Vassar College
Digital Window @ Vassar

Senior Capstone Projects

2020

Unlocking her diary: the “Confessional” in U.S. female singer-songwriting of the 1990s

Leah Cates
Vassar College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone

Recommended Citation
Cates, Leah, "Unlocking her diary: the “Confessional” in U.S. female singer-songwriting of the 1990s" (2020). *Senior Capstone Projects*. 967.
https://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone/967

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Window @ Vassar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Window @ Vassar. For more information, please contact library_thesis@vassar.edu.

Unlocking Her Diary: The “Confessional” in U.S. Female Singer-Songwriting of the 1990s

Leah Cates

Vassar College

April 24, 2020

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Personal is Powerful:

Reclaiming Relegation to the Confessional Realm

Chapter 1

“Every time I see your face / I get all wet between my legs”:

Revealing the Reality of Female Sexual Desire

Chapter 2

“Yes, I wore a slinky red thing / Does that mean I should spread?”:

Unmasking Sexual Violence and Resisting Rape Culture

Chapter 3

“The child in her womb can hear the tears / That the Black man cries”:

Redefining Beauty Standards and Inviting Men to Girl World

Conclusion

Confessional Diary as Protest Anthem:

The Legacy of 1990s Female Singer-Songwriters

Content Warning: This thesis discusses sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, and rape culture.

Abstract

This thesis engages feminist and queer theory to reclaim the oft-patronizing and paternalistic critical rhetoric of female singer songwriting as "confessional," "therapeutic," or "diary-like." I begin by suggesting that these subtly sexist labels implicitly relegate women's music—which poignantly reveals and resists structural oppression—to the realm of the personal, drawing on stereotypes of women as hyper-emotional, self-focused, and incapable of contributing intelligently to dialogues about the social and political. I argue that the metaphor of women's-music-as-diary actually creates a valuable feminist framework through which to analyze, appreciate, and learn from the art of female singer-songwriters. Critics, fans, and scholars *should* examine these musicians' creative work as intimate girl-to-girl talks or deeply personal overshares, but ones that are firmly grounded in both sociopolitical reality and "Girl World," as I refer to the girls-and-emotions-to-the-front space that women's albums create. To demonstrate the utility of a confessional diary analysis, I explore the groundbreaking creative works of Tori Amos, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Liz Phair, in particular, their respective breakthrough albums: *Little Earthquakes* (1992), *Plantation Lullabies* (1993), and *Exile in Guyville* (1993). I analyze these seminal works' essential contributions to discourses surrounding female sexual desire, sexual violence, and beauty standards, the latter of which I link to these women's empathy for men's fraught experience under patriarchy. The forthright, incisive, and intimate creative work of Amos, Ndegeocello, and Phair left an indelible mark on feminist female singer-songwriters in the 1990s and laid the groundwork for the bold and diary-like art of 21st-century female singer-songwriters.

Keywords: Confessional, Catharsis, Diary, Therapy, Emotional, Overshare, Girl Talk, Girl World, Singer-Songwriter, Female, Heteropatriarchy, Racism, Sexual Desire, Sexual Violence, Female Beauty Standards, Empathy, Reclamation, Resistance, Protest Anthems, Intersectionality, Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, Music Criticism, 1990s, U.S., Tori Amos, Meshell Ndegeocello, Liz Phair, *Little Earthquakes*, *Plantation Lullabies*, *Exile in Guyville*

Introduction

The Personal is Powerful: Reclaiming Relegation to the Confessional Realm

"Isn't it great, all this diary stuff?" raved Tori Amos in her 1998 *Rolling Stone* cover story. "So much better than it was a few years ago, when record companies had a quota of, like, ten female signings a year" (Daly). Amos was praising the bourgeoning of bold, outspoken, and feminist female artists in the 1990s: Alanis Morissette, Lauryn Hill, Sarah McLachlan, Paula Cole, Toni Braxton…She was also lauding the intimate, candid, and emotional nature of their oeuvres: their "diary stuff."

When I set out to write this thesis, I wasn't looking to take a deep dive into diaries. I wanted to explore the early 90s magnum opuses of Tori Amos, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Liz Phair, whose works I considered *forthright*, *courageous*, and *powerful* indictments of patriarchy.[1] As I dug into the body of literature on their creative work, however, I discovered a distinct vocabulary wielded by critics describing their art. Whether music review, cover story, or magazine feature, from 1992 or 2019, reporters, columnists, and critics alike characterized the music of these women (and others) as deeply personal diary entries, cathartic therapy sessions, confessionals, overshares, or emotion-laden girl-to-girl conversations.

To wit: Tori Amos "opened a vein for [her] public, serving up for their consumption every painful detail of [her] personal life," and, in turn, "fans flood backstage for [her] healing touch" (Daly). Back in the day, Liz Phair "felt like the living embodiment of any angsty, sexually frustrated teen's diary entries," and, as "America's art-damaged shit-talking boy-crazy…sweetheart," Phair originated "the concept of 'overshare'" (Akinfenwa and Sheffield).

[1] In writing Meshell Ndegeocello's name, different sources use a variety of spellings, including Me'Shell Ndegéocello or NdegéOcello. In this thesis, I use the spelling "Meshell Ndegeocello" (unless I am quoting a journalist who uses an alternate spelling), as Ndegeocello spells her own name this way on her official website and social media.

The headline of a 1996 *LA Times* feature on Meshell Ndegeocello announces, "She Can't Hide Her Feelings," and according to another *LA Times* feature from two years earlier, "NdegéOcello's music would seem to serve as therapy" for Ndegeocello herself.

Although think pieces on Amos, Ndegeocello, and Phair (as well as their contemporary and modern-day counterparts) aim to celebrate their incisive and feminist work, there's a problem with characterizing female creations as cathartic confessionals or therapy sessions: Diary rhetoric obscures the reality that women's everyday ordeals—orgasmless sex with dudes who don't call back, rejection by hunks who prefer popular white girls, fearing for your life when you walk alone at night—result directly from deep-seated structural inequality, in particular, patriarchy and racism.[2] When female artists publicly and passionately denounce social ills, mainstream media shoves their powerful protests under the proverbial rug by framing them as evidence of personal—not structural or systemic—problems. Writing about your experience as a survivor of sexual assault? Go for it, but don't forget to lock your diary when you're done. Condemning racism? That's fine, as long it's in a therapy session and you remember to sign the HIPAA Agreement.

For example, the journalist who declared Ndegeocello's work "therapy" was responding to her open discussion of lifelong traumatic encounters with anti-Black racism. After recalling how white children and adults hurled "n*****" at her and white boys said, "I'd better be different if they were going to sleep with me, like I have to be exotic for them," Ndegeocello reflects:

[2] In 1994, Ndegeocello rejected the label "feminist," articulating, "I'm not a feminist at all…feminism is a white concept for white, middle-class women who want to have the same opportunities as their white, male counterparts" (Seigal). Despite feminism's limitations—particularly the racism that Ndegeocello incisively articulates—I use the term "feminist" to describe the work of female-centered and bold work of women artists in this thesis. My conception of feminism is grounded in intersectionality and rejects the historical and modern-day exclusion of POC, including men of color, from the movement.

> I became so angry, I wanted to slit the throat of every white person I saw. Cheated, I felt *cheated*. Now, it's not so much anger I feel, it's a customary sadness I live with. I look, and I don't see our future. I don't see my place, and I'm struggling to find it. (Ndegeocello in Seigal).

Seigal responds, "NdegéOcello's music would seem to serve as therapy," and all of a sudden, Ndegeocello's disavowal of racism—a nefarious, age-old institution of oppression—becomes the angry outcry of a young woman in need of mental healthcare. Right. Albeit, Seigal, who was probably trying to express the poignance of Ndegeocello's work, goes on to eloquently praise her musical discussion of race."[3] Nevertheless, his initial analysis exposes critics' impulse to emphasize female artists' emotions over their drive for political and social change, particularly when considered alongside his introduction to Ndegeocello's quote. Seigal writes, "The scars left by racism have affected her deeply, both in her personal life and, as a result, in her art," collapsing Ndegeocello's "personal life" with her "art" and rendering conspicuously absent the sociopolitical context in which Ndegeocello experienced racism. Implicitly, Seigal harkens back to the notion of female-penned song as diary entry.

Critics' relegation of social ills to the realm of diary is not unique to Ndegeocello, Amos, and Phair. In the aforementioned Tori Amos *Rolling Stone* feature, for example, Daly figuratively banishes the words of then 21-year-old Fiona Apple to the pages of a journal that (presumably) no one should read, and simultaneously exposes the patronizing tone adopted by some male critics who write about young female artists. Daly calls Apple, who released her

[3] Seigal writes, "she explores themes of black pride with obvious relish and of white racism with unvarnished contempt [and her voice] oozes intellect and self-confidence." Notably, "intellect" and "self-confidence" are stereotypically masculine traits, reflecting Seigal's ability to describe Ndegeocello's music in an empowering and productive manner, and suggesting the unintentional nature of his sexist and racist relegation of Ndegeocello's music to therapy.

critically acclaimed debut *Tidal* two years before, “a little piano-playing glam freak...who even has among her musical-journal entries a song about being raped.” Sure, Daly’s description is partially satirical and intended to underscore the press’s condescension toward young women who create sharp-witted music about serious subjects. (Tiny, diary-scribbling “glam freaks” write about topics of import? What a surprise!) But even if Daly intended to write a sarcastic quip, his remark undermines the gravity of Fiona Apple’s testimony about sexual assault. Daly’s quote reveals society’s taboo against talking about sexual assault and penchant for punishing the “freaks” who dare speak out against it.

Female artists themselves recognize and resist the oft-subtle sexism of critical rhetoric. Generations of woman creatives have taken particular issue with the term “confessional”—Joni Mitchell, the arguable poster child for “confessional” songwriting, vehemently rejects the label, associating confession with witch hunts, trials, and imprisonment intended to “humiliate and degrade” the victim (Fantasia). Chinese-English singer-songwriter Emmy the Great, who rose to prominence 40 years after Mitchell released her debut album, likewise eschews the term, which she ties directly to “diary-like” rhetoric: “A male singer-songwriter might play on the same themes as a female singer-songwriter and it may end up being assumed that the girl is singing from her diary, and the boy is making statements on the big themes of life.” (Pollard). Heaven forbid a woman’s diary should hold the power to reveal structural inequalities!

Calling a female artist’s body of work “confessional” also trivializes the music’s artistic merit, a reality that Tori Amos eloquently highlighted when, in a 2012 Q&A article, the interviewer commented, “*Little Earthquakes* was an album that established you in people’s eyes as a ‘confessional artist’” (Blanche). Amos shot back,

> Not for one minute do I think that I'm a confessional artist. If I thought I was I'd go find a priest or a therapist. When male poets talk about emotions, bare to the bone, then they're just being 'deep and poetic' – it's the women who carry the pejorative. 'Confessional' to me means there's no filter and the filter is very much there and there is this precision. It's not as if you're just exploding every emotion out there as if you just taken [*sic*] a knife and open the organs, 'here's the whole lot.'"[4]

When well-intended critics *implicitly* conceive of women as hyper-emotional wrecks who are biologically incapable of containing their melodrama, they elide the meticulous and thoughtful manner in which women create art. They also suggest that women "lack the imagination to write about anything other than their exact, literal lives," as articulated by 28-year-old English singer-songwriter Marika Hackman who, like her counterparts, considers the confessional label "pejorative" (Pollard). Words like "diary," "confessional," and "therapy" say more about the internalized sexism of well-meaning and, in some instances, feminist critics than they do the work of female singer-songwriters themselves. Notably, Amos' equating of the "confessional" label to the "therapy" designation—which is similar to Emmy's connecting "diary-like" rhetoric with "confessional" —reveals the relative synonymy of these labels. Critics may slap "therapy" on Ndegeocello, "diary" on Phair, and "confessional" on Amos, but they're all (inadvertently) getting at the same sentiment: Girl art belongs in Girl World, where girls wax poetic to each other about their personal problems and untamable emotions.[5]

[4] Given Amos' laudatory use of "diary" above and disdain for "confessional" here, it is likely that she sees some distinction between the two terms, even as critics elide them and this thesis emphasizes their relative synonymy. Perhaps, for Amos, "diary" connotes a woman's affecting emotional honesty, whereas "confessional" implies the armchair diagnosis of a psychologist or priest, in addition to a lack of songcraft.
[5] Critics have labelled each of these women's music with at least two, but not necessarily all three, of these terms. (For example, to my knowledge, critics have not called the Ndegeocello's work a "diary," nor have they deemed Phair's music "therapeutic.") Nevertheless, I use all three of these terms to analyze the work of all three artists (for

But this orange cloud has a silver lining, because there is nothing inherently wrong with Girl World.[6] Actually, Girl World proves infinitely more honest, creative, emotionally intelligent, dynamic, and challenging than "a space where most often only white, cis-het men's voices counted and endured," as feminist music critic Jessica Hopper characterizes the male-dominated music scene ("Review"). Only under patriarchy—which devalues femininity—is it trivializing to conceive of women's song-crafting as "confessional," or an "intimate" girl-to-girl chat. Candidness, emotionality, and personal testimony are powerful tools for confronting patriarchy, racism, and other forms of structural oppression. According to journalist Camille Fantasia, "It makes perfect sense to make art from one's subjective inner life because it is the only inner life we have direct access to." In Girl World, stereotypically female forms of written and verbal communication, from secret diaries to 2:00 a.m. sleepover conversations, can be insightful, persuasive, and profound. As articulated by Hopper, "Phair treated girl life as intrinsically interesting and complex source material. It was" ("Review"). The same can be said of Tori Amos, Meshell Ndegeocello, and a litany of other female artists.

This thesis reveals the patriarchal underpinnings of the discourses surrounding Tori Amos', Meshell Ndegeocello's, and Liz Phair's creative work. The "confessional" narrative need not, however, paint women as overly emotional and self-centered through paternalistic, patronizing and muzzling language. On the contrary, I will demonstrate that "diary stuff" creates a valuable feminist framework for understanding, analyzing, appreciating, and learning from these women's work (Daly). It would be too simplistic to say that "confessional" rhetoric is *only*

example, I read Ndegeocello's work as a diary) because, as discussed in this thesis, their connotation is essentially the same.

[6] "Orange cloud" is a reference to the Tori Amos lyric "Years go by if I'm stripped of my beauty / And the orange clouds raining in my head" from "Silent All These Years," the third track on and second single from *Little Earthquakes*.

reductive; rather, these artists' songs can be productively read as therapy sessions or intimate sleepover conversations that are firmly grounded in the social and political reality engaged by these bold women.[7] In arguing for the utility of a diary analysis, my thesis engages feminist theory, with a particular emphasis on intersectionality, in addition to queer theory, music journalism, and popular music studies.

Background: The Creative Work of Tori Amos, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Liz Phair

I ground my analysis in case studies of Tori Amos, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Liz Phair because, at the dawn of the 1990s, all three of these then-20-something-year-olds transformed their misadventures and tragedies at the hands of patriarchy into their breakthrough and groundbreaking albums: *Little Earthquakes* (1992), *Plantation Lullabies* (1992), and *Exile in Guyville* (1993), respectively. In these diary-like records, Amos, Ndegeocello, and Phair create their own woman-centered worlds, using cathartic, candid, and confessional girl-talk to illuminate their sharp-witted, courageous, and diverse resistance to patriarchy's ugliest transgressions.

Because their songwriting centers their personal lives, these women's albums are informed by and grounded in their unique positionalities and life experiences. Meshell Ndegeocello's music is influenced by her lifelong encounters with white supremacist heterosexism as a Black, bisexual, and androgynous-presenting cisgender woman. Ndegeocello turned to art to process not only her mother's abuse at the hands of her father, but also the lifelong heterosexism and racism she faced as a Black bisexual woman growing up in

[7] A song about girls-only sleepovers called "Girls' Room" is the final track on Phair's 1998 *whitechocolatespaceegg*.

Washington D.C. (Glickman and Seigal).[8] Ndegeocello's intersectional identity is reflected in *Plantation Lullabies*' blending of intersecting music genres—funk, contemporary R & B, mainstream pop, hip hop, rhythm & blues—which contributed to critics' crediting *Plantation Lullabies* with the birth of neo-soul (Easlea). On the Grammy-nominated album, Ndegeocello delivers peace and resistance against the profound legacy of the slavery "plantation" via poetic, candid, and political "lullabies" of Black love and resilience. In her engagement of Girl World, Ndegeocello queers not only the diary but also the lullaby, transforming it from the property of cisgender, feminine, and white mothers rocking their babies, to neo-soul protest anthems authored by a woman at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. The comfort of Ndegeocello's lullabies derives from their unsettling of race, gender, and sexual hierarchies.

Although Liz Phair and Tori Amos benefit from white, heterosexual, cisgender, and socioeconomic privilege, they both endured different manifestations of sexism and misogyny, which influence their respective artmaking. Phair rebelled against the conservative, upper-middle class Chicago suburb in which her adoptive parents raised her and spent the majority of her Oberlin education holed up in her dorm room, creating the *Girly-Sound* tapes, which would become *Exile in Guyville:* An "imitable," critically acclaimed middle finger to the gender-based discrimination that followed her from her childhood community into the indie underground scene, that doubled as a song-by-song response to the Rolling Stone's seminal—and sexist—1971 *Exile on Mainst.* (McDonnell and Itkowsky).[9] Phair explained, "Men were the gatekeepers. They ran all the equipment and the labels … I was tired of being the girlfriend of the guy in the

8 Ndegeocello had music in her DNA: Her father, Jacques Johnson, was a jazz saxophonist, as well as a U.S. army lieutenant who was, according to Ndegeocello, "one of the few blacks [in the military]" (Seigal).

9 The *Girly-Sound* "project" is three hours of tapes recorded in Phair's Oberlin dorm room and parents' attic that was the precursor to *Exile in Guyville*. Raw and initially private—just like a diary—the tapes feature Phair's quiet, female voice bashing toxically masculine men in language laced with expletives and explicit declarations of female sexuality. Phair, a Studio Art major, had slim-to-no formal music training at the time of creation. Notably, several *Girly-Sound* songs appear in revised form on *Exile in Guyville*.

band, I was tired of hearing that my musical tastes suck" (McDonnell). So, she carved out her own slice of emotionally honest Girl World within Guyville. Phair became an overnight hero to legions of women across the U.S. because even though "guyville" was the world of indie rock, the male-dominated music scene was a microcosm of patriarchy writ large, and *everyone* is exiled in patriarchy ("Review").

Amos, who has declared her life mission "to expose the dark side of Christianity," was raised under strict, middle-class Christian heteropatriarchy; her father was a Methodist minister in Maryland (Great Rock Bible).[10] [11]*Little Earthquakes* is informed not only by Amos' rebellion against Christian heteropatriarchy, but also her experience as a survivor of sexual assault; at 21 years old, Amos was raped at knifepoint (Staff). The album explores how life's "little earthquakes" —emotionally numb boyfriends, Christian hypocrisy, female in-fighting, family blowups, women's silence, guns—create life-shattering earthquakes, from rape and murder to the stifling of women's emotions, spirits, and ambitions. On *Little Earthquakes,* Amos creates a transgressive space for female feelings, experiences, and wisdom.

Chapter Summaries and Methodology

My thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which examines, through a confessional diary framework, these artists' discussions of female sexual desire, sexual assault, and oppressive beauty standards (the latter of which I connect to women's empathy for men). The case studies that I have chosen to trace across these albums are eternally relevant feminist issues that affect

[10] Amos also rebelled in the classroom. At age five, Amos—already a prodigious pianist and composer—became the youngest child ever admitted to the prestigious Peabody Conservatory, which rescinded her full-ride scholarship and expelled her six years later for "musical insubordination" (she insisted on playing rock music) (Sorgen).
[11] Amos' mother is part-Cherokee, but Amos is not an enrolled member of a Native American tribe, nor does she explicitly acknowledge this aspect of her identity on *Little Earthquakes* (Gentry).

people of all genders across lines of class, race, and sexual orientation, and feature prominently on *Exile in Guyville*, *Little Earthquakes*, and *Plantation Lullabies*.

The first chapter, "'Every time I see your face / I get all wet between my legs': Revealing the Reality of Female Sexual Desire," uses the frameworks of the confessional diary, cathartic therapy session, and girl talk to explore Phair's, Ndegeocello's, and Amos' articulations of female sexuality.[12] In the sexually explicit "Flower," Phair brazenly asserts her desire by queering the stereotypical boy-crazy-but-celibate female diary, in addition to simulating a frank, girl-to-girl sex talk via the song's production. Phair's whiteness works to her advantage throughout the track. Ndegeocello likewise expresses her desire in forthright terms by engaging in girl talk; in "If That's Your Boyfriend (He Wasn't Last Night)," she channels her pain into confidently informing the privileged and popular girls that multiply marginalized women can both feel and inspire sexual desire. Amos, for her part, reveals the coercion and hypocrisy that may characterize female sexual desire under white Christian heteropatriarchy by recounting her lived experiences like a spooky sleepover story ("Precious Things").

In chapter two, "'Yes, I wore a slinky red thing / Does that mean I should spread?': Unmasking Sexual Violence and Resisting Rape Culture," I examine how these artists broach sexual assault through confessional diary writing, girl talk, and inviting men into Girl World. Chapter two begins with an exploration of Amos' seminal "Me and a Gun," in which she describes her rape in diary-like detail. The second section of the chapter investigates Phair's depiction of her experience under a regime of rape culture, which she reports to another

[12] I define "girl talk" as girl-to-girl conversation that is *informal* in tone and style; emotionally honest; and personal. Despite its casual nature, girl talk often deliberates structural inequality, including patriarchy and racism.

woman—Mary the Blessed Virgin—in “Help Me Mary.” In the chapter’s final section, I explore “Soul on Ice,” where Ndegeocello pulls men into the “girly” sphere of female beauty standards, which oppress women *and* Black men. In turn, the latter objectify and abuse Black women.

The final chapter, “‘The child in her womb can hear the tears / That the Black man cries’: Redefining Beauty Standards and Inviting Men to Girl World,” picks up where the former left off in its connecting of female beauty standards—stereotypically the sole property of Girl World—to the experience of men, whom these women invite into the emotion-centered realm of Girl World. I trace the image of a bloodied princess throughout Tori Amos’ *Little Earthquakes*, with particular attention to “Mother,” to demonstrate how Amos queers the image of a white, feminine princess. Amos ties the princess’ oppression to patriarchy, under which men likewise suffer, and she suggests the power of men’s genuine emotion in “Tear in Your Hand,” where she writes with diary-like detail about a breakup. Throughout *Exile in Guyville*, Phair details men’s appearance more than that of women, once again queering boy-crazy diary writing by thoughtfully parsing out men’s fraught experience under patriarchy in “Soap Star Joe” and “Explain It to Me.” Ndegeocello, for her part invites men, especially Black men, into Girl World, where they recognize the beauty in Blackness and embrace emotional and physical intimacy as they process their experiences with racism (“Shoot’n up and Gett’n High,” “Soul on Ice,” “Step into the Projects”).

In the conclusion, “Confessional Diary as Protest Anthem: The Legacy of 1990s Female Singer-Songwriters,” I present an anecdote about Taylor Swift’s marketing of *Lover* (2019) to illustrate how 21st-century female artists have proudly claimed, as well as commodified, the labels of “diary” and “confessional.” I review the preceding chapters and offer a final argument for the utility of analyzing female-made art through the lens of a diary, confessional, or therapy session that is firmly grounded in both sociopolitical reality and Girl World.

Chapter 1

"Every time I see your face / I get all wet between my legs:"

Revealing the Reality of Female Sexual Desire

> My mother always taught me to 'keep my knees kissing.' The taboo topic of sex isn't a talking point for women in the Black community, but more like bullet to dodge. Through songs, from artists like Trina, Lil Kim, Mya and others, I grew to embrace my sexuality without apology…They reminded me, when my mother couldn't, that there was nothing to be ashamed of.
>
> —Lauren Porter, *Essence* journalist

Girls learn about sex and sexuality through song (Springer, Porter). As Porter's quote reveals, music holds tremendous sway in girls' conception of themselves as sexual beings, and it has the power to push back against societal misconceptions about female desire as nonexistent, abnormal, despicable, or dangerous—stereotypes that feature prominently in the music of male artists. In "Emo: Where the Girls Aren't," Hopper expresses her disgust at male-made punk music for portraying women as desireless sexual objects who are "muses at best" and "cum rags or invisible at worst" (16). She laments, "My deepest concerns about the lingering effects of emo is…for the teenage girls I see crowding front and center at emo shows" ("Emo" 18). Indeed, the heterosexist double standards that laud men for possessing allegedly insatiable sexual desire, and slut shame women for so much as wearing a low-cut dress, foster a rape culture that is physically and emotionally damaging to people of all genders. It is the art of women—from Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith's sexually forthright, queer, and groundbreaking blues in the 1920s, to the seminal albums of Liz Phair, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Tori Amos in the 1990s, all the way to the unabashed sexuality of Lizzo and Lana Del Rey in the 2010s—that has created a space to celebrate female desire.

By engaging some aspect of Girl World, Liz Phair, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Tori Amos each articulate their desire in a way that is authentic to them. Phair opens her diary to reveal, on brazenly explicit terms, the reality of sexual desire and then—quite literally—invites women to shout their desire alongside her. Ndegeocello douses her desire in snark as she centers the female experience and schools the supposedly sexually superior women on the desire and desirability of multiply marginalized women. In contrast to Phair and Ndegecello, Amos tells a scary, metaphor-driven, and poetic sleepover story about sexuality as it is constructed under heteropatriarchy. Phair's explicitness, Ndegeocello's snark, and Amos' metaphors all smash sexual double standards and illustrate the utility of a confessional diary analysis in exploring female-created art about sexuality.

Liz Phair: "Flower"

In a 2010 *Rolling Stone* question-and-answer feature, Liz Phair explained that "Flower" responds to the Rolling Stones' "Let It Loose:"

> [Mick Jagger] is saying let it loose, stop being an uptight girl from the suburbs and I'm like, 'Really, OK, here you go, here's what's in there!'...I wrote the rap at school thinking about this boy with these beautiful lips" (Phair in Ganz).

Evidently, Liz Phair really did rip "Flower"—where, for just over two minutes, she details her desire to "fuck" a flower-faced boy—from her schoolgirl diary. The power of "Flower" lies in how, like all of *Exile in Guyville*, "it demanded its listeners interrogate their assumptions about what young women truly desire, begged us to wonder what girls *really* think about" ("Review"). Girls are *supposed* to fill their diaries with descriptions of boys, which Liz Phair does:

> Your face reminds me of a flower
> Kind of like you're underwater
> Hair's too long and in your eyes.

They're just supposed to spare the ensuing rhyme—"your lips a perfect suck-me size"—as well as the details of boys' lower anatomies, including describing their "jimmies" as "fresh" and "young." ("I just want your fresh young jimmy / jamming, slamming, ramming in me" is a marvelous *in*ternal rhyme.) The "Blowjob Queen," as Phair refers to herself in verse four, got the memo about what girls are and aren't supposed to write in their diaries, but she makes a conscious decision to, well, fuck (phuck?) it up. By queering the confessional female diary, Phair reveals the reality of female sexual desire.

Indeed, the diary-like nature of the slyly poetic track is what made the song both believable and memorable to me as a first-time Liz Phair listener—"Flower" was one of the first Liz Phair songs I ever heard. I was playing Phair's music on Spotify shuffle after reading a *GQ* cover story on Taylor Swift that compares Swift—famed for writing "confessional" lyrics that delve "directly" into her personal life—to Phair, with the caveat that the latter swears and the former (usually) doesn't (Klosterman and Greenhaus). I thought, "a cussing Taylor Swift sounds like fun." Although the word "diary" didn't pop into my then-teenage brain as Phair's articulations of desire effortlessly and endlessly flowed into one another, I cared about what Phair had to say, and I trusted her because her writing was so direct, detailed, matter-of-fact, and ostensibly simple. "I want to fuck you like a dog / I'll take you home and make you like it," as Phair sings a mere 30 seconds into "Flower," are the words of a woman who's telling it like it is, in the moment, no filter, no BS, no beating around the (vaginal) bush. I admired Phair's forthrightness, and I felt a sense of connection to her because she was so candid.

My enthusiasm for "Flower" reflects feminism's relative progress in the last 25 years, in part because a slew of women like Liz Phair have continued pushing the proverbial envelope by creating sexually forthright art.[13] Back in 1993, many listeners responded to "Flower"—and much of *Exile in Guyville*—with shock, disgust, and disbelief. After all, women aren't supposed to *want* to "fuck you till your dick is blue," and if they do, then they shouldn't wax poetic about it to anyone, let alone the continental U.S. (quite literally), and *especially* not a quarter of a century ago when, according to Phair "they hadn't studied the female brain enough at that point, and they were still trying to tell you that…women were less interested in sex" (Spanos). For example, when critic Joe Vallese played "Flower" for a Nine Inch Nails-loving, "strategically pierced" female friend, she spat, "That's the filthiest thing I've ever heard *despite* her rebellious nature and adoration of Nine Inch Nails which, in 1994, released a song ("Closer") featuring the lyrics "You let me violate you / You let me desecrate you / You let me penetrate you" and "I wanna fuck you like an animal." So, when Liz Phair declares, "I want to fuck you like a dog," it's filthy, disgusting, "amateur," and "slutty," as Hopper recalls young men calling Liz Phair's debut album in 1993, but when Trent Reznor spits "I wanna fuck you like an animal," moments after bragging about violating a woman, it's "existential pain expressed as rock and roll," which is what *Rolling Stone* called *The Downward Spiral* in 1994 (Gold and "Review"). Double standards and rape culture, much?[14]

[13] As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, scores of women pushed the envelope decades before Liz Phair, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Tori Amos. These women, from Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith to Donna Summer and Lesley Gore, created space for the work around which I center my thesis.
[14] See above for a delineation of sexual double standards.

Others chose not to believe Phair, whom they deemed a “master manipulator” or “shockmeister,” accusing her of “using sexual bluntness as an attention-getting device both in her lyrics and in her conversation” (Dunn). According to Phair, the shock value of “Flower,” and much of *Exile in Guyville*, is a strategic decision:

> I know what I’m doing when I use the word ‘fuck’...it’s termed explicit only because I’m a girl. The thrill of it is like, your little sister could be . . . having these thoughts and you wouldn’t know it . . . It makes you look around at all the good girls and wonder what’s going on in their heads” (Phair in Lankford Jr. 56).

As Hopper hints above, with “Flower,” Phair plants seeds of doubt in men’s heads about the comforting—and oppressive—binary that relegates women to sexual submissiveness. But this binary breakdown is *only* shocking because Phair’s diary is consumed by citizens of Guyville, which perceives women as passive sexual objects, and assumes that’s how women perceive themselves in their diaries.

When women “shock” the world with frank declarations of their own sexual desire, public relegation of those words to the diary realm is not far behind—first comes shock, then comes diary lock. Hopper writes, “Like Mitchell, Phair was miscategorized as ‘confessional’ – as if the work tumbled out unfiltered from a sentimental diary page” (“Review”). I argue, however, that this “miscategorization” actually reinforces the legitimacy and amplifies the power of Phair’s statement. Listeners can disbelieve Phair, the “master manipulator,” or they can relegate “Flower” to the realm of the confessional diary. But they can’t do both at the same time because confessional diaries are, by their very nature, genuine, unfiltered, and honest. Liz Phair wrote all this down in her diary, so it *must* be true. If people didn’t tell themselves that Phair ripped *Exile in Guyville*, including “Flower,” from the pages of her diary, if they stopped at the idea that she was grabbing for attention, that “I’ll fuck you and your minions too” was an empty promise, then “Flower” would become *less* threatening, and everyone could return to their (un)safe, male-dominant/female-submissive lives. Instead, Phair is “the *living* [emphasis mine] embodiment of any angsty, sexually frustrated teen’s diary entries” (Akinfenwa). She allows her sexuality to *live*, breathe, shock, inform, and liberate off the page by reading her diary—her most honest and candid thoughts—aloud to the continental U.S. (Again, quite literally.) That long-haired college kid who acts like a fourteen-year-old? He’s as real as Phair’s desire to “fuck” him until his “dick is blue.” And that’s how Liz Phair throws diary talk right back in patriarchy’s face, which probably doesn’t look very much like an underwater flower.

Then Liz Phair, ever the overachiever, takes transgression one step further by sewing girl talk, in particular, female solidarity into the very fabric of the song. “Flower” underscores that female libido doesn’t just live in the “thoughts” and “heads” of “good girls.” Instead, young women engage in sexual girl talk. As articulated by Phair, women “dissect” their sexual encounters and feelings with one another:

> About giving blow jobs, for example – you talked to your friends like ‘What are you supposed to do? Where? How do you know if he’s going to come?’ Then women will have really sexual names like ‘old purple dick’ or something” (Phair in Dunn).

Journalist Jancee Dunn elaborates, “[Phair] rightly maintains that her songs are directly reflective of conversations that most young women are having…and that those chats are as frank, casual and often clinical as those of men.” Yes, guys—women talk about how good (or awful) you were in bed last night, and they do it with other women, behind your back, so if you’re not secure in your masculinity and sexuality, you’re probably going to have a pretty tough time digesting

"Flower." Which, according to Phair, they do: "It scares guys...I've had more male [than female] friends freak out" (Dunn).

Phair harps on the "Flower" freak factor with the track's brilliant production. All the way through the song, she loops the chorus—"every time I see your face / I get all wet between my legs / every time you pass me by I heave a sigh of pain" —and speeds up the recording to achieve a high, feminine, and soft-sounding voice. In a 2018 track-by-track breakdown of Exile in *Guyville*, Liz Phair reflected on the intentionality of the vocal aesthetic:

> You have this little, tiny girl voice singing these blue, filthy lyrics about wanting to give blow jobs and stuff. That encapsulates the *Girly-Sound* project that came before *Guyville* that was all about how the young female voice carries the least amount of authority of any voice in society. What does it take before you listen to what she's saying? What is she allowed to say? (Spanos).

Society would rather *not* listen to the young female voice—that's why they banish it to a diary or confessional, especially if that voice says something it's not supposed to. But Liz Phair forces patriarchy to listen by adding in "menacing" guitar sounds, as Phair describes the riff that circles through the song (again, female sexual desire *is* menacing to patriarchy) and, most important, a second female voice dueting with her throughout the track. Phair layers the verses over the looped and hyperfeminine chorus, mumbling about jimmies and blowjobs in a voice that is deep, smoky, distinctly her own, and unmistakably female. Vallese describes the resulting harmonization as a kind of female "solidarity" —neither voice is that of a "freak" or a "slut" (quotes mine), but instead those of two average women who are, to quote Phair, "as interested in sex as any boy" (Spanos). Phair makes the reality of the sexual everywoman all the more obvious in concert when—to this day—she invites up a couple audience members to sing the chorus while she takes care of the lyrics (and rocks the guitar). Vallese summarizes,

> While Phair instructs and nurtures her impromptu TAs through the song with confidence, there's a palpable sense of exhilaration, embarrassment, and bad-assery coursing through their veins. It's a reminder of what "Flower" and Phair and *Guyville* have given them: the permission...to tap into and vocalize baser instincts without the threat of stigma and with the security that you're never doing so alone.

Empowering and courageous as "Flower" is, it's important to remember that "for a pretty, well-educated white woman, [Liz Phair's] risk was relative" ("Review"). The legacy of "Flower" as a "straightforward expression of female sexuality, explicit and unashamed," as articulated by critic and author Ronald D. Lankford Jr., opens up a conversation about which women are granted leniency in articulations of sexual desire by a U.S. society that is white supremacist and heteropatriarchal.

The ways in which Phair's middle-class whiteness, as well as her heterosexual and cisgender identity, work to her advantage throughout "Flower" are twofold: First, Phair's privileged positionality allows her to embrace a relatively high degree of brazenness—after all, she need not be wary of reinforcing stereotypes of Black women as lascivious, nor of queer folks as sexually deviant. Second, her whiteness promotes the song's shock factor. In the U.S., a white woman, and especially a heterosexual white woman, ought to be "pure" and "chaste," words to which Phair explicitly sets herself in opposition on "Flower" when she sings the song's first lines: "Every time I see your face / I think of things *un*pure, *un*chaste." This is not to say that Phair's positionality detracts from the power of "Flower." Indeed, Phair's white, cishet privilege demands that she take these risks and, I argue, she does so without rendering sexuality the sole property of white women. In "Flower," Phair's persona is not that of a rich white girl who's getting the guys because she's just *that* pretty. Instead, she is a bold and thoughtful young woman who intentionally smashes female sexual taboos by "articulating something primal and confusing that exists *in each of us* [emphasis mine], an instinctive vacillation between sleazy and sweet expressions of physical love" (Vallese).[15] Nevertheless, Phair does not explicitly consider the unique sexual experiences of marginalized women. Meshell Ndegeocello, however, does just this with her bright, bold, brash, and brazen "If That's Your Boyfriend (He Wasn't Last Night)."

Meshell Ndegeocello: "If That's Your Boyfriend (He Wasn't Last Night)"

Like *Exile in Guyville*, *Plantation Lullabies* exposes what women are really thinking about and *doing*; when you open Ndegeocello's diary, you find overt displays of female sexuality on almost every page. This is an album of slow jams. In documenting her desire, Ndegeocello is candid, detailed, and "confessional," as she has been characterized by writers Britt Robson, Farnum Brown, and Rickey Wright. Occasionally, Ndegeocello even drops the listener directly in the moment of lovemaking. In the last minute-and-a-half of "Sweet Love," for instance, she moans "touch me there," "I like it like that," and "don't stop, please," and in "Dred Loc," Ndegeocello purrs, "let me run my fingers through your dreadlocks / run them all over your body 'til you holler stop," not so much pleading for sexual contact as she is giving the dude a play-by-play of precisely what she's doing. Indeed, Ndegeocello's sexuality is not the passive, self-

[15] Vallese's assertion that "expressions of physical love" are present in "each of us" excludes asexual people. Neither Phair, nor Amos or Ndegeocello, explicitly accounts for the experience of asexual individuals in their discussion of sexuality. Perhaps, however, these women's owning of their female sexuality—which heteropatriarchy marginalizes—can inspire asexual individuals to likewise experience pride in their identity, which is similarly marginalized under heteropatriarchy.

sexualization-to-please-a-man kind. Instead, her sexuality is active, pursuant, confident, self-assured, and super sensual—Ndegeocello has the art of the rich, warm, and inviting sex voice down pat, more so than Liz Phair, with her gravelly mumble, or Amos, with her airy falsetto.

But my favorite *Plantation Lullabies* sex song isn't a Ndegeocelloian slow jam. Instead, it's the up-tempo, hip-hop driven "If That's Your Boyfriend (He Wasn't Last Night) (ITYB)," where Ndegeocello engages in a poignant and political four-and-a-half minutes of girl talk that doubles as "therapy" for lifelong encounters with bullying—according to her then-manager Benny Medina, a "lack of self-esteem that has been indelibly etched into her psyche….To me, the experiences she is putting into her records…are her therapy" (Hilburn). "ITYB" also topples men from their throne of "prototype" or "neutral" and amplifies the voice of the "other," namely women and, in particular, women at the intersection of race- and sexuality-based discrimination (Beauvoir).

In the music video, a slap bass-rocking Ndegeocello—confident, sexy, and androgynous with a bald head and sparkly lipstick—beats majority-white and feminine "stuck-up bitch[es]" to a dude who is evidently quite the hunk. The unidentified hottie desires Ndegeocello, in her masculinity and androgyneity, over a slew of more feminine ladies. And since Ndegeocello is a "confessional" songwriter, it's based on a true story:

> I look a particular way—I'm kind of androgynous—so, growing up, it was very clear that I could engage physically with both genders, so there wasn't really a thought there. And I was having an experience with this one guy, and then his girlfriend confronted me and wanted to obliterate my self-esteem by teasing me about my looks. That thought came to mind, that she was just so confident that

> there was no way that this guy could be interested in me, and from that hurt came that song (Ndegeocello in Locker).

Thank goodness Ndegeocello's music serves as "therapy," because the true story teaches an essential lesson about how the "lack of self-esteem that has been indelibly etched into her psyche" is not so much a personal problem as it reflects damaging white, heteronormative beauty standards that dictate who is allowed to feel and inspire desire. And it's a lesson that mainstream 90s America evidently heard loud and clear, because the track racked up two Grammy nominations and broke the US Billboard Hot 100. Apparently Ndegeocello forgot to sign the HIPAA agreement. Ndegeocello queers U.S. beauty standards throughout "ITYB" by backtalking the popular girls, who hurl sexual slurs intended to repress women of color's sexual freedom. They say it's "out of line" and, in fact, "kinda freaky" for a Black, androgynous, and bisexual woman to desire and pursue the hunky boyfriend of a feminine, heterosexual and perhaps white woman *and then* for her to beat the girls playing patriarchy's game. Indeed, racist and homophobic America tries to ensure a society wherein white, straight women feel perpetually superior to women of color because, in hierarchies of popularity, women who are feminine-presenting and whites become the supposed "superior" objects. But Meshell Ndegeocello won't play that game.

Instead, she sings "Boyfriend, boyfriend, yes I had your boyfriend" in a tune that closely resembles that of the eminent "Na-Na Na-Na Boo-Boo" chant of your childhood. According to Ndegeocello, who had a four-year-old son when she recorded "ITYB," "That's a nursery rhyme….That tone and that sort of melody is for taunting, and that's how it came to mind. 'I'm going to taunt you with this, no matter what bad things you say about me'" (Wiser). Again, Ndegeocello is taking her personal tragedy—bullying at the hands of racist heterosexism—and transforming it into poignant art, where she proves that no insult will silence her in this girl talk and offers some girl-to-girl education on white and heteronormative standards of sexuality. In the second verse, Ndegeocello responds, "Go ahead, call me what you like / While I boot slam your boyfriend tonight" and "You're upset because you're one stuck-up bitch / Maybe he needed a change, needed a switch." Out with the "blonde hair, blue eyes" and femininity, in with the bald head, brown eyes, and androgyneity.[16] Ndegeocello knows very well that the popular girls are "just jealous cause he wasn't with you." Which is certainly part of the story, but they're probably also "jealous" of Ndegeocello's sexual confidence in a society where patriarchy teaches white, heterosexual girls to play sexually coy. Ndegeocello also makes it quite clear that Mr. Hunk desires her, and her body—which "ain't right" in white, heteronormative America—right back. Quoth Ndegeocello, "It ain't my fault if he wants me." After all, "He knocked on my door / So what should I say no for?" If you're into it, which you are, then you should *not* say "no" — instead give affirmative, enthusiastic consent.

It's essential for Ndegeocello, early on in her girl-to-girl education, to affirm her womanhood. Within the first 45 seconds, Ndegeocello spits, "I'm the kind of woman / I'll do almost anything to get what I want." She might be bald, rock baggy jeans and loose t-shirts, and fall in love with other women, but none of that makes her any less a *woman* who is capable of having mutually enjoyable sex with sexy men. Here, Ndegeocello's queerness is front and center, despite the LGBTQIA+ community's criticizing *Plantation Lullabies* for *not* being queer enough; indeed, upon *Plantation Lullabies*' release, the queer community criticized Ndegeocello's use of heteronormative pronouns in songs about romantic and sexual relationships

[16] "You no longer burn for the motherland brown skin / You want blonde hair, blue eyes" is a quote from "Soul on Ice," a song that I will analyze in a later chapter.

(Glickman).[17] Reflecting on the pushback, Ndegeocello clearly articulated the challenges she faces at the intersection of multiple oppressions: “Homophobia is rampant in the black community, so I am a traitor to my race, and gay people don’t like me because I’m not gay enough” (Hilburn). I argue, however, that despite the queer community’s grievances, *Plantation Lullabies* is distinctly queer, and *ITYB* is a prime example of the album’s queerness. In its unsettling of sexual hierarchies, *ITYB*, like many *Plantation Lullabies* songs, proves that queer women can not only desire cis, het men but also be the object of their desire.

It’s also essential, as well as courageous, for Ndegeocello to spell out that sex is what *she* wants when under U.S. patriarchy, with the stereotypes of Black girls as licentious and sexually deviant run rampant to cover up their rape. As many scholars have observed, there is a centuries-old legacy of Black women *not wanting* sex, and instead enduring rape and forced maternity at the hands of white slaveowners (Jennings). Today, Black women experience sexual assault and domestic violence at disproportionately high rates; in fact, 20 percent of Black women endure rape over the course of their life (CDC). Against the backdrop of Black women’s historically maligned sexuality, Ndegeocello’s self-assured insistence on her own desire and pleasure packs a particularly powerful punch. She affirms, “I had your boyfriend” (he didn’t have *her*—*she* had him). She sneers “I just like what I see” (he’s not gazing at her—*she’s* gazing at *him*, as Liz Phair gazes at the long-haired boy in *Flower*). She promises to “make you wanna do things that you never have” (he’s not making her do anything—*she’s* making *him* do try all kinds of new, um, tricks with her sex appeal). And how was the sex? “Good to the last chip at the bottom of the bag,” that’s how. Got it.

[17] Notably, when Ndegeocello released *Plantation Lullabies*, her bisexuality marked the recent events of her life—she’d given birth to a son (whose father she declined to reveal) a few years prior to dropping *Plantation Lullabies* and was romantically involved with women in the early years of her career (Glickman).

Notably, Ndegeocello refuses to engage in this girl talk in the popular girls' world of whiteness, or internalized whiteness. "ITYB" is a song firmly grounded in hip-hop, jazz and jazz rap—genres that owe their existence, success, and longevity to African American artists and communities. Ndegeocello is fighting, and winning, this battle in a universe of rich and groundbreaking Black culture.

"ITYB" is also firmly grounded in Girl World. As articulated by writer Melissa Locker and Ndegeocello herself, this song is not "necessarily female-friendly" —Ndegeocello doesn't have time for fineries as she dismantles hierarchies of sexual desire and power—but it *is* "female-driven." Throughout the track, Ndegeocello leaves open the possibility that she's having a full-fledged affair with Mr. Hunk—picture shows, "candles with warm apple cider," "reading Shakespeare in our birthday suits," the works.[18] But at the 11th hour, in 11 words, Ndegeocello shuts down that possibility entirely:

> Ooh baby baby
> Mad sex and when we're through
> *I really have no problem actin like I don't know you* [emphasis mine]

Meshell Ndegeocello doesn't have a problem giving Mr. Hunk the post-intercourse cold shoulder. It's not about him—nothing that happens in this song has anything to do with Mr. Hunk, or any other guy, for that matter. "ITYB" is firmly grounded in Girl World, where one woman teaches a bunch of other women about female sexual pleasure, and what it means to queer patriarchy's heteronormative and white standards of who is allowed to experience and act upon desire. From the very first lines—"you say that's your boyfriend / you say I'm out of line" —Ndegeocello is focusing on what girls "say," (*not* on what guys say), and on what she says in response. Mr. Hunk is merely a means to this end, because Ndegeocello's girl-to-girl schooling

[18] For further examples of Ndegeocello's penchant for writing about romance with evocative and diary-like detail, please see track #11, "Picture Show," from whence these semi-sexual lyrics come.

(not bullying but educating) is far too important for men to take up any space in the song, or in the video, where viewers see and hear from exactly seven women—all seven of them speak during the music video—and zero men. We've heard guys, especially white, het-, cis- guys, talk about sex, sexuality and relationships over and over (and over) again, and then a little more. Frankly, when it comes to what *he* has to say, I'm done caring. I'm only interested in hearing what Meshell Ndegeocello has to say about sexual pleasure, and how Black, androgynous, and LGBTQ+ women can both enjoy and inspire it. It's girl-talk time now.

Tori Amos: "Precious Things"

In contrast to Meshell Ndegeocello and Liz Phair, Tori Amos isn't as eager to express her own sexual desire as she is driven to expose the voyeuristic and exploitative nature of men's sexuality as constructed under Christian heteropatriarchy. Any expression of Amos' own sexual arousal on *Little Earthquakes*—an album that tackles sexual assault and rape head-on—is tempered by Amos' wariness of male promiscuity and violence. [19] Amos understands that patriarchy constrains and complicates women's arousal, desire, and sexual freedom, and she conveys this grim reality by queering confessional, girl-to-girl sleepover talk.

On "Precious Things," *Little Earthquake*s' fourth track, Tori (not Amos, just Tori) sings to the listener like they are a close friend to whom she is telling a scary sleepover story that doubles as an intimate confession about her own life, and ultimately exposes male dickery and Christian patriarchy's implication in it. As she packs on the gossip, melodrama, and creep factor, Amos reveals what girls are *really* talking about and tells a ghost story with a moral: There's

[19] See the following chapter for an in-depth discussion of sexual assault in *Little Earthquakes*.

almost nothing scarier than white, Christian boys who believe that they are Jesus and might grow into rapists.[20]

The ghoulishness begins before Amos even opens her mouth—in my initial listen of "Precious Things," I actually mistook the track for Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* from *The Exorcist* score. The high-pitched minor piano chords, played in staccato, sound almost identical to the 1973 soundtrack of one film's most bloodcurdling horror movies. Amos pairs *The Exorcist* sound-alike with an offbeat panting noise that sounds like someone who is running away, frightened, and rapidly losing stamina (Lankford Jr. 133).

Which makes sense—the first words out of Amos' mouth are "So I ran faster / But it caught me here." It is fitting that Amos starts her spooky song with "so," because that's how *so* many of my girlfriends begin their scary stories, which are usually about guys (or girls) who left them haunted, or at least ghosted them on social media. And as for the unidentified "it" that catches Amos, even as she runs "faster"—that's the stuff of great ghost story openings. So, what is this mysterious and macabre beast that chases Amos? In a 1999 interview for VH1 storytellers, Amos suggested that "it" was her aging grandmother:

> [She] was convinced that I was gonna give my soul to God and my body to a man that I would marry….At five years old I knew that we were enemies, so in my mind I was always trying to find ways to get away from this creature….I started to really think that maybe just one day, I could run faster.

Amos is getting metaphorical here. It's not *really* her grandmother from whom she's running, but the damaging set of ideals and norms with which her grandmother attempted to endow her. Notably, "it" is *not* "she," "he," or "they," and therefore not human. "It" is a monster, and

[20] Professor Elías Krell's WMST 375 Senior Seminar, which centers theorizing through the occult (including Avery Gordon's hauntology), was central to my thinking throughout this section.

specifically, the monster of Christian, heteropatriarchal norms of courting, dating, marriage, and sex. These “precious things,” prevalent in white, conservative, and Christian communities, teach girls to physically and romantically desire members of the “opposite sex”; wear “nine-inch nails and little fascist panties” for the pleasure of boys, as Amos sing-screams in the bridge; and *simultaneously* act virtuous, chaste and obedient. If they “succeed,” they’ll earn marriage to, and reproduction with, a husband who “rules” the house, is encouraged to experience and act upon (aggressive) sexual desire, and is liable to sexually manipulate, exploit, or assault them.

The sinister beast of Christian heteropatriarchy effectively possesses Amos in the proceeding lines:

> Yes my loyalties turned
> Like my angle
> In the seventh grade
> Running after Billy
> Running after the rain.

Billy, the prepubescent schoolboy, is exactly the type of “Christian boy” to whom Christian patriarchy would like Amos to marry and lose her virginity (in that order), and as Amos’ “loyalties” to her own free-spirited feminism “turn,” so too does the “ankle” that supported her—when Amos chases self-absorbed and insolent Christian boys and, by extension sexuality, she trips. And that’s just the tip (trip?) of the iceberg when it comes to Amos physically suffering at the hands of patriarchy on *Little Earthquakes*, where Christian boys grow into sex offenders.[21]

Come the second verse, Amos does what patriarchy would like to think is at the top of every “good” girl’s sleepover agenda: Talking about boys, “dressing up” for them, gazing longingly at their yearbook photo. In short, sexless and submissive displays of their compulsory

[21] See the next two chapters for a further discussion of the themes outlined in this paragraph.

heterosexuality (Rich). But just like Liz Phair when she queers the stereotypical good girl's diary entry, Amos seriously screws with sleepover-speak stereotypes:

> He said 'You're really an ugly girl'
> But I like the way you play
> And I died
> But I thanked him
> Can you believe that?
> Sick, sick
> Holding onto his picture
> Dressing up every day

In this moment, Amos exposes the absurdity of the expectation that girls should sexually and romantically worship haughty and rude boys who give nothing but backhanded compliments about their piano-playing prowess. Amos confesses to doing exactly this—even though, ironically, Christian tradition would send her to confession for *not* desiring Christian boys—and it's "sick, sick," and she knows it.

Amos' characterization of her desire for Christian boys as "sick," or perverted, is the antithesis of Ndegeocello's and Phair's treatment of female sexual desire, which they consider *natural* and *healthy*. This is not to say that Amos considers *all* female and heterosexual desire warped. But when a woman's desire is passive, pleading, and a result of her conservative Christian upbringing, she's got a problem, and patriarchy is to blame. This becomes clearer when Amos asks her sleepover friends—in this case, the listener—"Can you believe that?" She's checking in, punctuating her story, making sure I'm still listening (I am), and imploring me to acknowledge the old feminist addage that choice is always constrained under patriarchy.

Amos' most explicit declaration of sexual arousal on *Little Earthquakes*—which immediately transforms into poignant Amosian vengeance—comes in the second verse, when a snarling Amos confesses,

> I want to spit in the faces

Of those beautiful boys
Those Christian boys
So you can make me come
That doesn't make you Jesus!

Amos articulately and purposefully punctuates every syllable until she arrives at "Jesus" and lingers there ("Je-e-suuus"), at which point drums take over the syllabic punctuation. It's as though everything—her cumming, some chauvinistic Christian boy making her, his arrogance growing as a result—was Jesus Christ's fault. While a self-deprecating Amos may still be sorting through her own confusions and insecurities, Billy—and a slew of other Christian boys—had better sleep with one eye open (unless they're deflecting spit), and *without* Amos, or any girl at her sleepover, in their bed. After all, Amos is in the process of cleansing herself of "these precious things;" as she chants in the chorus, during which a rock n' roll drum beat duets with the staccato concert piano, "Let them bleed / Let them wash away...Let them break / Their hold on me." The days of "precious things" possessing Amos are numbered as she exorcises them through confessional girl talk and scary sleepover stories.

By queering diaries and sleepover speak with carefully crafted confessions about her personal ordeals, Amos metaphorically illuminates the oppressive nature of sexual double standards and compulsory heterosexuality. Ndegeocello likewise resists oppressive sexual standards—namely, the hierarchies that dictate who may desire whom—via girl talk that doubles as therapeutic catharsis. All the while, she pushes men into the background and allows women, particularly women of color, to step into the limelight. In addition to chatting with fellow females both in song and onstage, Liz Phair reveals the reality of female sexual desire by using detail that is explicit (in every sense of the word) and diary-like—just like Amos does in "Me and a Gun," her poignant testimony as a survivor of rape.

Chapter 2

"Yes, I wore a slinky red thing / Does that mean I should spread?"

Unmasking Sexual Violence and Resisting Rape Culture

An estimated 75% of sexual assaults went unreported in the 1990s, and despite the #MeToo movement, the percentage hasn't budged today (U.S. Dept. of Justice, "The Criminal," Kimble). The reasons for silence range from feelings of shame and guilt in a society that disbelieves and blames survivors, to a pervasive rape culture that normalizes sexual violence. (Queens College, Taub). Women of color, fearful of "betraying" already marginalized members of their own race, are especially likely to remain quiet (Eligon). There is perhaps a greater stigma associated with speaking out against sexual assault than there is committing sexual violence.

In the face of societal muzzling, Tori Amos, Liz Phair, and Meshell Ndegeocello sing bravely about sexual assault, speaking their—and their abusers'—truths from Girl World. They forge solidarity with fellow women, both among their fanbases and, particularly in the cases of Phair and Ndegeocello, within the songs themselves. Phair disavows and wreaks vengeance on rape culture through confessional girl talk with an unlikely female counterpart—Mother Mary—and Ndegeocello stands up for her Black sisters as she pulls men directly into Girl World, calling them out not only on their abuse, but also their neglect. In the first single off *Little Earthquakes* and arguably one of the most famous and forthright songs written about sexual assault, Amos offers a diary-like account of her experience as a survivor of rape and engages in girl talk to explicitly invoke religion ("Songs," Ranker). Taken together, their songs elucidate how sexual violence functions in a U.S. context, with Phair revealing the everyday male impudence and entitlement that breeds rape culture; Amos pulling the listener into the moment of rape engendered by that very culture; and Ndegeocello underscoring how sexual violence uniquely and disproportionately affects women of color.

Tori Amos: "Me and a Gun"

> In the song I say it was 'Me and a Gun' but it wasn't a gun. It was a knife he had. The idea was to take me to his friends and cut me up, and he kept telling me that, for hours. And if he hadn't needed more drugs I would have been just one more news report, where you see the parents grieving for their daughter. And I was singing hymns, as I say in the song, because he told me to I sang to stay alive. Yet I survived that torture, which left me urinating all over myself and...paralyzed for years (Staff).
>
> —Tori Amos

"Me and a Gun" is poignant and deeply affecting because Amos writes the song—which tells the story of the rape she endured at 21 years old after performing in a bar—like an intimate diary entry. It's a detailed, therapeutic, confessional and moment-by-moment playback of sexual violence and, more importantly, *exactly* what Amos was thinking (Violanti). Amos gives no airtime to her rapist (What did he say? Look like? Why did he rape her?) but instead places her own thoughts, those of the survivor, in the limelight. By doing so, Tori Amos centers her own lived experience—it's *her* diary, after all—in a society that often ignores, or disbelieves the testimony of rape survivors, blaming the survivor or painting rape as consensual. Amos sings "Me and a Gun" *a cappella*, which drives home the diary-ness of the song. As articulated by journalist Anthony Violanti, "There is no guitar, no piano and no place to hide." Instead, it's just Tori Amos and her diary, exactly as she wrote it, singing directly to you, the listener.

A long history of white men purporting that "lascivious" Black women invited unwanted sexual encounters subtends Amos's privilege as a white woman who is more likely than women of color to be believed by a white supremacist and patriarchal U.S. audience (Jennings). Amos' whiteness offers some historically secured assurance that the listener will be concerned about her well-being in "Me and a Gun." Nevertheless, the track speaks bravely of sexual assault and, in so doing, reveals the power of both diary-like and girl-talk songwriting.

Amos delineates "the things that go through your head when there's a man on your back and you're pushed flat on your stomach," as she sings in the third verse, momentarily placing "you," the listener, in her high heels, before switching back to first person because this story is not actually about "you," but about her. She thinks: *I haven't seen Barbados, so I must get out of this*. *That's not a classic Cadillac. Do you know Carolina, where the biscuits are soft and sweet?* She could have spoken in metaphors or abstractions as she often does, or she could have embellished or dramatized "the things that go through your head." Instead, Amos writes a realistic account of her experience as someone who was raped. Since listeners read Amos' diary and experience the story from a survivor-centered perspective, even those from within the "she was asking for it" discourse are encouraged to share Amos' viewpoint (Sollée 104-106).

In the second verse, Amos asks, "Yes, I wore a slinky red thing / Does that mean I should spread?" literally spreading out the syllables of "spread" so that you, the listener, begin to envision the moment of assault. Amos' lyrics demonstrate that she is aware of what she was wearing, and that she is also aware of the victim-blaming discourse that would shift the responsibility of her violation to her and her sartorial choices. Her intimate, diary-like writing invites the listener in to relate to her, a rhetorical choice that lessens the chance of them identifying with rape culture and perpetrators of sexual assault.

"Me and a Gun" also illuminates the potential of "girl talk" to engage the listener and vividly indict sexual assault and Christian patriarchy. The girl-talk starts in the first verse, where Amos describes her post-rape hours in diary-like detail: It's 5 a.m. Friday morning. Gas tank is full. She has "some chips." And she "can't go home. *Obviously* [emphasis mine]." Obviously, indeed. Amos' rapist could be following her ("I'll just change directions / cause they'll soon know where I live"), and even if he's not, she needs to process the experience. Later on, Amos acknowledges that the thoughts she's delineating might seem surprising or quirky, offering,

> You can laugh
> It's kind of funny
> The things you think
> In times like these.[22]

Her use of a colloquial expression ("you can laugh"), followed by "kind of" underscores the tragedy and gravity of the situation; the juxtaposition of laughter with sexual assault is deeply affecting. *Of course* you shouldn't laugh, but the moment feels so intimate, uncomfortable, and unexpected—sexual assault is something that, under patriarchy, you just don't talk about—that the listener needs that in-the-moment check-in with Amos to re-center and re-focus. Amos pulls you closer to her, right before her essential rhetorical question, where she reminds you that "a slinky red thing" does not mean that she—or any woman—is "asking for it."

In the bridge, Amos recounts, in girl-talk style, her chat with Jesus Christ:

> Me and Jesus a few years back
> Used to hang and he said
> 'It's your choice babe, just remember
> I don't think you'll be back
> In 3 days' time, so you choose well'
> Tell me what's right, is it my right?
> To be on my stomach of Fred's Seville.

[22] Once again, note Amos' use of second person: Momentarily, "you're" wearing Amos' high heels.

Given *Little Earthquakes*' implication of Christian heteropatriarchy in sexual assault, Amos' recurrence to Jesus, and her "girly," conversational style of interaction with Him, prove notable. Instead of praying to Jesus for comfort, or forgiveness for "wearing a slinky red thing" (as her childhood church may have advised), Amos contemplates this cisgender male God's utility in helping her process a trauma that disproportionately affects women—particularly when His religion purports that men reign over women. And Amos doesn't hold back the girl talk just because Jesus himself has entered the picture; she brings him into her human, feminine, and girls-to-the-front world, instead of allowing him to remain godly, masculine, and all-mighty. Welcome to Girl World, Jesus, where you "hang" with Tori Amos, whom you call "babe," and who asserts herself against you, girl talk and all, when you become a complete jerk. Amos questions Jesus' apparent choice feminism, asking him, Is it my choice and right to commit suicide? Was it my choice and right to be raped? Her questions scream, "Where were you when it was me and a gun and a man on my back? Why the hell are you only showing up now? And do you have anything more productive to say than 'suicide is a sin'?"

The tension during the Jesus-Amos exchange is heightened by the rapist's forcing Amos to sing "Holy Holy" while "he buttoned down his pants," which is a hyperbolization of her childhood trauma under Christian heteropatriarchy. Throughout girlhood, Amos tried to escape "these precious things," but they "catch" her even in adulthood, creeping directly and intimately into the moment where her vulnerability and oppression as a woman is laid bare.

Anthony Violanti's 1992 feature "Tori Amos' Self-Respect: Singer Shakes Up the Music World With Her Brutally Honest Work," which focuses on "Me and a Gun," provides an opportunity to reclaim subtly sexist (though well-intended) critical literature via a diary analysis. In the article, Violanti characterizes Amos' writing process as "therapeutic" and describes a live performance of “Me and a Gun”: “Her wounded voice is horrific and chilling...she is alone and fragile, just as she was on that long-ago night when she was raped.” According to Violanti, “The meshing of [Amos’] art and life is most apparent when she sings ‘Me and a Gun’ on stage.”

At first glance, the article, as well as its title, threaten to erase the structural underpinnings of Amos’ tragedies. Violanti’s melodramatic language carries more than a twinge of sensationalism, and then there’s the trusty (and patronizing) old characterization of women’s songwriting as “therapeutic” and enmeshed with “[personal] life,” as if 1 in every 6 women doesn’t endure sexual assault each year (“Victims”). And yes, Tori Amos is “brutally honest,” but the description’s proximity to “self-respect” implies that she’s dishing dirt about her personal foibles, as opposed to spilling tea about patriarchy. When a Girl World lens is applied, however, Violanti’s analysis actually underscores the power of “Me and a Gun.” After all, in Girl World, women’s “wounds” make women warriors; overt “fragility” and vulnerability are fuel for exposure of and resistance to damaging structural forces, particularly patriarchy; and writing about lived experience creates poignant songs. In the words of Amos,

> That night was all about mutilation, more than violence through sex. I really do feel as though I was psychologically mutilated that night and that now I’m trying to put the pieces back together again. Through love, not hatred. And through my music. My strength has been to open again, to life, and my victory is the fact that, despite it all, I kept alive my vulnerability (Amos in Storkey).

“Vulnerability” is a “victory” in Girl World, where patriarchy doesn’t stifle emotion. Amos notes, "We're taught to look to the outside; we look to others and ask, 'What do you think?' instead of what I feel” (Violanti). There’s nothing wrong with thinking, but there is a lot wrong with the male/thinking vs. female/feeling binary, particularly when patriarchy devalues the latter.

When women process their distinctly female experiences, patriarchy teaches them to seek answers from "others," namely men, whose alleged logic is not clouded by "feminine emotion"– even when the tragedy that require processing results from the wrongdoing of the very man to whom she defers. Girl World creates a girls-only diary space. It's just a woman, a pen and a blank page, and she is allowed to feel and process her feelings, which are powerful in and of themselves *and* often lead to action. As Amos explained, "Musicians have a responsibility....to be the conscience of the masses....to speak the truth, whatever it is" (Violanti). That responsibility starts on the diary page.[23]

Liz Phair: "Help Me Mary"

In "Help Me Mary," the second track on *Exile in Guyville*, Liz Phair exposes, condemns, and wreaks revenge on the culture that normalizes rape. She does this through prayer, which may sound preposterous—after all, Phair's lyrics could fill an A-Z Book of Swear Words—but Phair is trapped in Guyville, and praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary might be her best bet for girl-talk time.

Notably, sexual violence and, by extension, rape culture disproportionately and uniquely effect women of color.[24] As with "Flower," Phair, who creates from a position of white privilege, does not explicitly engage race. Despite the limitations of "Help Me Mary," the track paints a poignant picture of a (white) woman's experience under a regime of rape culture as Phair claps back at the second track on *Exile in Mainst.*, "Rip This Joint."

[23] Besides exposing sexual assault through music, Amos is a founding member of RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), for which she has served as a spokesperson for over 25 years. RAINN is the largest nonprofit anti-sexual assault organization in the U.S.
[24] For further information on women of colors' experience with sexual assault, see above and below sections.

On "Rip This Joint," The Rolling Stones "roll into town," wreak havoc on the local women, "raise hell," and "don't give a damn"—actually, they seem exceedingly proud of their hypermasculine joint ripping. When she wrote "Help Me Mary," Liz Phair was having some trouble with the Rolling Stones' 90s counterparts or, as she refers to them, "the rock guys that would just kind of *roll into town* [emphasis mine]...sleep with other people's girlfriends and leave a big mess behind" (Spanos). Phair hosted some of these "spontaneous" parties and let the strung-out dudes crash on her couch, but she didn't enjoy it: "[I think about] how just hidden my real self was in that male scene. There weren't that many women in the scene and, like, everybody either was like a girlfriend or a den mother" (Spanos). Because we're in Girlville, Liz Phair removes herself from the position of the object who's present solely to serve up sex and drinks for men's pleasure. Instead, she centers the female experience—not the experience men would like to *think* that women have—and wreaks vengeance on Mick and Co., and their 90s reincarnations, with help from one of the most famous women in Western canon: Mary the Virgin.

In the beginning of the song, the "rock dudes" shacking up with Liz Phair don't seem *that* bad. Sure, they imbibe and leave suspicious stains in her sink, but my roommates do that too, and I live with civil young people, none of whom are cis men. Then Phair offers a sinister simile to describe how the "rock dudes" treat her: "They play me like a pitbull in a basement," Phair snarls. Pitbulls, statistically among the most abused and neglected dogs in the U.S., are infamously chained in basements and thrown into brutal dog fights (Admin). Combine the pitbull simile with Phair's other grievances—"they make rude remarks about me / they wonder just how wild I would be / as they egg me on and keep me mad"—and it's time to file a restraining order. What these guys are doing to Phair is probably some combination of sexual objectification;

misogynist taunts and catcalls; coercion to dress “slutty”; and sex where Phair didn’t explicitly affirm “yes” but didn’t necessarily say “no” either. After all, Phair chose to host the party (similar to Amos’ choice to wear a “slinky red thing”), so doesn’t that double as an open invitation to do whatever the hell they want in the name of fun? In short, Liz Phair is living under a regime of rape culture that parades around under the guise of an epic month-long rager, emphasized by the song’s upbeat tempo and perky guitar riffs.

So how does Liz Phair respond? Ostensibly, her rape-culture regime survival tactics comprise of hiding in her own home (“I lock my door at night”); passivity and silence (“I keep my mouth shut tight”); and jaded acquiescence to their sexual demands:

> I practice all my moves
> I memorize their stupid rules
> I make myself their friend
> I show them just how far I can bend

Liz Phair leads listeners to believe that, when Mick Jagger and co. demand “Kiss me quick, baby, won't cha make my day” and “Let me in, sweetie, to your fair land,” she purses her lips, opens her legs, prepares to show off all those gymnast sex moves she rehearsed—and rolls her eyes the entire time. Unsurprisingly, the rock dudes aren’t satisfied no matter how far Liz Phair bends; they continue to egg her on, keep her mad, and play her like a pitbull in a basement. She emphatically punctuates the “bay” of “BAY-sement,” hinting that she might not be as resigned as her monotone mumble purports.

Of course, she has ulterior plans. In the final 40 seconds, the drums slow, the chords change, and Liz Phair’s voice lowers as she brings back Mary. Phair hasn’t spoken Mary’s name since the third word of the song, but since this song is an extended prayer to the virgin goddess herself, she never really left. Mary is prepared to help Liz Phair wreak vengeance on the stealing, stereo-bullying, sink-staining guys of Guyville. Phair sings,

I'm asking you, Mary, please
Temper my hatred with peace
Weave my disgust into fame

Then the drums and tempo pick back up, and an uncharacteristically emphatic Liz Phair sings: "And watch how fast they run to the flame."

There's no outro, no return to the refrain, no more playing women in basements like pitbulls. Party over. Done, after the final words, "Watch how fast they run to the flame."

Everything that Liz Phair sang in the preceding two minutes takes on a new meaning because the guys aren't playing her like a pitbull in a basement. She's playing them. Phair is demonstrating her capacity to "take full advantage of every man I meet," long before boasting about it nine songs later on "Girls! Girls! Girls!" (where she sings in the chorus, "I get away / almost every day / with what the girls call...murder"). Five minutes into her first album, Liz Phair takes "full advantage" of men's preoccupation with female sexuality by luring them in with her "moves." She feigns passivity just long enough to make the men comfy, before breaking their hearts, or kicking them out on their butts *and then* making them foot the cleaning bill (plus hefty interest), or biting them in the balls come bedtime—and then she writes a song about it, exposing to the world the joint rippers' misdeeds and, by extension, rape culture. "Weave my disgust into fame"? Check.

As I suggested above, Liz Phair isn't taking sole credit for the fame, nor the flame. Mary's semi-disappearance and conspicuous reappearance, not to mention her titular prominence, emphasize the reality that Phair has another woman by her side the entire time. And not just any woman, but Mary, The Blessed Virgin, Mother of Jesus. (Let's just call her "Mary," because I become miffed when the world defines women by their sexuality or relationship to men, and I bet Liz Phair does, too.) *Exile in Guyville* contains few overt religious references, and

Phair's religious invocation is probably a response to the Rolling Stones' promising women, "Gonna save your soul" in the first chorus of "Rip This Joint." On the contrary, the guys of Guyville are not going to save Liz Phair's soul. But neither is Jesus. Nor God *Him*self. Mary is. Specifically, she's going to advise Liz Phair in the art of saving herself *herself*, and maybe some other women in the process. After all, we're in Girl World, where women pray to and empower other women.

Liz Phair spends the majority of the song reporting her lived experience with rape culture to Mary. Is she reaching out to Mary—again, not Jesus, not God, not even a female friend—because she believes that Mary herself has been *there*, ravaged by rape culture, before? Does "Help Me Mary" suggest that Jesus' conception was not actually immaculate, and transpired under circumstances similar to those that drove Phair to pray to Mary? Or, maybe Mary weaved her own disgust with sexual double standards into "fame" by non-immaculately conceiving Jesus *on her own terms* and proceeding to watch how fast billions of people worldwide ran—and continue to run—to the flame. Whatever did or didn't happen thousands of years ago, Liz Phair invocation of the Blessed "Virgin" in a song about rape culture represents the threat that female conversations hold to sexual assault, as they report it to one another, and resist it together.

Jessica Hopper writes: "If [*Exile* in Guyville] was [Phair's] answer to [*Exile on Mainst.*], then, as Robert Christgau once suggested in reviewing Prince, Mick Jagger should fold up his penis and go home" ("Review"). After hearing "Help Me Mary," Mick Jagger and all the guys of Guyville, would do well to heed the wise warning of Jessica Hopper—and, by extension, Liz Phair and Mary. Boys, fold 'er up, walk back to Main St., and never underestimate the power of girlvillian girl talk, even if it's with an alleged virgin who died approximately 2016 years ago.

Meshell Ndegeocello: "Soul on Ice"

While Tori Amos and Liz Phair indict non-consensual sexual encounters, Ndegeocello articulates the violence of being ignored by Black men, and watching her Black "sisters," as she refers to fellow Black women, experience the same neglect. In her interview with Wiser, quoted above, Meshell Ndegeocello poses an astute question to the popular girls from "ITYB" who slut-shamed her for going to bed with their boyfriend: "Why aren't you berating *him*?" It's a valid inquiry; Why do girls always berate other girls, and not guys, when men misbehave? In "Soul on Ice," while Ndegeocello doesn't engage directly in girl talk, per se, she does speak on behalf of her Black sisters, who have her back as she brings Black and white men into the epicenter of "girliness:" Female beauty standards.

Ndegeocello has no problem "berating" the guys when her Black, Brooks Brothers suit-wearing "brother" callously ignores her and her Black sisters, with whom she stands in solidarity, instead "defiling" white women.[25] A rightfully indignant Ndegeocello hurls at him, "I have psychotic dreams, your jism in a white chalk line." Which is the poetic equivalent of "I have psychotic dreams, your balls cut off." The "white" is also notable—yes, back in the day, police outlined dead bodies with white chalk, but the image of "jism in a white chalk line" offers a metaphor for how whiteness encircles, traps, and infiltrates Black man's sexuality and sexual preferences.[26] As a result of whiteness, Mr. Brooks Bros. misused his sexuality, and now he's going to pay. Meshell Ndegeocello is *done* with her Black brother's sexism and internalized racism, and even more done with the racism and misogyny of white men. After all, had Mr.

[25] A note on Ndegeocello's word choice: She's not "othering" or objectifying Black men, even as they objectify women. Instead, they're her "brothers," just like the Black women are her "sisters." In Girl World, humans are not objects.

[26] Also notable is the image of (white) policeman as chalk artist, connoting a racist police force that disproportionately incarcerates and kills men of color.

Brooks Bros. not been “indoctrinated and convinced by the white racist standard of beauty,” he might not be objectifying women of *both* races.

Mr. Brooks Brothers is not one specific guy. Instead, he is a stand-in for the infinite number of Black men who internalize both white, racist beauty standards *and* patriarchy (the latter is inextricably linked to the former) and develop a “soul on ice.” In “Soul on Ice,” Ndegeocello illuminates the damaging impact of female beauty standards on her Black brothers, who might very well claim that female beauty is strictly women’s business. By plunging masculine-presenting men into the “feminine” world of racist “cover girls and clairol ads”—which would exclude Ndegeocello not only because of her Blackness but also her androgynous presentation—Ndegeocello proves that the “trivial” and “superficial” sphere of female beauty intimately affects men of all races. So, when she kicks off the song with, “We've been indoctrinated and convinced by the white racist standard of beauty / The overwhelming popularity of seeing, better off being, and looking white,” Ndegeocello means “we” as in *everyone*—men included.

The ensuing lines underscore that “we” and invite Black male into the female experience: “My brothers attempt to defy the white man's law and his system of values / Defiles his white woman, but my my, Master's in the slave house again.” To resist racism and white supremacist culture, or “defy the white man’s law and his system of values,” as Ndegeocello theorizes, he vies with white men for “their” white women.[27] Notably, Ndegeocello could be saying “defile,” sarcastically. She understands the tragic reason why it “used to be customary to bow one’s eyes at the sight of a white face,” as she emphatically raps later on in the song. If you’re a Black man (or boy) who so much as looks a white woman in the eye, she might falsely accuse you of

[27] The possessive implies ownership, which is particularly interesting on an album with a title that connotes slavery.

“defilement,” as in the case of Emmett Till, the Scottsboro Boys, the Central Park Five (convicted just four years prior to the *Plantation Lullabies’* release)… (Harris, Costantini). Indeed, there is a long history of white women falsely accusing Black men of inappropriate sexual attention and rape, and Black men’s ensuing incarceration and/or brutal murder at the hands of white people.

Ndegeocello is also referring, however, to female objectification. Although many Black men fall for women who happen to be white, Ndegeocello illuminates the possibility that some Black men woo white women as a calculated response to white men’s racist fear of miscegenation, as well a ticket into their club of white, upper-middle class masculinity. In the second verse, she quips, “Excuse me, does *your* [emphasis mine] white woman go better with the Brooks Brothers suit?” which is both snarky and sad. Mr. Brooks Brothers views “his” white women not as an autonomous agent with value in and of herself, but instead as a mere accessory that looks snazzy with his suit. She is an object (underscored by Ndegeocello’s use of the possessive “your”) in the white, upper-middle class aesthetic he’s trying to achieve by shelling out upwards of $700 for a suit associated with the white bourgeoisie. Whoever said “masculine” men don’t care about clothes and accessories didn’t know anything about race, class, and gender.

As Black (and white) men seek to accessorize with white women, they render Black women at best invisible and at worst vulnerable to sexual assault. In author Tracy Curtis’ *New Media in Black Women’s Autobiography*, Curtis examines “Soul on Ice,” paying particular attention to the lyric, “My brothers attempt to defy the white man's law...Defiles his white woman, but my my, Master's in the slave house again.” She surmises that Ndegeocello is taking a swing at Black men’s inability to “protect” Black women from white men (the “masters in the slave house”) because they’re distracted by winning over white women. According to Curtis, “The lyrics speak not of outright abuse by Black men but instead of a long-standing and constant neglect...the effect [of racism and sexism] on black women is the worst; they are not seen at all.” Curtis’ analysis illuminates Black women’s invisibility to Black men who have internalized white racism. When Black men “let [their] sisters go by,” turning up their noses at Black women, they ignore their outer *and* inner beauty (excuse the cliché), not to mention their potential as romantic and sexual partners. As Ndegeocello summarizes, “You no longer burn for the motherland brown skin / You want blond-haired, blue-eyed soul / Snow white passion without the hot comb.”

Black men’s identification with white men and women over their Black sisters also creates barriers to racial solidarity. Black women don’t need Black men to fight against racism *for* them, but they would appreciate Black men fighting for racial justice *alongside* them. Instead, Black men prioritize their own liberation, often at the expense of Black women. For example, African American studies professor Devon W. Carbado explains how many Black men “are perceived to be *significantly* more vulnerable and *significantly* more ‘endangered’ than Black women” (337). When Black men commit domestic abuse and sexual assault against Black women, the latter experience particular pressure and coercion *not* to “report their [endangered] Black men” —the “quintessential” (quotes mine) oppressed Americans—by reporting the violence (Carbado 338). Instead of forging racial solidarity by respecting and valuing Black women, men place the burden of unity on them, even after they have abused and violated them. Notably, this abuse often results from racism from their lack of power and relative emasculation under white supremacist America; they have to feel control over *something*, so they turn to the only “others” over whom patriarchy does afford them control: Black women (Carbado 347-348).

In short, racist patriarchy pushes women of all races to the margins, where they're ignored, unless they're being objectified, assaulted, and raped. And this is why the girls-to-the-front-and-center world that Meshell Ndegeocello, Tori Amos, and Liz Phair create on their albums is so transgressive, powerful, and important.

Perhaps the most striking feature of "Soul on Ice" is Ndegeocello's repeated assertion that there are "*Illusions* of her virginal white beauty dancing in your head." Ndegeocello insists, time and time again, "it's just an illusion," and "all an illusion," using production to distort the sound so that her vocals sound otherworldly, unreal, and, well, like an illusion. That one word—illusion—says so much. White women's virginity? That's an illusion, because virginity is a social construct. White women? Also an illusion, because race is an illusion, and so is gender (Pounder). Even if it weren't, female sexual standards are actually hypocritical double standards, achievement of which is impossible, as Amos expresses (Foster). Mr. Brooks Brothers spends his days desperately chasing something that never actually existed, and he damages women, as well as himself, in the process. None of this is to say that virginity, race, and gender don't matter. On the contrary, they form society's foundation, because much of the world has created and contorted them to oppress, to rape, to murder. But they're illusions, nonetheless.

As Ndegeocello reveals the illusory nature of the beautiful, feminine, and white virgin, she stands in solidarity with her sisters and brings Black men into Girl World, all the while asserting herself in the face of Black men who objectify, and potentially abuse, her and her sisters. Liz Phair also forges solidarity with a fellow female, confessing to Mary and seeking her guidance in wreaking revenge on the rock dudes who perpetuate rape culture. Like Phair, Amos engages in girl talk with a legendary religious figure, Jesus, as she offers a courageous and survivor-centered account of rape with the detail of a diary entry. In the following section, Amos once again uses diary detail, as well as girl talk— this time with another woman—to illuminate the role that female beauty standards play in perpetuating sexual violence.

Chapter 3

"The child in her womb can hear the tears / That the Black man cries":

Redefining Beauty Standards and Inviting Men to Girl World

"All the girls walk by / dressed up for each other," sings Van Morrison in his 1971 hit "Wild Night."[28] Morrison might be a six-time Grammy winner, but he got Girl World all wrong. (As often happens when white, cisgender men write songs about women.) It's true that girls don't *always* dress up to attract men; they might be trying to compete with or attract other girls. But most of the U.S.'s pervasive female beauty standards—fair skin, a slender physique, high heels, "nine-inch nails and little fascist panties" — were originally patriarchy's brainchild, even if the women who strive to look like models do so for themselves (or mistakenly think they do). As Ndegeocello's "Soul on Ice" proves, female beauty standards are not the frivolous and feminine property of Girl World—instead, they are inextricably linked to Guyville.

In what follows, I show how these women's Girl World-grounded writing reveals the oppression and racism of beauty standards, as well as how expectations of both feminine and masculine appearance intimately affect men, for whom these women express a degree of empathy. In "Mother," Tori Amos engages in intergenerational girl talk to expose how achieving white standards of feminine beauty can endanger the independence and even lives of young women. Despite her ambivalence toward men throughout "Mother" (and much of *Little Earthquakes*), Amos suggests the power of men's genuine emotion in "Tear in your Hand," where she shares intimate details about a breakup. Phair, for her part, again queers diary writing, this time to explore men's physical appearance and ultimately illuminate their plight under patriarchy. Oppressive female beauty standards are a central theme throughout *Plantation*

[28] In 1994, Ndegeocello actually covered "Wild Night" with John Mellencamp.

Lullabies, where, as a result of her multiply marginalized positionality, Ndegeocello delves deeper into men's experience than do the relatively privileged Phair and Amos. Ultimately, Ndegeocello advocates inviting men, particularly Black men, into Girl World, where they learn to accept both the beauty of Blackness and their own emotions.

Tori Amos: "Mother" and "Tear in your Hand"

There's a premium on (illusory) white female virginity, and Meshell Ndegeocello knows it, and so does Tori Amos. In fact, "*Illusions* [emphasis mine] of her virginal white beauty dancing in your head" is precisely the sentiment Tori Amos articulates throughout *Little Earthquakes*, where she personifies the illusory nature of virginal white beauty through her depiction of female beauty. By using diary-like detail throughout the album, Amos conjures the image of a hyperfeminine and intricately made-up white girl who dons a sparkly princess dress and frilly ribbons in her hair—and is prepared at any moment to strip down to the thong she's wearing beneath, or to nothing at all, either as a form of protest or the result of coercion by a male sexual predator.[29] The princess' dress is stained with blood from the cuts on her arms and hands, and there's a leg-long run in her pantyhose. Her whiteness, girlishness, and innocence prove fragile and fake in a world that teaches men *not* to take no for an answer. And even if a young woman is fortunate enough to forgo encounters with promiscuous and volatile men, she's liable to become sick of performing girly chasteness 24/7. *Little Earthquakes* might take place in a land of Disney Princesses where Amos' depicts femininity in diary-like detail, but by adding some blood, gore,

[29] It is not feminine appearance in and of itself that I am critiquing. Instead, I am problematizing the way that femininity is constructed under white supremacist patriarchy. Indeed, there is strength, power, transgression, and beauty in femininity, including a feminine aesthetic.

and boorish Christian men, Tori Amos queers normative female beauty standards and exposes their impossibility.

Perhaps the embattled and jaded princess' most poignant moment comes in "Mother," which reveals the power of both intergenerational girl talk and diary-like detail. In the first verse, Tori Amos' mother arms her daughter, military-style, for womanhood. "Tuck those ribbons under your helmet / Be a good soldier," she instructs Amos, blotting her little girl's tears because soldiers don't cry. Notably, Ndegeocello has referred to makeup as "war paint," corroborating Amos' depiction of young girl as battle-ready soldier, fighting for both a male suitor *and* physical safety (Ndegeocello in Wiser). Amos' mother pushes Amos from the "nest" and out into a dark nighttime battle, where her suitor awaits her in a green limousine. Amos' beau is only taking her dancing, but Amos has a premonition that she won't return home. "He's gonna change my name," a listless and loveless Amos predicts, imploring her mother to leave the house light on so that "I can remember where I come from."

As she sends off her child into the abyss of compulsory heterosexual romantic entanglements, "Mother" offers an astute description of Tori Amos as a "circus girl without a safety net." In depicting her daughter, Amos' mother characterizes many young ladies on the brink of womanhood. Just like circus girls, they paint their faces with makeup; sport sparkly, slinky, and sexy ensembles; and put on performances. Not with a tightrope or trapeze, but instead with seduction, sweetness, submissiveness...And heteropatriarchy applauds them. But when they earn a standing ovation—boys' sexual and romantic attention—they often fall, and there's no safety net to catch them. As generations of mothers have done, Amos' mother can make her beautiful for boys *and* even offer a bit of protection via military helmet, which she places over her daughter's "ribbons" so as not to send her out into the dark appearing *too* girlish and vulnerable. But none of that can keep her out of harm's way. Indeed, within her first cautious steps out the door ("first my left foot / then my right behind the other"), Amos' safety net begins to rip. She discovers her "pantyhose running in the cold." Her bare legs—which her mother sought to protect by covering them with hose—are already exposed to not only the nighttime chill but also male sexual aggressiveness.

Throughout *Little Earthquakes*, Tori Amos is betrayed by the white and heteronormative beauty standards that she describes in such painstaking diary detail. In "Mother," Amos wears pantyhose. They rip, and by the end of the song, she's forgotten her way home to her formerly beloved mother, against whom her suitor has "poisoned" her. In "Silent All These Years," Amos transforms into mermaid Princess Ariel and loses her ability to speak. In "Winter," Amos attempts to enter an enchanted land of pretty princesses, only to have Sleeping Beauty "trip [her] with a frown" as the white horses canter away. In "Me and a Gun," she sports "a slinky red thing." A man rapes her.

And then there's the blood. These perfect princesses keep slashing their hands and wounding their knees, and patriarchy is culpable. In "Girl"— where Amos again engages in intergenerational girl talk, this time with a not-yet-17-year-old—the "girl" tells Amos about the "cuts on my knees" from losing her virginity despite, or perhaps because of, her becoming "all that they told you." In "Tear in Your Hand," Amos sings to Mr. On-Again-Off-Again, "I cut my hands up every time I touch you." In "Mother," Amos foresees herself "dripping with blood" when she's taken her suitor's hand in marriage. In the song about gunpoint rape, there's no actual blood. But there is "a slinky *red* [emphasis mine] thing," the kind of "red thing" that men use as an excuse to make women bleed—and stop bleeding, because once a month, a lot of women *want* to bleed.

Women are also grateful for blood; after a woman has experienced coerced sex, bleeding means that she won't also experience coerced reproduction. Indeed, bleeding can be an act of protest and liberation, as it is when Amos chants "these precious things / let them *bleed* [emphasis mine] / let them wash away" (if Amos is bleeding, she is not pregnant with a Christian boy's baby) or when, in "Silent All These Years," Amos spits at a cheater, whom she hints is sexually violent, "Boy, you'd best pray that I bleed real soon." Amos holds *her* blood over his head in this candid, confessional, and cathartic declarations, once again queering the pristine princess.

Despite the abuse Amos has experienced at the hands of men, in "Tear in Your Hand," she suggests that Girlville might become a place of healing and healthy emotional expression for men who enter. Amos opens the track by oversharing about a relationship that is unequivocally on the outs. "You" —the guy about whom she writes in her diary—claims he's leaving because Amos and Charles Manson "like the same ice cream," but Amos knows that it's really "that girl," so she takes a deep breath, walks out, and reads Neil Gaiman. [30] What's notable here is the diary-entry level detail, which Amos uses to draw in the audience—she doesn't arrive at the chorus and song title until around the minute-and-a-half mark, and by that point, the listener has become emotionally invested in the relationship. Amos' confession, "You don't know the power that you have / With that tear in your hand," stands out not only because Amos finally sings the song title, but also because the listener feels engaged in the floundering romance.

This lyric is a poignant nod to men's suppressed softness on an album that generally (and rightfully) harps on men's misdeeds. It is only by crying—an emotional expression that

[30] An important note about "that girl," the song's third character: Amos declares, over and over again, that she's "just pieces of me you've never seen." Amos *could* call her a bitch, witch, whore, or slut, but this is Girlville, where girls stick together, or at least try to, and sometimes discover they actually have a lot in common. Amos complicates the idea of the other woman. She refuses to "other" her, instead focusing to fixate on their connection.

patriarchy labels soft, weak, and feminine—that this man exercises power over Amos. Not violence, nor anger, nor even general sexiness. Just sadness that the relationship is nearing its end, and the ability to express what patriarchy too often stifles in men. When they enter Girlville, men cry, and it actually affords them a degree of power. Amos' (soon-to-be-ex) beau doesn't *know*, or understand, the power of his tear because patriarchy doesn't train men, or women, to understand the strength in their emotional expression. But in Girlville, he's allowed to weep, and even though Amos is generally disgusted with him (especially when she gloriously mocks his "baby, baby babies" at the three-minute mark), she respects his unabashed emotionality. "Tear in Your Hand" symbolizes what guys gain from hanging out in Girlville, upon which Ndegeocello expands below.

Liz Phair: "Soap Star Joe" and "Explain It to Me"

For Liz Phair, empathy toward men is inextricably linked to careful study of their physical appearance and actions. In a *Rolling Stone* feature celebrating *Exile in Guyville*'s 20th birthday, music critic Rob Sheffield explained why, from his perspective, the seminal record remains relevant well into the 21st century:

> The dudes on this album could fill a 'Where are they now?' documentary. Johnny Sunshine? Probably not as hot as he used to be. The 'Fuck and Run' guy? Not doing much of either. Thanks to Liz Phair, however, they live forever as poster boys of Nineties male pattern lameness. That condition has never come close to going extinct.

Phair is able to expertly chronicle "male pattern lameness" throughout *Exile in Guyville* because she has studied men so carefully and empathically during her foray into Guyville. In contrast to

Amos, Phair spends little time singing about female beauty standards, and instead devotes her lyrical efforts to sizing up men's physical appearance and actions, and what that suggests about their minds and hearts. Here again, she flips the script, becoming the gazer and not the gazed-at.

Phair also queers diary talk again; she's writing about boys, but it's not mindless, lovestruck admiration of their hotness, as heteropatriarchy might expect of a young woman. Instead, Phair envisions "the circumstances that made [the] Guys in the Ville so morally and emotionally diffuse, so at once egotistical and numb to the effects of their actions on the women around them" (Vallese). And, as in any honest and thorough diary entry, Phair names names (see, for example, "Johnny" in "Dance of the Seven Veils"), refusing to objectify men and instead insisting on seeing them as fully human.[31]

Perhaps Phair's most talked-about *Guyville* character is thinning-haired Soap Star Joe who rocks "tight" bluejeans (or at least attempts to) and smells of aftershave. As with "Flower," Liz Phair writes about a real-life man, or at least breed of man:

> When I was in my twenties, I was always dating older men, and they would always pick me up in cars and take me to dinner. [It all felt] weirdly generic….Like, every Friday, Saturday night, someone was taking you out somewhere. I just had all these thoughts and feelings that I never shared, and it kind of came out in my songwriting (Spanos).

It is important here to note the race-, sexuality- and class-privileged position from which Phair critiques normalcy. While Ndegeocello writes about being neglected by men as she sits at the intersection of race- and sexuality-based oppression, Phair finds herself surrounded by (banal)

31 Johnny actually reappears as the abusive "Johnny Feelgood" on Phair's 1998 *whitechocolatespaceegg*, where Phair also details the misadventures of Uncle Eugene Issac Alvarez; headache-afflicted Luis; and Henry, her bartending friend.

guys who are eager to date her and, by extension, her whiteness, heterosexuality, and class privilege.

Even from her position of privilege, Phair offers an important criticism of emotionally detached older men driving younger women to dinner in the *he* picks *her* up and pays for *her* meal binary. Soap Star Joe—one of these older men—is, as Phair sings in the first lines, "just a hero in a long line of heros / Looking for something attractive to save." Indeed, Joe desperately desires to overachieve in his socially prescribed role of an esteemed, macho man's man—even if that means endangering a woman. When he's "looking for something attractive to save," that "something" is not literally a something, but instead a human being, specifically a damsel in distress. Joe *hopes* that a woman finds herself in some dire shenanigan so that he can fly in on his pick-up truck, perform a Superman-style rescue, and puff out his chest when he's done. Sexist society sets up Soap Star Joe to be the savior. Since he's a man, he "feels safe in the dark," a luxury that neither Phair nor Amos has (see "Help Me Mary" and "Me and a Gun," respectively), and Ndegeocello even less so as a Black woman. Notably, Joe's anecdote also suggests that he is white; men of color, particularly Black men, rightfully fear race-based assault, including police violence, come nightfall. As if Joe's relative disregard for female human life isn't unappealing enough, he's evidently a general nuisance as well. Phair narrates, "They say he sprung from the skull of Athena / Think about your own head and the headache he gave." In Greek mythology, Athena "sprung" from Zeus' "head," but no one emerged from Athena's. In Girl World, however, Phair queers the narrative. Athena popping out full-grown humans from her head emphasizes that it is primarily women—and not men—to whom men like Soap Star (read: Average) Joe give "headaches."

If it seems like Soap Star Joe is a masculine, know-it-all, self-absorbed, insecure, and cocky migraine of a privileged dude, that's because he probably is. But since Phair is describing him in Girlville, home of empathy and understanding, she digs deeper. Like many *Guyville* tracks, "Soap Star Joe" is, at its core, a sad song. Phair has reflected, "[I'm] skewering [Joe], but at the same time, I'm also lovingly aware of his plight in a weird way" (Spanos). Phair understands that Joe is as lonely and empty as the billboard he wants to grace. In the song's final lines, she sings

> Check out the thinning hair
> Check out the aftershave
> Check out America
> You're looking at it, babe.

Soap Star Joe represents a lot of what's wrong with America—he's a man who's roaming around the country, striving to meet unrealistic standards of white masculine heroism, seeking the reverence that patriarchy promised him, and failing miserably. Check out America, indeed.

On "Explain It to Me" —the song proceeding "Soap Star Joe" —Liz Phair explains how Soap Star Joe, and all the other guys of Guyville, wound up insufferable and pitiable. "Explain it to Me" marks a profound shift in tone: The first six songs are, for the most part, up-tempo and spirited (despite somewhat sinister subject matter), while "Explain It to Me" is downright melancholy; the drumbeat slows, guitar chords turn minor, and lyrics grow sparse as Phair backtracks to the somber moments when patriarchy left indelible and damaging marks on Guyville's guys. Phair has said of "Explain It to Me," "It's about a ruined rock hero and seeing one of your greatest figures at their weakest," and the metaphor extends to "seeing" every cisgender man at his weakest (Vallese).

Sensitivity and generosity are hallmarks of Girl World, where empathy allows women to understand that their oppression, or even lack of luck in love, does not stem from a personal failing. When Phair sings the chorus—“Tell him to jump higher / Tell him to run farther / Make him measure up ten times longer than you ever should”—she’s talking about how patriarchy pushes virtually all men to the brink of physical and emotional “toughness,” and then just a little further, at which point they inevitably snap, asserting their (toxic) masculinity by playing women “in a basement like a pitbull” or burning a cat to death in antifreeze and dumping it in a truck à la Johnny Sunshine. (Actual lyric. Poor kitty.) After all, no one is there to catch men when they fall, since they’re the ones who are supposed to be saving “something attractive.” Instead, society will merely “Watch him travel / Kiss the gravel,” as Phair sings in “Explain It to Me.” All the while, he remains with “head underwater,” sinking under the pressure of patriarchy *and* lacking in self-awareness in a society that stifles men’s genuine self-reflection (Vallese).

Meshell Ndegeocello: “Step into the Projects” and “Soul on Ice”

> I'm not going to fight my brothers; I'm going to try to stand beside them. I try to support my brothers on many terms; I cannot talk bad about them—I refuse, I refuse to. I just hope they turn around and give me the same respect, that's all. A lot of women take issue with what I have to say. To me, an issue is …. incorporating the men, who are in control of the patriarchy, into how we feel. If we separate them, they'll never know (Seigal).
>
> —Meshell Ndegeocello

Ndegeocello’s astute declaration of solidarity with her Black brothers encapsulates *Plantation Lullabies*’ overarching statement about men, particularly Black men, and their relationship with women. Ndegeocello goes further Phair and Amos in both deciphering men’s plight under patriarchy *and* proffering a remedy for icy and toxically masculine souls—she advocates for "incorporating," or inviting, men into the therapeutic realm of Girl World, where they not only learn how "we feel," but also how *they* feel by accepting Blackness as beautiful and welcoming non-sexual and comforting physical contact with women.

In contrast to Phair (and to a degree Amos), Ndegeocello doesn't write one song that criticizes men, or a man, without providing context for his jerkishness. Indeed, a crucial aspect of Ndegeocello's "therapy" is understanding *why* Black men oppress Black women, and she does just this in every *Plantation Lullabies* song. The depth of Ndegeocello's analysis stems from her embodied experience as an androgynous-presenting woman, in addition to her careful attention to race. Regarding the former, Ndegeocello might be more comfortable with masculinity than feminine-presenting Phair and Amos, who perhaps unconsciously collapse masculinity with patriarchal oppression. Ndegeocello, on the other hand, understands that masculinity is not inherently toxic, and she creates space for a healthy masculinity. Notably, Ndegeocello's embrace of masculinity might imbue her with deeper appreciation of and hope for the future of not only Black men but also men of *all* races.

In terms of Ndegeocello's racial consciousness, unlike the racially privileged Amos and Phair, Ndegeocello has lived and written extensively about the embodied experience of being Black in white supremacist U.S. In "Shoot'n up and Gett'n High," for example, Ndegeocello and her Black brother are *both* "shootin' up dope just to cope in this dehumanizing society"; they bond together in the face of *the same* white supremacy. Since Ndegeocello understands intimately the adversity faced by Black men, she understands why the oppressed transforms into the oppressor (Freire). Black women do not reap the "benefits" of gender privilege afforded to Black cisgender men, who might neglect, abuse, and objectify Black women (and, to a lesser degree, white women) as they grasp for some form of masculine capital under white men's oppressive reign. But when, in “Soul on Ice,” Ndegeocello asks, “Brother, brother, are you suffering from a social infection / misdirection?” she’s referring to the racism that oppresses Black men and women in similar ways, and privileges women like Liz Phair and Tori Amos. Meshell Ndegeocello’s positionality necessitates solidarity with her Black brothers as they battle white supremacy together, and it also allows her to identify and empathize with her Black brothers. As a result, Ndegeocello is more generous than Phair and Amos in her analysis of men’s misdeeds.

Although white supremacy renders America a living hell for Black men, that doesn’t mean they should internalize racism, stew in self-hatred, and oppress their “Black sisters,” as they do in “Soul on Ice.” Instead, they should embrace the beauty of Blackness. A male listener might write off Ndegeocello’s (or Amos’, or any other woman’s) fixation on female beauty standards as “trivial,” “vain,” or “superficial.” In fact, as I alluded to above, the notion that female beauty standards only affect women is sexist, oppressive, and patently false, particularly when considering race and class. When men enter Girl World, they learn just that. Ndegeocello masterfully articulates the blatant racism and classism of U.S. beauty standards throughout *Plantation Lullabies* and, in “Soul on Ice,” she suggests that men accepting Black women as beautiful is key to men accepting themselves. She sings, “I am a reflection of you...you can’t run from yourself,” and in the outro, “Take a look in the mirror, if you don’t love yourself…” and then her voice trails off. When Black men run from “their sisters,” they are really running from their own Blackness or, more specifically, the oppressive weight that Black skin carries under white supremacy. Instead, they should learn to love Blackness and find “beauty in [their] black skin / Amidst the Cover Girl and Clairol ads,” as Ndegeocello’s man does in “Shoot’n up and Gett’n High.”

Black men must also accept and reflect on their emotions and vulnerability, and they should not be afraid to, quite literally, cry in the arms of Black women in the process. Indeed, men must embrace physical contact, and not always of the sexual variety. In "Dred Loc," for instance, Ndegeocello sings "[I'm going to] caress and kiss your tears away," and in "Untitled," she narrates, "Her fingers stretch endlessly across into his world of pain / She loves him even though his existence is predestined to be one of…no compassion, nor is it clouded with the delusion of equality." Perhaps the most poignant moment of physical contact comes when, in "Step into the Projects," Ndegeocello describes a love fostered "right smack dab in the middle of / poverty insecurity." She sings,

> The young Black man lays his head on her young Black thighs
> So that the child in her womb can hear the tears
> That the Black man cries.

The moving image evoked by this scene illuminates the cathartic power of nonsexual affection between women and men who struggle under the same racial oppression, as Ndegeocello emphasizes the couple's Blackness by repeating "Black" three times in just a few lines. Importantly, the Black woman does not turn to the Black man for comfort or protection, as is customary in both romantic and platonic heterosexual relationships. Instead, the Black man rests *his* head on *her* lap, allowing her body to stand taller than his as "he finds love in the Blackness of her skin."

In this moment, the Black man's tears become a plantation lullaby for his unborn child. It is the man, not the woman, who serenades his soon-to-be baby with tears from inside "the projects," which symbolize the 19th-century plantations where enslaved Black people suffered, and resisted, the atrocities of racism and white supremacy. The man's "song" —inspired by his courageous vulnerability in the arms of his lover—tenderly warns the fetus about the bigotry they will face the moment they leave their mother's protective womb. As he begins to prepare his child for life under white supremacy, the Black youth models coping via emotional catharsis, as opposed to violence against oneself or others, particularly Black women. His lullaby of tears also indicates that he will not abandon his pregnant lover. Instead, he will assume responsibility for, guide, and mentor their child as they resist white supremacism. It is his willingness to cry in the arms of his lover that makes this young man kind, resilient, and strong.

Importantly, Ndegeocello is *not* suggesting that Black people's vulnerability and affection alone can cure racism and mitigate its deleterious effects on people of color (POC), nor that Black women should assume the burden of "saving" their "endangered" Black brothers. Rather, she is illuminating the therapeutic power of Black Girl World, where POC of all genders run the cathartic emotional gamut—anger, sorrow, joy, disgust, fear—as they tackle, head on, their lifelong resistance to and tragic encounters with a centuries-old institution that's designed to kill them.

Ndegeocello's multiply marginalized positionality allows her to dive deep into the experience of men and advocate for their entry into Girl World, where Blackness is beautiful and emotional vulnerability is resistance. Although Phair's understanding of men's plight is arguably less comprehensive than that of Ndegeocello, she nevertheless recognizes their frustration and desperation as they seek to achieve an unrealistic and toxic standard of white masculinity. In her diary, she refuses to scribble hearts around flattering descriptions of men, instead opting to thoughtfully examine their physical appearances, minds, and souls on songs like "Soap Star Joe." Tori Amos, for her part, employs a combination of intergenerational girl talk and diary-like detail to queer the white, pristine princess, and on "Tear in Your Hand," she acknowledges the "power" of men's genuine emotion and vulnerability.

Conclusion

Confessional Diary as Protest Anthem: The Legacy of 1990s Female Singer-Songwriters

On July 23, 2019, Taylor Swift took to Instagram Live to talk about new music, feelings, and writing. Snuggled up on a couch, punctuating her unscripted girl talk with "likes," "ums," and giggles, and occasionally becoming distracted by her new kitten (Benjamin), Swift made the Livestream feel more like an intimate FaceTime with your BFF than a pop star promoting new material (Swift). During the nearly 15-minute heart-to-heart, Swift waxed poetic about her relationship with diaries:

> I've been writing in diaries since I was 13 years old, and I've written about pretty much everything that's happened to me. And, you know, I've written my original lyrics in those diaries, [about my] feelings, lessons, things you go through. And that's been one of my ways of coping with things. I need to process life, good times and bad. And so, um, I want to show you something real quick.

Swift turned the camera to reveal no less than 30 diaries, all full, all relatively worn, and varying in design from floral and pastel pink to brown leather. She explained how each deluxe edition of her upcoming album, *Lover,* would include photocopied pages of her original diaries. As Swift prepared to reveal 17 years of diary entries to the world, she reflected,

> I've always used the metaphor of 'I open up my diary and share it with [my fans],' and the fact that [you] accept me for that is why we have such a strong bond. But this...is taking it a step further. This is like, actually doing it (Swift).

In the twenty-first century, female artists have explicitly acknowledged and embraced the label of "diary," "therapeutic," or "confessional" songwriting, from Alicia Keys in 2003, when her feminist R&B album, *The Diary of Alicia Keys,* racked up three Grammys and garnered millions of sales worldwide, to Taylor Swift in 2019. Twenty-first century women like Swift have also used these originally sexist labels to market their work and create a brand, to which the advent of social media has proven essential—artists can now engage in "girl talk" directly with their fanbases.[32]

It is the courageous and innovative art of 1990s female musicians like Tori Amos, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Liz Phair that laid the groundwork for twenty-first century women to not only smash racist heteropatriarchy with their pens and instruments but also weave femininity into the very fabric of their oeuvres, thereby elevating the feminine in a patriarchal society that prizes masculinity. By releasing music that sounds like a confessional diary, intimate outpouring of overshares, or therapy session, these women proved that female stereotypes intended to muzzle women can transform into poignant, imaginative, and carefully crafted art forms. Indeed, the very act of Amos, Ndegeocello, and Phair reading their diaries aloud unsettles patriarchy.

The emotionality of their female-centered songs boosts their transgression and defiance—overt displays of emotion are deeply courageous in a world that deems supreme stereotypically masculine stoicism, and writes off fear as "girly," anger as "bitchiness," and tears as evidence of menstruation. As they recount their confrontations with patriarchy, these women *should* express fear, anger and sadness (and everything in between), and allow their emotional expression to fuel their art, drive home their theses about structural oppression, and even move the listener to resistance. These creatives also queer both diaries and girl talk to reveal the absurdity of stereotypes about "girly" communication with the female self and fellow females. When these women do take a moment to gawk at a guy's swoopy hair or prepare for Prince Charming to sweep them off their feet, they do so with a combination of unabashed sexual desire, cynicism,

32 Notably, Swift's whiteness, heterosexuality, and socioeconomic privilege have worked to her advantage throughout her career.

dread, and resistance; as if woman-to-woman conversations didn't threaten patriarchy enough, Amos, Ndegeocello, and Phair have the audacity to denounce and dissect men's misdeeds. That said, the women of Girl World don't mercilessly bash men, nor do they gaze upon them as sex objects. In fact, Amos, Ndegeocello, and Phair empathize with men, whom they invite in to Girl World to teach them a thing or two about the healing power of unabashed emotion.

This thesis presented the case studies of female sexual desire, sexual violence, and beauty standards, linked to female empathy for men's plight under patriarchy, to demonstrate how popular music critics, as well as popular music and feminist scholars, might productively read women's music through a confessional or diary framework. I argue that music criticism should engage with feminist music in a manner that embraces the melodramatic, hyper-emotional, and therapeutic. Feminist critics and writers, including many of those cited in this thesis, have already begun to do so implicitly, from Jessica Hopper, who lauds Phair for centering "girl life," to journalist Alex Macpherson, who writes, "Tori Amos's command of raw catharsis was unparalleled," citing her ability to "veer into a world of private references and beguiling nonsense wordplay, as if reflecting the difficulty of piecing together a confessional statement in the first place" ("Review," "Why"). Similarly, writer Britt Robson, explicitly politicizes Ndegeocello's "confessional" work and praises her refusal to write celibate and trivial love songs, instead imbuing them with "anger, woe… insecurity…bliss, satisfaction and desire."

A song that creates an emotion-laden, patriarchy-bashing, and girls-to-the-front space—in short, a song crafted in Girl World—is a protest anthem three times over. First because the work "protests" patriarchy, second because it does so via unabashed femininity, and third because it dares to speak from a distinctly female perspective and form an intimate conversation with a female listener in a world where white men sit in the center and—despite stereotypes of women as “chatty” and “gossipy”—do most of the talking. When Tori Amos, Meshell Ndegeocello, Liz Phair, and a slew of other gifted women make music, they topple men from the throne of “prototype” or “neutral” and amplify the voice of the “other” (Beauvoir). Critics, cynics, and male chauvinists alike can try to banish their words to a confessional, or muzzle them via a HIPAA agreement, but “diary stuff” is creative, courageous, transgressive, and inherently political whether it lives in perpetuity on the pages of a diary or blares through a stadium speaker while tens of thousands of female fans scream along.

Works Cited

Admin. “Pitbull Abuse and Neglect.” *Animal Justice League of America*, 5 July 2018, http://www.animaljla.org/pitbull-abuse-and-neglect/. Accessed Jan. 2020.

Akinfenwa, Jumi. “Liz Phair’s Music Used to Shock People and She’s Fine with That.” *Vice*, 11 June 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/bj95em/liz-phair-girly-sound-guyville-tour-interview-2019. Accessed March 2020.

Amos, Tori. “Tori Amos Storytellers 4 Precious Things.” *YouTube*, uploaded by JupiterCalling, 7 Feb. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=td4UTvzHmHc. Accessed Oct. 2019.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H M Parshley, Penguin, 1972, orig. pub. 1949, https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/. Accessed online 19 Apr. 2020.

Blanche, Cate. “‘Not for one minute do I think that I’m a confessional artist’ – DiS meets Tori Amos.” *Drowned in Sound*, 7 Oct. 2012. http://drownedinsound.com/in_depth/4145576-not-for-one-minute-do-i-think-that-i%E2%80%99m-a-confessional-artist-dis-meets-tori-amos. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Brown, Farnum. “Meshell Ndegéocello: Our critics’ picks in new releases.” *Indy Week*, 26 June 2002, https://indyweek.com/news/archives/meshell-ndegeocello/. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Carbado, Devon W. “Black Male Racial Victimhood.” *Callaloo*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1998, pp. 337-361.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization — National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011.” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 63, no. 8, 5 Sept. 2014, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6308.pdf. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Costantini, Cristina. “Trayvon Martin & 8 Other Trials That Stirred Racial Tensions.” *ABC News*, 15 July 2013, https://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/trayvon-martin-trials-stirred-racial-tensions/story?id=19671013. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Curtis, Tracy. *New Media in Black Women’s Autobiography: Intrepid Embodiment and Narrative Innovation*. Google Books, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Daly, Steven. “Tori Amos’ Secret Garden.” *Rolling Stone*, 26 June 1998, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/tori-amos-secret-garden-180722/. Accessed 14 Oct. 2019.

Dunn, Jancee. “Liz Phair: A Rock & Roll Star Is Born.” *Rolling Stone*, 7 Oct. 1994, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/happy-birthday-exile-in-Guyville-celebrating-twenty-years-of-liz-phairs-masterpiece-79389/. Accessed 7 Oct. 2019.

Elignon, John. “ ‘You’re Not Supposed to Betray Your Race’: The Challenge Faced by Black Women Accusing Black Men.” *The New York Times*, 22 Mar. 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/22/us/meredith-watson-duke-justin-fairfax.html. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Fantasia, Camille. “The Original Sin of Confessional Songwriters.” *Baeble Music*, 17 Apr. 2015, https://www.baeblemusic.com/musicblog/4-17-2015/the-original-sin-of-confessional-songwriters.html. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Foster, Lauren. “Why Virginity is a Social Construct.” *Her Campus*, 11 Oct. 2016, https://www.hercampus.com/school/western/why-virginity-social-construct. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, Regis.edu, New York, Continuum, 2005. Orig. pub. 1970.

Ganz, Caryn. "He Said, She Said: How Liz Phair Took the Rolling Stones to 'Guyville.'" *Rolling Stone,* 21 May 2010, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/he-said-she-said-how-liz-phair-took-the-rolling-stones-to-guyville-73618/. Accessed Dec. 2019.

Gentry, Amy. *Tori Amos' Boys for Pele*. Google Books, Bloomsbury, 2018.

Glickman, Simon. "Me'shell Ndegéocello 1968—." *Encyclopedia.com*, 23 March 2020, https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/music-popular-and-jazz-biographies/meshell-ndegeocello. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Gold, Jonathan. "The Downward Spiral." *Rolling Stone*, 24 March 1994, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/the-downward-spiral-187149/. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Greenhaus, Rachel. "Taylor Swift: 1989's Confessional Poet." *JStor Daily*, 23 Sept. 2015, https://daily.jstor.org/taylor-swift-confessional-poet/. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Harris, Aisha. "The Central Park Five: 'We Were Just Baby Boys.'" *The New York Times*, 30 May 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/30/arts/television/when-they-see-us.html. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Hilburn, Robert. "She Can't Hide Her Feelings." *Los Angeles Times*, 25. Aug. 1996, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-08-25-ca-37351-story.html. Accessed Jan. 2020.

Hopper, Jessica. "Emo: Where the Girls Aren't." *The First Collection of Criticism by a Living Female Rock Critic*, featherproof books, 2015, pp. 15-20.

Hopper, Jessica. "Review: Liz Phair's 'Girly-Sound to Guyville Tells Full Story of an Indie Classic." *Rolling Stone*, 8 May 2018, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/review-liz-phairs-girly-sound-to-Guyville-tells-full-story-of-an-indie-classic-629031/. Accessed March 2020.

Itkowsky, Liz. "Liz Phair's Debut Album 'Exile in Guyville' Turns 25: Anniversary Retrospective." *Albumism*, 20 June 2018, https://www.albumism.com/features/liz-phair-debut-album-exile-in-guyville-turns-25-anniversary-retrospective. Accessed 21 Apr. 2020.

Jennings, Thelma. " 'Us Colored Women Had to Go Through A Plenty': Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women." *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1990, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/363025/pdf. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Kimble, Cameron. "Sexual Assault Remains Dramatically Underreported." *Brennan Center for Justice*, 4 Oct. 2018, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/sexual-assault-remains-dramatically-underreported. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Klosterman, Chuck. "Taylor Swift on 'Bad Blood,' Kanye West, and How People Interpret Her Lyrics." *GQ*, 15 Oct. 2015, https://www.gq.com/story/taylor-swift-gq-cover-story. Accessed Dec. 2019.

Lankford, Ronald D., Jr. *Women Singer-Songwriters in Rock: A Populist Rebellion in the 1990s*. Lanham, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010.

Liz Phair. *Exile in Guyville*, Matador, 1993. *Spotify*, https://open.spotify.com/album/444zYF83XQOTXmjke2JWU9.

Locker, Melissa. "An Interview with Meshell Ndegeocello." *The Believer*, 1 Sept. 2014, https://believermag.com/an-interview-with-meshell-ndegeocello/. Accessed Nov. 2019.

McDonnell, Evelyn. "'You could not have given us a bigger middle finger': Liz Phair on how Trump changed her music for ever [*sic*]." *The Guardian*, 3 May 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/may/03/liz-phair-trump-change-her-music-exile-in-guyville-25-years. Accessed Dec. 2019.

Meshell Ndegeocello. *Plantation Lullabies*, Maverick Record Company, 1993. *Spotify*, https://open.spotify.com/album/3K1ZZP9cAwUGxZHYrUv7Qe.

Mundy, Chris. "Liz Phair: Last Train to Guyville." *Rolling Stone*, 14 Oct. 1993, https://www.oocities.org/~kenmlee/00000014.html. Accessed Oct. 2019.

Pollard, Alexandra. "Why are only women described as 'confessional' singer-songwriters?" *The Guardian*, 9 Apr. 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/apr/09/why-are-only-women-described-as-confessional-singer-songwriters. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Porter, Lauren. "What Music by Black Women Taught Me About Unapologetic Sexuality and Feminism." *Essence*, 1 Apr. 2016, https://www.essence.com/lifestyle/what-music-black-women-taught-me-about-unapologetic-sexuality-and-feminism/. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Pounder, C C. H, Larry Adelman, Jean Cheng, Christine Herbes-Sommers, Tracy H. Strain, Llewellyn Smith, and Claudio Ragazzi. *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. San Francisco, Calif: California Newsreel, 2003.

Powers, Ann. "Songs That Say 'Me Too.'" *NPR Music*, 17 Oct. 2017, https://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2017/10/17/558098166/songs-that-say-me-too. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Powers, Ann. "Why Tori Amos Connects." *NPR Music*, 13 May 2014, https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2014/05/13/311864823/why-tori-amos-connects. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Queens College, The Graduate Center. “Reporting Sexual Assault: Why Some Women Stay Silent.” *SUM CUNY*, 15 July 2019, https://sum.cuny.edu/reporting-sexual-assault-why-some-stay-silent/. Accessed Apr. 2020.

RAINN. “The Criminal Justice System: Statistics.” *RAINN*, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system. Accessed Apr. 2020.

RAINN. “Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics,” *RAINN*, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Ranker Music. “The Most Powerful Songs About Rape.” *Ranker*, 15 Oct. 2019, https://www.ranker.com/list/songs-about-rape/ranker-music. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Rich, Adrienne. “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” *Women: Sex and Sexuality*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1980, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Robson, Britt. “Music: Love, Meshell style.” *Star Tribune*, 15 Oct. 2009, https://www.startribune.com/love-meshell-style/64387717/. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Seigal, Buddy. “Seething Is Believing in Equality : Pop music: Me’Shell Ndegéocello, who plays the Coach House on Sunday, explores white racism with unvarnished contempt.” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Aug. 1994, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-08-27-ca-31868-story.html. Accessed 14 Oct. 2019.

Sheffield, Rob. “Happy Birthday, ‘Exile in Guyville’: Celebrating Twenty Years of Liz Phair’s Masterpiece.” *Rolling Stone*, 22 June 2013, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/happy-birthday-exile-in-Guyville-celebrating-twenty-years-of-liz-phairs-masterpiece-79389/. Accessed 14 Oct. 2019.

Sollée, Kristen J. *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive*. ThreeLMedia, Stone Bridge Press, 2017.

Sorgen, Carol. “A homecoming for performer Tori Amos.” The Beacon, 26 Apr. 2019, https://www.thebeaconnewspapers.com/a-homecoming-for-performer-tori-amos/. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Spanos, Brittany. “Liz Phair Breaks Down ‘Exile in Guyville,’ Track by Track: With a new reissue out, the songwriter looks back on her classic, Stones-inspired skewering of male-centric rock mythology.” *Rolling Stone*, 4 May 2018, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/liz-phair-breaks-down-exile-in-Guyville-track-by-track-628853/. Accessed Nov. 2019.

Springer Science+Business Media. "Songs about sex — how they affect kids: Study questions the impact of sexualized lyrics on adolescent behaviors and attitudes." *ScienceDaily*, 6 September 2011. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110906102456.htm. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Staff, H. “Tori Amos’ Rape Survivor Story.” *HealthyPlace*, 18 Nov. 2008, https://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/articles/how-tori-amos-survived-rape. Accessed Mar. 2020.

Storkey, Elaine. *Scars Across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence Against Women*. Google Books, Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2018.

Swift, Taylor. “Taylor Swift Instagram Live #2 07/23/19 - Lover Deluxe, The Archer.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Lex Swift, 23 July 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qypzGzhDWPc. Accessed Mar. 2020

Taub, Amanda. “Rape culture isn’t a myth. It’s real, and it’s dangerous.” *Vox*, 15 Dec. 2014, https://www.vox.com/2014/12/15/7371737/rape-culture-definition. Accessed Mar. 2020.

“Tori Amos Biography.” *The Great Rock Bible*, Aug. 2008, http://thegreatrockbible.com/portfolio-item/tori-amos-biography/

Tori Amos. *Little Earthquakes*, Atlantic Records, 1992. *Spotify*, https://open.spotify.com/album/5bxqwBKvCyB67zOEVCrFZE.

U.S. Department of Justice. “Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention, 1992-2000.” *Bureau of Justice Statistics: Selected Findings*, Aug. 2002, https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Vallese, Joe. “Strange Loops: Liz Phair – ‘Never Said.’” *PopMatters*, 28 May 2013, https://www.popmatters.com/171859-strange-loops-liz-phair-never-said-2495753798.html. Accessed Nov. 2019.

Violanti, Anthony. “Tori Amos’ Self-Respect: Singer Shakes Up the Music World With Her Brutally Honest Work.” *The Buffalo News*, 18 Oct. 1992, https://buffalonews.com/1992/10/18/. Accessed March 2020.

Wright, Rickey. *Amazon*, n.d., https://www.amazon.com/Bitter-MESHELL-NDEGEOCELLO/dp/B00000JZC7. Accessed Apr. 2020.

Wiser, Carl. “Meshell Ndegeocello.” *Songfacts*, 30 May 2014, https://www.songfacts.com/blog/interviews/meshell-ndegeocello. Accessed Feb. 2020.