at the hands of their domestic abuser (NBC Nightly News, 1996). Additionally, and more obviously, the segment ran a reel of pictures of abused women. Each picture in the slide show showed their black eyes and puffy faces; some were naked and crying.

In NBC’s “Domestic Violence (Part One),” visual representation of the women was incredibly important to the frame the segment created (NBC Nightly News, 1997). There was a site of a woman with her child, crouched on the floor crying while admitting to police that she is hit at least once a week. This is telling because the woman is crouched on the floor while the white male police officer is standing over her, bending over to talk to her but not coming down to her level. This showcases her inferiority compared to him. Later in the segment, another woman is showing the police and a doctor her bruises. Again she is sitting and the male doctor is standing over her.

Lastly, the Hurricane Katrina segment in 2007 also showcased women’s inferiority, but did so with words rather than images. “Marie,” one of the abused shelter residents, says, “I feel

like I paid for it, the stress that he was going through,” her voice sad and dejected (NBC Nightly News, 2007). Reporter Campbell Brown also states, “She feared her husband for years,” reiterating the woman’s weakness compared to her male partner (NBC Nightly News, 2007).

### *What It All Means*

From these results, three things are clear. One, victim blaming and exoneration of the male do occur in the news, especially more and more recently. Two, rarely do news programs portray women who have been involved in a domestic dispute and have come out of it as survivors in a positive or uplifting light. Three, the multiplicity of instances where pity was used in the news was both unexpected and impossible to ignore. Whether women in abusive relationships are depicted as faulty or pitied, women are rarely ever shown as survivors in the news as my research has indicated. In general, if you are left with nothing else, think about what Ann Jones (1994) said regarding victim-blaming in the news:

Considering that the [legal] system was designed by men for men, it worked perfectly – at least until the murder trial where the jury refused to cooperate by convicting Karen Straw. Karen Straw, all by herself, had to stop the man who terrorized her. Why should men, who had no quarrel with her assailant, have done it for her? What right had she had to ask? But men don’t come right out and say that – how would that sound? So they say instead, like anchorman Jim Jenson did: Why didn’t she leave? And then someone, someone like reporter Bree Walker, begins to explain – all about the dependence and helplessness and low self-esteem and masochism and psychological problems and what the experts say and ... well, you see how neatly that works. And you see what battered women, individually and collectively, have been up against all this time (p. 165-166).

*Findings: Content Analysis*

Segment	Victim Blaming	Exoneration	Pity	Survivor	Visual Pity	Visual Survivor	Visual Exoneration
Grigsby Interview (2007) CNN	8	7	0	0	0	0	0
Hurricane Katrina (2006) NBC	6	8	2	0	4	0	0
Domestic Violence (1997) NBC	0	3	3	0	4	0	0
Domestic Abuse (1996) NBC	1	0	1	0	3	0	0
Battered Wives (1986) NBC	0	0	5	1	8	0	0
Battered Women (1983) NBC	2	1	5	1	3	0	0
Wife Beating (1979) NBC	0	4	1	0	1	0	1

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Lyrics: Women's Problems Put to Song

Much like film and television, music serves as an outlet for listeners and has the capacity of misrepresenting serious issues. It has been said that music helps soothe people and creates an outlet for a range of emotions (Forman, 2002). Murray Forman's study titled "Soundtrack to a Crisis: Music, Context, Discourse" discusses how music has the ability to help people overcome crisis while being a "crucial conductor in the communication of complex social phenomenon" (Forman, 2002, p. 192). Additionally, *Popular Music and Communication*, a book edited by James Lull (1987) says:

Music is a passionate sequencing of thoughts and feelings that expresses meaning in a manner that has no parallel in human life. It is a universally recognized synthesis of the substance and style of our existence—a blending of personal, social, and cultural signification that is confused with no other variety of communication (p. 10).

Likewise, lyrics can be a highly rhetorical artifact in the sense that they are heard by many audiences and have the capacity to both persuade listeners and narrate personal experiences. With this in mind, it seemed necessary to examine song lyrics regarding domestic abuse. In an attempt to cover many different audiences and incorporate a representative sample, I chose to select two pieces of music from each of the following genres: country, pop, rock, and rap/hip hop. In order to limit the range of possible selections, it was important to look for song lyrics that were about domestic abuse specifically and which discussed the narrative of abuse from a perspective that is close to the woman being abused. In many cases, this narration is by a child or the woman herself. Therefore, my artifacts include: "Independence Day" by Martina McBride and "Black Eyes, Blue Tears" by Shania Twain in the country genre; "I'm OK" by Christina Aguilera and "Family Portrait" by Alecia Beth Moore aka Pink in the pop genre;

“Never Again” by Nickelback and “Face Down” by The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus in the rock genre; and “Love is Blind” by Eve and “Baby Don’t Cry” by Tupac Shakur in the rap/hip hop genre. With a main focus on domestic abuse, these artifacts were selected for their ability to be analyzed according to both the gender stereotypes that exist and the misrepresentation of domestic abuse.

For the country genre, both Martina McBride and Shania Twain have been influential. McBride’s song “Independence Day” from her 1993 album, *The Way That I Am*, is narrated by the abused woman’s child (Peters, 1993). The song discusses how the woman’s husband began drinking again and how his alcoholism leads to his abusive behavior (Peters, 1993). The town writes her husband off as a dangerous individual but, ultimately, does not show too much concern for her well-being (Peters, 1993). In the conclusion of the song, the abused woman burns her house down with her husband inside and this is her “independence day” (Peters, 1993). In contrast, Twain’s song, “Black Eyes, Blue Tears” from her 1997 album *Come On Over*, is written from the abused female’s perspective (Twain, 1997). The song is empowering because the abused woman has left her abusive partner and sings about her newfound freedom (Twain, 1997). She talks about finding her self-esteem and refusing to live a life of abuse while also urging other women to reach this goal (Twain, 1997).

The pop genre also has two inspiring women whose lyrics are appropriate for this study, as both of them have experienced domestic abuse in their personal lives. Christina Aguilera’s “I’m OK” from her 2002 *Stripped* album develops the story of a young girl, now grown, who is looking back on her childhood with an abusive father (Aguilera & Perry, 2002). She discusses how her home was a war, how she had to see her mother in constant pain, and how this memory not only makes her feel guilty but has remained with her (Aguilera & Perry, 2002). Noticeably

different from the other songs selected, Aguilera addresses her mother and speaks of her strength in the chorus of the song (Aguilera & Perry, 2002). Pink's "Family Portrait" on her 2004 *Missundaztood* album, reiterates much of what Aguilera touches upon as well (Moore, 2004). She discusses the pain she experienced when her mother and father would fight, and how this constant fighting not only made her feel as though she was at fault but how she took action and ran away (Moore, 2004). Pink, deviating from the other songs of abuse, addresses the fact that she, her siblings, and her mother can try harder in an attempt to keep her dad from leaving (Moore, 2004).

The rock genre is the only such genre which has songs sung by men. This is telling, because it addresses the problem of abuse from a male's perspective. Nickelback's 2001 album *Silver Side Up* features a song called "Never Again," which narrates the abuse of a mother by a father from the male child's perspective (Kroeger, M., Vikedal, Kroeger, C., & Peake, 2001). The abusive father drinks then beats up his female partner, in what seems to be a repeated event (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). The song discusses the severity of this specific episode of domestic abuse, always alluding to how it will never happen again (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). The reader understands this reference at the conclusion of the song when the mother of the child shoots her husband, thus ending his life and her abuse (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus's first hit song off their 2006 album *Don't You Fake It* was "Face Down," a story of domestic abuse (Winters, Kitchens, Reidy, Westerwood, & Wilkes, 2006). The male narrator of the song has feelings for a female who is being abused by her male partner (Winters, et al, 2006). The male in the song is questioning the male abuser, wondering why he beats her and if it makes him feel like more of a man to see her hurting (Winters, et al, 2006). Finally, the lyrics indicate

the abused woman has had enough, but it does not explicitly say whether she is leaving her abuser or whether she has harmed him in some way (Winters, et al, 2006).

The rap/hip hop genre is the only genre that has both a female artist and a male artist of the selected songs. Eve's song "Love is Blind" on her 1999 album *Let There Be Eve: Ruff Ryders' First Lady* discusses the struggle women have in finding an appropriate and healthy love in an abusive relationship and the resistance she finds in leaving her abuser for good (Fields, Watson, Jeffers, & Dean, 1999). In Eve's song, however, the abused woman dies at the hands of her abuser; afterwards, her girlfriend shoots and kills him, which creates a much more dramatic and emotional twist to the song (Fields et al, 1999). Tupac Shakur's "Baby Don't Cry" from his 1999 album *Still I Rise*, discusses a male's friendship with a woman who is abused (Shakur, Schack, Cooper, Greenidge, & Karlin, 1999). The narrator reiterates how she has to be strong and continuously tells her that, although she repeatedly goes back to her abuser, that he will never change (Shakur et al, 1999). In summation, the narrator's message to this woman is that she deserves better and that she needs to realize that she choose the wrong man (Shakur et al, 1999).

Ultimately, these eight songs are a representative sample of the songs describing domestic abuse. By analyzing these songs based on a hegemonic and narrative critique, it is clear that they misrepresent women in abusive relationships. Likewise, several of these songs follow a narrative that either represents the woman as the damsel in distress or emphasizes her escaping the abuse.

### **"She's Just a Woman": A Feminist Critique of Lyrics**

In evaluating the eight songs specified, each demonstrated the male and female stereotypical norms of society. Although the songs did so in different and perhaps subtle ways,

each provided ample examples of society's stereotypical views of women. Much like the films and news segments already discussed, these lyrics also established consistent hegemony in which females were often depicted as weaker and less important than their male counterparts. This also reinforces what Foss (2004) suggests is our culture's way of showing male's superiority over women.

In the songs selected, women were often depicted as weak, frail, or powerless to their male abuser while the men were shown to be both aggressive and unnecessarily violent. Males, in their depiction as the aggressor, were therefore characterized as dominant. They hold the power in their relationships and they establish this power in a physical way. This was prominent throughout all the genres selected and often reiterated many times in each song. Likewise, several songs indicated that the female's abuse was partly her own doing, therefore acknowledging that the male is not completely responsible for his own actions. This was also indicated, although to a lesser degree. With regards to narrative, half the songs analyzed told of the abused woman's escape. The remainder of the songs, particularly those where the woman does flee from her abuser, portrayed the women as damsels in distress. <sup>1</sup>

#### *Female as Weak / Male as Dominant*

Several, if not all, of the representative songs repeatedly show a woman's inability to stand up to her abuser. Although some women eventually overcome their abuser in the final stanzas of the songs, the majority of each song is dedicated to the woman's inability to defeat her assailant. With this in mind, the phrasing of the representative songs indicates a women's powerlessness, particularly emphasizing their weakness and fragility.

---

<sup>1</sup> All song lyrics are located in Appendix A

In McBride's country song "Independence Day," the lyrics discuss how the abused wife looked "worried" and "weak" (Peters, 1993). Although McBride was attempting to emphasize the wife's worry that her husband had been drinking again – an action that frequently leads to him beating her – the use of the word weak specifically reiterates society's notion of woman as the fragile sex. The woman had attempted to be brave – "she seemed all right" – but she failed and therefore the only characterization that is appropriate for this failure is weak (Peters, 1993). This overarching generalization of the abused female's actions not only creates a sense that women are inferior but that their failure is typical. McBride also mentions the word weak in the chorus – repeated twice in the song – when she sings "let the weak be strong" (Peters, 1993). Again, this generalization of the abused woman as weak leaves its mark on the listener. It implies that the woman is weak as long as she stays with her abuser, but will be strong once she leaves him, as if this decision characterizes her entire demeanor.

More notably, however, McBride discusses how the townspeople "looked the other way" and stood idly by even though "some folks whispered and some folks talked" and obviously knew what was going on (Peters, 1993). In this sense, this woman's life didn't ultimately seem important enough for the townspeople to step in and help her, which also emphasizes a female's lower status in society.

In Twain's country song "Black Eyes, Blue Tears," the lyrics discuss abuse using the first person. Twain notes that, with her abuser, she was "living on her knees, begging no more, please," which emphasizes how much stronger the male in the relationship was (Twain, 1997). By giving the listener a visual of Twain on her knees begging, it automatically acknowledges how much weaker and inferior Twain was to her male counterpart. Twain also discusses crying in corners, which also denotes her weakness, as society usually equates those who cry with

weakness. Likewise – and perhaps the biggest sign of female fragility – Twain makes numerous comments about finding her self-esteem. She notes that when she left her abuser, she finally discovered her self-esteem and then urges other women who are abused to find theirs. These stanzas are important because Twain infers that those in abusive relationships have low self-esteem; she therefore implies that they are flawed. When she advocates that other women find their self-esteem, she emphasizes the fact that many women believe themselves to be inadequate given that they do not believe in themselves. By ending this supposedly empowering song with these lyrics, she destroys the ultimate uplifting message she is trying to send.

Additionally, Aguilera’s pop song “I’m OK” also classifies the abused woman as weak, in this case Aguilera’s own mother. She sings about the pain she witnessed on her mother’s face and also reiterates how her father put her mother “in her place” (Aguilera & Perry, 2002). These lines are particularly important because they reiterate the weakness of women – they easily show their pain – and the male view of where a woman stands in society. Commendably, Aguilera attempts to characterize her mother as strong – “strength is my mother” – but fails by adding the line “for all the love she gave” (Aguilera & Perry, 2002). This insinuates that her mother was only strong because of her love and not for the other characteristics that society normally deems as such. Society normally associates this parental role with woman, and Aguilera demonstrates that with that particular stanza.

Pink also characterizes her mother’s pain numerous times throughout her pop song, emphasizing the weakness her mother has displayed. She sings “Momma, stop crying” and “make Momma stop crying” as a command to her mother to be braver (Moore, 2004). In our society, crying is deemed as weak and often inappropriate for males. When Pink sings to tell her mother to stop crying, she is reiterating that society thinks this is weak and therefore is

classifying her mother as inferior, especially by asking her father to step in and provide comfort for her mother.

The rock group, Nickelback, also reiterates this distinction of males and females by using the lyrics “she’s *just* a woman” four times in their song (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). This assertion implies that women are not on the same level as men and the use of the “just” consistently refers to this fact (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). Not only is this phrase in the chorus of their song, but because it is reiterated it stays with its listener.

The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus also demonstrates this inferiority in their rock song by emphasizing women’s inability to make appropriate decisions. The band sings about the female hanging around and insisting that she isn’t getting hurt. These actions are evidenced by the song’s serious tone when the lead singer urges the female to “heed my lecture” (Winters, et al, 2006). Additionally, the musicians maintain that if “you wade around forever, you will surely drown,” in an attempt to convince the female that she should leave (Winters, et al, 2006). By not doing so, it is apparent that the musicians believe the female is making an inappropriate choice; this incapability reiterates that she is not worthy of a higher status in society if she cannot figure out the appropriate measures to take in her own life.

Additionally, Eve’s hip hop song “Love is Blind” characterizes women as inferior in a very different way. Instead of discussing the weakness of women, she using anecdotes of one woman’s story as a generalization for the whole. She discusses how this woman could not escape her abuser and how the abuser had a power over her that was impossible to break. By mentioning this, Eve reiterates that the abusive male was far superior to his female counterpart; he could convince her to stay with him and ultimately controlled her beyond any point of return. Eve also sings of the need to find a better love. She insists that women need to “elevate and find” because

“what [they] think is love is truly not” (Fields et al, 1999). This insinuates that women’s judgment is skewed or faulty and that they have to think harder in order to make appropriate choices. The necessity to make appropriate choices about relationships are usually a woman’s alone as society often does not ask the same of men in a relationship.

Lastly, Shakur also emphasizes women’s inferiority to men with his hip hop song title alone – “Baby Don’t Cry” – which is repeated in the song a minimum of 23 times (Shakur et al, 1999). By reiterating this, like other singers previously, he assumes that women are weaker and more emotional. He also talks about tears, pain, grief, pity, and pressure when talking about his female protagonist in his song. These words only emphasize that he feels, as society often does, that women are incapable of handling pain or distress and therefore are the weaker sex.

### *Female as Maternal*

In many instances, women are characterized as mothers and studies have proven that society accepts them in the motherly role while providing them with more parental responsibilities than their male counterparts (Ashcraft, 2000; Glascock, 2001; Michelle & Weaver, 2003). In the eight songs selected, six of them indicate the abused female to be a mother, four of which are narrated by the child who is viewing or has viewed the abuse. Such is the case in “Independence Day,” “I’m OK,” “Family Portrait,” and “Never Again.” Two such songs – “I’m OK” and “Family Portrait” refer to their mothers as mom or mommy, while the other two neglect to spell it out so easily, but imply the idea. This is important in the classification of women because it insinuates that women are often thought of as mothers but may not be regarded as much else.

### *Female as Faulty*

Although the representation of the female as faulty is not substantial in all songs, it is apparent enough to acknowledge its existence. Specifically, women are classified as faulty for two reasons: They stay with their abuser even after the abuse or they warrant the abuse in some way. Ultimately, however, the fact that society does not pinpoint the faults of abusive men as the sole cause of abuse is both demoralizing to women and a cause for concern.

In the country song “Independence Day,” McBride alludes to the woman’s fault by discussing how the woman “stood her ground” even after the town “said he was a dangerous man” (Peters, 1993). This discussion insinuates that, because the woman knew better and because she had been repeatedly abused, the fact that she stood her ground and stayed with him makes her partly responsible for her own abuse. Likewise, Twain emphasizes how she will no longer make excuses for her abuser – implying that she once did – and that she will no longer “roll with the punches” (Twain, 1997). Much like McBride, Twain also implies that she was at fault for far too long because she did not leave her abuser earlier.

In the pop genre, Pink frequently alluded to the fact that her mom was at fault. Pink refers to her father leaving as her mother’s fault, particularly when she says “Mom will be nicer” and “I told dad you didn’t mean those nasty things you said” (Moore, 2004). These stanzas are remarkably important because they reflect Pink’s inability to blame her father for what has happened. Rather, it is easier to blame her mother for her father’s abuse. This notion distorts the view of domestic abuse as a fault of both parties rather than just the abuser’s.

Both rock bands, Nickelback and The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus, also display this type of judgment. Nickelback asserts that the abused female must have “done something wrong tonight” because the abusive male has become angry with her (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). The notion that

the female provokes the abuse is a classic sign that indicates the female is faulty. The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus illustrates fault in the opposite way, by indicating that the female should leave the abusive relationship. Although “he swears he loves you,” they insist that listening to that kind of excuse will eventually be the death of the abused woman, as she will drown like a pebble wading in the sea eventually drowns. Although they do emphasize the male’s fault, the earlier emphasis on the woman’s inability to make an appropriate choice and leave her abuser demonstrates a sharing of responsibility.

Additionally, in the hip hop/rap genre, Eve and Shakur also indicate that women are incapable of making assertive decisions for their well-being and often find themselves stuck in these unnecessary situations. Eve sings of the inability of the woman to escape her abuser, and says “She was in love – How? Why?” as a jab to the abused female’s ability to love someone and stay with someone who is abusing her (Fields et al, 1999). She also talks specifically to the female, saying “and you stayed” then goes on to tell of how she left and then went back to her abuser (Fields et al, 1999). Her reason for going back to this man was because he missed the kids that the two shared, which Eve sings as “a lie” which the female made up as an excuse to tell her friends (Fields et al, 1999). This easily demonstrates how females are often judged as irresponsible or silly for going back to a man that has abused them; ultimately, society finds them partly responsible for their own abuse in these scenarios. Shakur discusses female fault when he tells the abused female that she should forget her abuser because “he ain’t never gonna change” (Shakur et al, 1999). Shakur also discusses that this female deserves more but she will never recognize it because she consistently chooses “the wrong man” (Shakur et al, 1999). This again reiterates how part of the blame is placed on the female of an abusive relationship for

remaining with an abuser and failing to recognize the appropriate characteristics of a suitable companion.

It is important to note, however, that not all songs fell into this category. Only seven of the eight selected songs indicated that the female may be faulty for her own abuse. Although Aguilera's song did not display any blatant attempts to classify her mother as faulty, this was the only one song out of a sample of eight.

### **Happily Ever After: Fantasy-Themed Criticism**

#### *Male as Aggressor*

Often, men in domestic abuse narratives are made to seem overly aggressive or violent. Whether this is the case in this narrative is unclear, however, there is much representation and discussion of how an abusive man beats his female partner, characterizing him as an aggressor.

The most apparent example is in Aguilera's "I'm OK" where she discusses the abuse she and her mother both experienced from her father. She describes her home as a war in which her mother's face continually showed the marks from her father's fists and she was often thrown against the stairs. She also discusses how the bruises have faded, but the memory of his abuse lives on within her as she was "a broken child screaming 'please, no more'" (Aguilera & Perry, 2002).

Other representation of the male as an aggressor is represented in "Independence Day" when the male is called a "dangerous man" who leaves the proof of his anger on his wife's cheek (Peters, 1993). "Black Eyes, Blue Tears" show the abusive male as punching, using and abusing, and causing his partner to cry in the corner. Pink's representation of her childhood depicts her father smashing glasses in the kitchen in what she refers to as World War III. She also asks that her dad please stop yelling in the song lyrics. Nickelback's "Never Again" characterizes the male

as clenching his fists in the living room that has become a boxing ring. Additionally, the group discusses the male as “a child with a temper” (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus also discussing the male’s disrespect for the woman he supposedly loves, commenting on how much of a man he feels by pushing her around. The group also sings of the fact that the woman is “face down in the dirt,” (Winters, et al, 2006).

More distressing representation of this fact is evidenced in “Love is Blind” and “Baby Don’t Cry.” Eve depicts the male as someone who will “black your eye” and “make you cry” (Fields et al, 1999). Likewise, he beats the mother of his children without any consideration in which Eve says, “Don’t give a fuck if she lives” when he causes “blood [to] pour from her head” (Fields et al, 1999). Shakur’s song also talks about this when he talks about men grabbing her and raping her while she continues to be trapped in the pain.

### *Female as Damsel in Distress*

Using similar findings to the Female as Weak argument, it is easy to consider that most narratives in these eight songs display the female as a damsel in distress, one that needs to be rescued.

The country song “Independence Day,” however, eludes more to the theme of damsel in distress when it discusses the townspeople’s reluctance to help the abused woman, even though she needed it. Likewise, Aguilera’s “I’m OK” begins with crying and a little girl saying, “Daddy, please” in an attempt to help her mother (Aguilera & Perry, 2002). Additionally, she sings, “Hurt me to see the pain across my mother’s face / Every time my father’s fist would put her in her place” (Aguilera & Perry, 2002). This only exemplifies that her mother was in need of help, but as a child she could not give that to her.

Both songs in the rock genre also discuss the female as a damsel in distress. Nickelback sings, “I’m scared she’ll wind up / Dead in his hands / She’s just a woman” (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). As much as reiterating that the abuser’s opponent is “just a woman,” it is also important to note that the abuse is so bad that the possibility of her being killed is probable and scares her son, the narrator (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). Additionally, The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus, in much the same fashion, saying “Do you feel like a man / When you push her around? / Do you feel better now / As she falls to the ground?” (Winters, et al, 2006). This reiterates the necessity for someone to step in, because the abused female is being pushed around and the potential for her to be seriously injured has increased.

The two biggest examples of the damsel in distress narrative, however, are “Love is Blind” and “Baby Don’t Cry,” both of the hip hop/rap genre. Both songs discuss the hardships that these women have undergone, specifically in an attempt to leave their batterer but to no avail. “Love is Blind” is particularly unsettling because the abused female was then murdered at the hands of her abuser, in which case the narrator takes action into her own hands and kills her murderer. This “help” came too late.

Of the eight songs chosen, six particularly play into this role; the exceptions are “Black Eyes, Blue Tears,” because the female has already left her attacker at the point in which the song is written, and “Family Portrait,” because no mention of help or female distress is mentioned. The other six songs, however, create the narrative that the women is helpless.

### *Female Overcomes*

Four out of the eight songs selected demonstrate the ease of either retaliation or escape from an abusive counterpart. While “Independence Day” and “Never Again” demonstrate this end with the murder of the abused female’s husband at her own hand, the other two songs create

the impression of the woman finally having had enough and walking away. No mention is made to the circumstances surrounding these events, with what ease a female can simply leave an abuser, or whether this period of absence is permanent, but the listener can assume that the female has left and is ultimately happier for it.

In “Independence Day,” – in the pop genre – and “Never Again,” – in the rock genre – unlike the other two songs, the male aggressor is killed. These two songs showcase the death of the male as the only viable way to stop the abuse. McBride sings, “Now I ain’t sayin’ it’s right or it’s wrong / But maybe it’s the only way” while also emphasizing the day of the fire as a “day of reckoning” where the guilty will pay (Peters, 1993). These lyrics acknowledge the male as a violent and inescapable being who has been impossible to overcome until the fire was set and burned him alive. Likewise, no reference to the consequences of these actions is mentioned, only a celebration of this “independence day” (Peters, 1993). Additionally, “Never Again” concludes with the woman shooting her abuser to find out “how fucking tough is this man” (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). By pulling the trigger “as fast as she can,” the abused woman finds a way to leave her abuse behind (Kroeger, M., et al, 2001). Similar to McBride’s song, no mention of consequences is made after the abuser’s death and the act appears justified to the songwriter.

In contrast, “Black Eyes, Blue Tears” and “Face Down” describe the abused woman leaving her abuser. Twain’s piece is the story of the abused female after she has walked away from her male counterpart. She sings, “Black eyes, all behind me / Blue tears’ll never find me now” in the chorus to reiterate her freedom now that she is no longer being abused (Twain, 1997). She fails to mention, however, how she left and where she went. “Face Down” also comes to this conclusion, with little acknowledgement of how the female leaves. All the listener knows

is that the female says she's had enough, but it is unclear what she has done to ensure she is not abused again.

### *Meaning to the Madness*

Using words such as weak to characterize women may seem innocuous, but these subtle uses often create a much larger image of women in general as inferior and unimportant. Women's fragility is often capitalized upon in today's society and these songs, supposedly inspiring and calming for those who have had similar experiences and for the general public, have demonstrated that no medium is exempt from hegemonic viewpoints, regardless of its intent. Most notably, these songs contribute to both society's negative perceptions of females in abusive relationships and its stereotypical viewpoints of women as maternal and weak. Ultimately, most women are judged as faulty for staying with their abuser, particularly if children are involved, and an analysis of these songs also come to that similar conclusion.

Likewise, two narratives are taking place, one in which the male is seen as abnormally abusive and aggressive and the female is seen as a damsel in distress in need of help, and the second in which the female has escaped her abuser by either retaliation or fleeing. What is distressing about these narratives is the fact that both of them are unrealistic and may lead the general population to believe that leaving an abuser or rising up against an abuser is the norm. In many cases, however, women are not helped, do not leave, and are ultimately killed at the hands of their abuser. The fact that these narratives have been represented sends the wrong message to society about women in abusive relationships. Much like the films, if society constantly sees a picture of women easily leaving or killing their abusers, those who do not accomplish this

“simple” feat – as has been represented – are more likely to be criticized and judged for their inability to stop the violence against them. In essence, these depictions lead to further judgment, which only adds to the stereotypical depiction of abused women.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion

In addressing the stereotypical gender roles that have pervaded these three chapters, it is easy to shrug one's shoulders and insist that this representation is not nearly as controversial as implicated. These ongoing stereotypes and biases, however, have left their mark on society in a big way. The problem becomes a greater cause for concern when these roles are portrayed in mediums that are said to give power to women, when, in essence, they have done the exact opposite.

Upon first or second glance, *Enough* and *Sleeping with the Enemy* seem like empowering films that demonstrate the power and strength of women in situations where they have been oppressed. When Laura and Slim both attack their husbands at the conclusion of the films, the audience members experience a feel-good sensation; finally, they have stood up for themselves and justice has been served. Unfortunately, when the films conclude, more than that feel-good emotion is left with the viewer. In framing the woman's inferiority within the context of an abusive relationship, it seems as though women in healthy relationships should not be portrayed as weak or inferior. With this frame, it enables viewers to rationalize why Laura and Slim were, rather openly in some cases, demeaned and made to fit stereotypical roles. In fact, however, these films do not display this. Both Laura and Slim require the help of other men in order to finally free themselves from their abuser's violence; they are incapable of handling it alone. Likewise, even though their inferiority was framed in an abusive relationship, other characters in the films also portray these gender stereotypes, which ultimately display the white, heterosexual male's dominance over all others, reaffirming the hegemonic and feminist criticism used to analyze the artifacts.

Initially, the effects of the film are innocuous. Due to the quality of these films, it is often hard to realize how detrimental these films are to women. Often, it is overlooked; the film is analyzed on a superficial level as a film regarding an abusive relationship where the woman is ultimately victorious. These subtleties, however, can be damaging, affecting how men and women see one another and how they perceive domestic abuse. The fact that the victim is often blamed for the domestic abuse – which is also reiterated in these films – can only cause more problems in the future. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that although these films initially do not have a tremendous effect on viewers, eventually these stereotypical depictions will leave a lasting impression on the population. The damage, although miniscule at first, can lead to changes in ideologies as people associate superiority with the white male and fault with the abused female.

Additionally, the implication of an all-male production in developing a film that is primarily female-oriented can be problematic and therefore worth mentioning. Both films highlight the struggles of women, yet are produced and directed by men. Although *Sleeping with the Enemy* is based on a book written by a woman, it is the only female influence that the films have. In reinforcing male superiority in the film, the female viewers are thereby duped. More filmmaking must be done by women, especially in cases of sensitive topic areas such as domestic abuse; the ability for males to misrepresent and misconstrue the events is greater than if women were to have some influence in the film's creation.

With regards to broadcast news, it is overwhelmingly apparent that a bias exists. This bias, although subtle, can impact the way society views women in abusive relationships. On the surface, we would like to assume that news reporting is fair to all parties, allowing all parties an equal say in the coverage. Although the females are the main interviewees in the representative

sample, it is these women who are then discriminated against. By exonerating the male abuser from full blame – whether it be by acknowledging the stress he is undergoing or referring to the problem as a societal issue rather than an individual trouble – it downplays the role men have in the abuse they inflict and often allows males to continue with their abusive behavior. By placing some of the responsibility on the abused female, both broadcast news and society has reiterated that this is the female's problem and that problems between a man and woman should be handled between a man and a woman. Often, police and other bystanders of abuse point to the victim as the one who should have stopped the abuse, left her abuser, and remedied the situation. If the abuse is her problem then it is up to her to find a solution. This was lightly touched upon in the two films, but becomes a major theme in broadcast news. Through and through, women in abusive relationships are often criticized by society, as this compilation of research has shown. Whether society's bias stems from that of the news or whether the news is following society's lead is unclear. What is known for certain, however, is that some bias in news reporting regarding domestic abuse is present. More research must be conducted in order to determine whether news bias is a direct link to society's bias.

Additionally, stereotypical gender roles also play a role in broadcast journalism. More often than not, the abused female was depicted as weak and shown as a source of pity. Representations of female trauma that showcase the injuries, images of ambulances and body bags, and graphics that represent the female as subordinate to her male counterpart all play into this representation.

In the eight music lyric artifacts, the two overwhelming themes that have occurred in both film and broadcast news combine. Regardless of genre of music, females were discussed as faulty and weak as compared to their male counterparts. Oftentimes, when the child was the

narrator of the song, the narration may say the mother is strong, but subtleties in the lyrics often contradict that representation. More often than not, the women who were being abused in these songs were represented as foolish or incapable of making appropriate decisions, thereby staying with an abuser when they should have left. This places the blame on the female for her abuse.

Most importantly, the abused female in the representative sample of song lyrics was heavily made to assume the stereotypical gender roles that society has carved out for women. Women were often looked upon as the motherly figure, showcased as the weaker or inferior party, and overwhelmingly demonstrated as incapable of standing up to their male abuser. The few instances when the woman did prevail – either by killing her attacker or leaving her abuser – were often overshadowed by the images of her as weak.

Much like the two films, the song lyrics that did showcase the woman's eventual freedom from her abuser, created a situation that rarely occurs in today's abusive relationships. More often than not, women are killed at the hands of their abusers, like the Eve song demonstrated, rather than escaping. With this said, the depiction of females as survivors of domestic abuse rather than victims is overplayed and leads to the perception in society that overcoming domestic violence is easy to accomplish. This may, in turn, reiterate why society's bias of women in abusive relationships is what it is.

This study is not without its limitations. Firstly, only two films, seven segments of television news, and eight songs were analyzed. With regards to news segments, six out of the seven were from NBC because no other channels had clips of their domestic violence news coverage online or did not have any coverage at all, such as FOX news. This leads to speculation about how much attention domestic violence is getting in the news and whether this is another form of biased reporting – leaving the issue out completely. Secondly, the artifacts were selected

as a representative sample. With this said, these artifacts may not and should not speak for the general whole of all films, news coverage, or songs regarding domestic abuse.

Female representation in domestic abuse situations, however, has not had nearly as much attention as it should; further research must be done in order to establish whether this trend is ongoing or whether it exists in other mediums besides film, broadcast journalism, and music. Likewise, further research can be developed on these three mediums alone; the stereotypical implications are numerous and thereby it was impossible to include them all. By and large, women's depiction in the media in the context of domestic abuse is and will continue to be an important study, one that requires far more research and inspection. These stereotypes and biases, however, need to be clearly articulated if society is ever going to overcome them.

## References

Abused Adult Resource Center. Retrieved Nov. 1, 2008, from

[www.abusedadultresourcecenter.com/stats.htm](http://www.abusedadultresourcecenter.com/stats.htm).

Aguilera, C. & Perry, L. (2002). I'm OK [Recorded by Christina Aguilera]. On *Stripped* [CD].

New York: RCA.

Alat, Z. (2006). News coverage of violence against women. *Feminist Media Studies*, 6(3), 295-314.

Apted, M. (Director). (2002). *Enough* [Motion Picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

Ashcroft, C. (2000). Naming knowledge: a language for reconstructing domestic violence and systematic gender inequity. *Women and Language*, 23(1), 3-10.

Bianculli, D. (1992). *Teleliteracy*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Brokaw, T. (Anchor). (1986). *NBC Nightly News*. New York: NBC

Brokaw, T. (Anchor). (1996). *NBC Nightly News*. New York: NBC

Brokaw, T. (Anchor) (1997). *NBC Nightly News*. New York: NBC

Brokaw, T. (Reporter) (1983). *NBC Nightly News*. New York: NBC

Bullock, C.F. (2007). Framing domestic violence fatalities: coverage by Utah newspapers. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 30(1), 34-58.

Byers, L. A., Shue, C. K., & Marshall, L. L. (2004). The interplay of violence, relationship quality, commitment, and communication in abusive relationships. *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, 29(1), 43-51.

Consalvo, M. (1998). Hegemony, domestic violence, and *Cops*: a critique of concordance. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 26(2), 62-70.

De la Cruz, V. (Reporter) (2007). *The Evening News*. Atlanta, Georgia: CNN

Dominick, Sherman, & Messere. (2000). *Broadcasting, Cable, the Internet and Beyond*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Family Violence Prevention Fund. Retrieved on Nov. 1, 2008, from <http://www.endabuse.org/section/campaigns/>.

Fields, A., Watson, S., Jeffers, E., & Dean, K. (1999). Love is blind [Recorded by Eve]. On *Let There Be Eve: Ruff Ryders' First Lady* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records.

Forman, M. (2002). Soundtrack to crisis: Music, context, discourse. *Television & New Media*, 3(2), 191-204.

Foss, S. K. (2004). *Rhetorical Criticism: Third Edition*. Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.

Gluscock, J. (2001). Gender roles in prime-time network television: demographics and behaviors. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45(4), 656-669.

Hart, J. (Reporter) (1979). *NBC Nightly News*. New York: NBC

The Internet film database. Retrieved on November 26, 2007 from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0278435/awards>

Jones, A. *Next Time She'll Be Dead: Battering and How to Stop It*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Kroeger, M., Vikedal, R., Kroeger, C., & Peake, R. (2001). Never again. On *Silver Side Up* [CD]. New York: Roadrunner Records.

McManus, J. & Dorfman, L. (2005). Functional truth or sexist distortion? Assessing a feminist critique of intimate violence reporting. *SAGE Publications*, 6(1), 43-65.

Meyers, M. (1994). News of battering. *Journal of Communication*, 44(2), 47-64.

- Michelle, C. & Weaver, C. K. (2003). Discursive manoeuvres and hegemonic recuperations in New Zealand documentary representations of domestic violence. *Feminist Media Studies*, 3, 284-297.
- Moore, A.B. (2001). Family portrait. On *Missundaztood* [CD]. New York: La Face Records.
- O'Neill, D. (1998). A post-structuralist review of the theoretical literature surrounding wife abuse. *Violence against Women*, 4 (4), 456-90.
- Peters, G. (1993). Independence day [Recorded by Martina McBride]. On *The Way That I Am* [CD]. New York: RCA
- Popular music and communication* (1987). In Lull J. (Ed.), Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Putnam, L. L. (1982) In search of gender: a critique of communication and sex-roles research. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 5(1), 1-9.
- Ruben, J. (Director). (1991). *Sleeping with the Enemy* [Motion Picture]. United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- Seigenthaler, J (Anchor). (2006). *NBC Nightly News*. New York: NBC
- Shakur, T., Schack, C., Cooper, R., Greenidge, M., & Karlin, K. (1999). Baby don't cry. On *Still I Rise* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records.

Stossel, S. (1997). The man who counts the killings. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 279(5), 86-104.

Twain, S. (1997). Black eyes, blue tears. On *Come On Over* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Mercury.

Unites States Department of Justice: Office on violence against women. Retrieved on December 12, 2007, from <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/domviolence.htm>.

Winters, R., Kitchens, D., Reidy, E., Westerwood, J. & Wilkes, J. (2006). Face down. On *Don't You Fake It*. Los Angeles, CA: Virgin Records.

## Appendix A

“Independence Day” by Martina McBride

Well, she seemed alright by dawn's early light  
Though she looked a little worried and weak  
She tried to pretend he wasn't drinkin' again  
But Daddy left the proof on her cheek  
And I was only eight years old that summer  
And I always seemed to be in the way  
So I took myself down to the fair in town  
On Independence Day

Well, word gets around in a small, small town  
They said, he was a dangerous man  
But Mama was proud, and she stood her ground  
She knew she was on the losin' end  
Some folks whispered, some folks talked  
But everybody looked the other way  
And when time ran out, there was no one about  
On Independence Day

Let freedom ring  
Let the white dove sing  
Let the whole world know that today  
Is a day of a reckoning  
Let the weak be strong  
Let the right be wrong  
Roll the stone away  
Let the guilty pay  
It's Independence Day

Well, she lit up the sky that Fourth of July  
By the time that the firemen come  
They just put out the flames and took down some names  
And sent me to the county home  
Now I ain't sayin' it's right, or it's wrong  
But maybe it's the only way  
Talk about your revolution  
It's Independence Day

Let freedom ring  
Let the white dove sing  
Let the whole world know that today  
Is the day of a reckoning  
Let the weak be strong  
Let the right be wrong  
Roll the stone away  
Let the guilty pay  
It's Independence Day

Roll the stone away  
It's Independence Day

“Black Eyes, Blue Tears” by Shania Twain

Black eyes, I don't need 'em  
Blue tears, gimme freedom  
Positively never goin' back  
I won't live where things are so out of whack  
No more rollin' with the punches  
No more usin' or abusin'

I'd rather die standing  
Than live on my knees  
Begging please-no more

Black eyes-I don't need 'em  
Blue tears-gimme freedom  
Black eyes-all behind me  
Blue tears'll never find me now

Definitely found my self esteem  
Finally-I'm forever free to dream  
No more cryin' in the corner  
No excuses-no more bruises

I'd rather die standing  
Than live on my knees  
Begging please-no more

Black eyes-I don't need 'em  
Blue tears-gimme freedom  
Black eyes-all behind me  
Blue tears'll never find me now

I'd rather die standing  
Than live on my knees, begging please...

Black eyes-I don't need 'em  
Blue tears-gimme freedom  
Black eyes-all behind me  
Blue tears'll never find me now

It's all behind me, they'll never find me now

Find your self-esteem and be forever free to dream

"I'm OK" by Christina Aguilera

Daddy please  
(Little Girl Crying)  
You're My Good Girl...

Once upon a time there was a girl  
In her early years she had to learn  
How to grow up living in a war that she called home  
Never noticed just where to turn for shelter from the storm

Hurt me to see the pain across my mother's face  
Everytime my father's fist would put her in her place  
Hearing all the yelling, I would cry up in my room  
Hoping it would be over soon

Bruises fade father, but the pain remains the same  
And I still remember how you kept me so afraid  
The strength is my mother, for all the love she gave  
Every morning that I wake, I look back at yesterday  
And I'm Ok

I often wonder why I've carried all this guilt  
When it's you that helped me put up all these walls I've built  
Shadows stare at night through a crack in the door  
The echoes of a broken child screaming please no more  
Daddy don't you understand the damage you have done?  
For you it's just a memory but for me it still lives on

Bruises fade father, but the pain remains the same  
And I still remember how you kept me so, so afraid  
The strength is my mother, for all the love she gave  
Every morning that I wake, I look back at yesterday

It's not so easy to forget  
All the marks you left along her neck  
When I was thrown against cold stairs  
And everyday I'm afraid to come home  
In fear of what I might find there

Bruises fade father but the pain remains the same  
And I still remember how you kept me so afraid  
The strength is my mother for all the love you gave  
Every morning that I wake, I look back at yesterday  
And I'm ok

“Family Portrait” by PINK

Momma please stop crying, I can't stand the sound  
Your pain is painful and its tearing me down  
I hear glasses breaking as I sit up in my bed  
I told dad you didn't mean those nasty things you said

You fight about money, bout me and my brother  
And this I come home to, this is my shelter  
It ain't easy growing up in World War III  
Never knowing what love could be, you'll see  
I don't want love to destroy me like it has done my family

Can we work it out? Can we be a family?  
I promise I'll be better, Mommy I'll do anything  
Can we work it out? Can we be a family?  
I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't leave

Daddy please stop yelling, I can't stand the sound  
Make mama stop crying, cuz I need you around  
My mama she loves you, no matter what she says it's true  
I know that she hurts you, but remember I love you, too

I ran away today, ran from the noise, ran away  
Don't wanna go back to that place, but don't have no choice, no way  
It ain't easy growing up in World War III  
Never knowing what love could be, well I've seen  
I don't want love to destroy me like it did my family

Can we work it out? Can we be a family?  
I promise I'll be better, Mommy I'll do anything  
Can we work it out? Can we be a family?  
I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't leave

In our family portrait, we look pretty happy  
Let's play pretend, let's act like it comes naturally  
I don't wanna have to split the holidays  
I don't want two addresses  
I don't want a step-brother anyways  
And I don't want my mom to have to change her last name

In our family portrait we look pretty happy  
We look pretty normal, let's go back to that  
In our family portrait we look pretty happy  
Let's play pretend, act like it goes naturally

In our family portrait we look pretty happy  
(Can we work it out? Can we be a family?)  
We look pretty normal, let's go back to that  
(I promise I'll be better, Mommy I'll do anything)  
In our family portrait we look pretty happy  
(Can we work it out? Can we be a family?)  
Let's play pretend act and like it comes so naturally  
(I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't leave)  
In our family portrait we look pretty happy  
(Can we work it out? Can we be a family?)

We look pretty normal, let's go back to that  
(I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't leave)

Daddy don't leave  
Daddy don't leave  
Daddy don't leave  
Turn around please  
Remember that the night you left you took my shining star?  
Daddy don't leave  
Daddy don't leave  
Daddy don't leave  
Don't leave us here alone

Mom will be nicer  
I'll be so much better, I'll tell my brother  
Oh, I won't spill the milk at dinner  
I'll be so much better, I'll do everything right  
I'll be your little girl forever  
I'll go to sleep at night

“Face Down” by The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus

Hey girl you know you drive me crazy  
one look puts the rhythm in my hand.  
Still I’ll never understand why you hang around  
I see what’s going down.

Cover up with make up in the mirror  
tell yourself it’s never gonna happen again  
you cry alone and then he swears he loves you.

Do you feel like a man  
When you push her around?  
Do you feel better now as she falls to the ground?  
Well I’ll tell you my friend, one day this world’s going to end  
As your lies crumble down, a new life she has found.

A pebble in the water makes a ripple effect  
every action in this world will bear a consequence  
If you wade around forever you will surely drown  
I see what’s going down.

I see the way you go and say your right again,  
say your right again  
heed my lecture

Do you feel like a man  
When you push her around?  
Do you feel better now as she falls to the ground?  
Well I’ll tell you my friend, one day this world’s going to end  
As your lies crumble down a new life she has.

Face down in the dirt she says, this doesn’t hurt she says I finally had enough..  
Face down in the dirt she says, this doesn’t hurt she says I finally had enough..

One day she will tell you that she has had enough  
It’s coming round again.

Do you feel like a man, when you push her around?  
Do you feel better now as she falls to the ground?  
Well I’ll tell you my friend, one day this world’s going to end  
as your lies crumble down, a new life she has.

Do you feel like a man, when you push her around?  
Do you feel better now as she falls to the ground?  
Well I’ll tell you my friend, one day this world’s going to end  
as your lies crumble down, a new life she has.

Face down in the dirt she says, this doesn’t hurt she says I finally had enough..

“Never Again” by Nickelback

He’s drunk again, it’s time to fight  
She must have done something wrong tonight  
The living room becomes a boxing ring  
It’s time to run when you see him  
Clenching his hands  
She’s just a woman  
Never Again

I hear her scream, from down the hall  
Amazing she can even talk at all  
She cries to me, Go back to bed  
I’m terrified that she’ll wind up  
Dead in his hands, She’s just a woman  
Never Again

Been there before, but not like this  
Seen it before, but not like this  
Never before have I ever  
Seen it this bad  
She’s just a woman  
Never Again

Just tell the nurse, you slipped and fell  
It starts to sting as it starts to swell  
She looks at you, she wants the truth  
It’s right out there in the waiting room  
With those hands  
Looking just as sweet as he can  
Never Again

Seen it before, but not like this  
Been there before, but not like this  
Never before have I ever  
Seen it this bad  
She’s just a woman  
Never Again

Father’s a name you haven’t earned yet  
You’re just a child with a temper  
Haven’t you heard “Don’t hit a lady”?  
Kicking your ass would be a pleasure

He’s drunk again, it’s time to fight  
Same old shit, just on a different night  
She grabs the gun, she’s had enough  
Tonight she’ll find out how fucking  
Tough is this man  
Pulls the trigger as fast as she can  
Never Again

“Love is Blind” by Eve

Hey, yo I don't even know you and I hate you  
See all I know is that my girlfriend used to date you  
How would you feel if she held you down and raped you?  
Tried and tried, but she never could escape you  
She was in love and I'd ask her how? I mean why?  
What kind of love from a nigga would black your eye?  
What kind of love from a nigga every night make you cry?  
What kind of love from a nigga make you wish he would die?  
I mean shit he bought you things and gave you diamond rings  
But them things wasn't worth none of the pain that he brings  
And you stayed, what made you fall for him?  
That nigga had the power to make you crawl for him  
I thought you was a doctor be on call for him  
Smacked you down cause he said you was too tall for him, huh?  
That wasn't love, babygirl you was dreamin'  
I could have killed you when you said your seed was growin' from his semen

Love is blind, and it will take over your mind  
What you think is love, is truly not  
You need to elevate and find

I don't even know you and I'd kill you myself  
You played with her like a doll and put her back on the shelf  
Wouldn't let her go to school and better herself  
She had a baby by your ass and you ain't giving no help  
Uh-huh big time hustler, snake motherfucker  
One's born everyday and everyday she was your sucker  
How could you beat the mother of your kids?  
How could you tell her that you love her?  
Don't give a fuck if she lives  
She told me she would leave you, I admit it she did  
But came back, made up a lie about you missing your kids  
Sweet kisses, baby ain't even know she was your mistress  
Had to deal with fist fights and phone calls from your bitches  
Floss like you possess her, tellin' me to mind my business  
Said that it was her life and stay the fuck out of it  
I tried and said just for him I'll keep a ready clip

Love is blind, and it will take over your mind  
What you think is love, is truly not  
You need to elevate and find

I don't even know you and I want you dead  
Don't know the facts but I saw the blood pour from her head  
See I laid down beside her in the hospital bed  
And about two hours later, doctors said she was dead  
Had the nerve to show up at her mother's house the next day  
To come and pay your respects and help the family pray  
Even knelt down on one knee and let a tear drop  
And before you had a chance to get up  
You heard my gun cock  
Prayin' to me now, I ain't God but I'll pretend  
I ain't start your life but nigga I'mma bring it to an end  
And I did, clear shots and no regrets, never

Cops comin' lock me under the jail  
Nigga whatever my bitch, fuck it my sister  
You could never figure out even if I let you live  
What our love was all about  
I considered her my blood and it don't come no thicker

Love is blind, and it will take over your mind  
What you think is love, is truly not  
You need to elevate and find

“Baby Don’t Cry” by Tupac Shakur

Baby don’t cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up  
Baby don’t cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up

Now here’s a story bout a woman with dreams  
So picture perfect at thirteen, an ebony queen  
Beneath the surface it was more than just a crooked smile  
Nobody knew about her secret so it took a while  
I could see a tear fall slow down her black cheek  
Sheddin quiet tears in the back seat; so when she asked me,  
“What would you do if it was you?”  
Couldn’t answer such a horrible pain to live through  
I tried to trade places in the tragedy  
I couldn’t picture three crazed ni---z grabbin me  
For just a moment I was trapped in the pain, Lord come and take me  
Four ni---z violated, they chased and they raped me  
Even though it wasn’t me, I could feel the grief  
Thinkin with your brains blown that would make the pain go  
No! You got to find a way to survive  
cause they win when your soul dies

Baby please don’t cry, you got to keep your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up  
Baby don’t cry, you got to keep your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up  
Baby don’t cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {never give up}  
Baby don’t cry, I hope you got your head up {never give up}  
Even when the road is hard, never give up  
Baby don’t cry

Forget him girl (forget him girl) he ain’t gon’ never change  
I ain’t no hater but that ni--a lost in the game  
After the bright lights and big thangs  
he probably could loev you, but he in love with the struggle  
Everyday, his mind on gettin mo’ (gettin mo’)  
and never your feelings, he’s chasin millions fo’ sho’  
Uh oh (uh oh), now you bout to have his baby? (dayamn)  
Another wild-ass ni--a that’s gon’ drive you crazy  
You got too much, mo’, livin to do - I’m spittin this to you,  
cause you deserve more than what he givin to you (that’s right)  
Beautiful, black, precious, and complicated  
A new millennium dime piece, so fine she  
got em all stuck standin still when she come through  
Baby take a little mo’ time, love’ll find you  
And show us the sky’s blue somebody other than me  
gon’ give you everything you need, feel me?

Baby don’t cry, you got to keep your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {you’ll be alright}  
Baby don’t cry, you got to keep your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {you’ll be alright}  
Baby don’t cry, I hope you got your head up

Even when the road is hard, never give up {keep your head up}  
Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up {never give up}  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {no no.. ohhhh}  
Baby don't cry

I'm tryin to do all that I can, from jump  
Now you losin, you was choosin the wrong man  
Dealt the wrong hand, you was young and beautiful  
Lost and turned out, what you let that ni--a do to you? (Damn)  
I knew her since elementary, she blew a kiss to me  
Wrote me a note in crayon, wantin to get with me  
We was kids, now she got three kids  
They see their father e'ryday, and they don't know who he is  
Seen him last night, homey roll a E-class  
Mad cheese in the stash, still a deadbeat dad  
I bring her, Pampers and food, just to stop through  
But those, ain't my seeds, nuttin really I could do (nah)  
I feel pity for you, you ain't even his wife  
Seventeen with three kids, locked down for life  
Shoulda chose me, she bout to O.D. from the pressure  
Hell nah I won't let her {BABY DON'T CRY}

Baby don't cry, you got to keep your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {you'll be alright}  
Baby don't cry, you got to keep your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {baby don't cry}  
Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {baby baby baby}  
Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up {no..}  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {no-ohhhh}  
Baby don't cry, I gotta keep your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up  
Baby don't cry, you got to keep your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up {ooooh baby}  
Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up  
Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up {keep your head up}  
{keep your head up, never give up}  
Even when the road is hard, never give up, baby don't cry

Uhh, uhh, yeah, don't give up {you'll be alright}  
Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry

Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up  
Baby don't cry, I hope you got your head up  
Even when the road is hard, never give up, baby don't cry

For all the ladies  
Baby don't cry  
Got to keep your head up {keep your head up}  
Makaveli the Don {head up} aight?