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"I Know You Want It": Teaching the Blurred Lines of Eighteenth-Century Rape Culture

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Abstract

"I Know You Want It: Teaching the Blurred Lines of Eighteenth-Century Rape Culture" is a collaborative pedagogical article that addresses the problem of so-called "post-feminism" in the contemporary college classroom by way of a comparative approach to eighteenth-century literature. Specifically, we contextualize and compare the early and late work of Eliza Haywood with current cultural debates and events in order to demonstrate not only the relevance of Haywood and eighteenth-century writers like her, but the importance of continuing the feminist conversation. The article provides texts, readings, and discussion points for consideration, as well as links to relevant contemporary issues and events.

Keywords

eliza haywood, rape culture, blurred lines, post-feminist, pedagogy, eighteenth-century, women's studies, women's writing, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, sexual double standard, literature pedagogy, teaching the eighteenth century

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Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to thank the 18th-Century Common, which first published our initial exploration of this topic "Seduction or Assault? Eliza Haywood and the Eighteenth-Century Rape Culture of Today."

*I know you want it . . .
Talk about getting blasted
I hate these blurred lines . . .
But you're a good girl
The way you grab me
Must wanna get nasty ("Blurred Lines")*

In her 2010 and 2012 articles on pedagogy and eighteenth-century women writers, Laura Runge responds to the MLA's assertion that today's students need historical and cross-cultural literacy. For "feminist teacher-scholars," the response is timely. As Runge and others have noted, many of today's students demonstrate what she calls a certain "fatigue" with feminism. Despite an out-of-hand acceptance of many feminist principles, they fail to notice just how much their world depends upon its interests ("Place" 1). For a generation "fatigued" with feminism, the eighteenth century provides a ripe teaching ground within the historical scope of feminist endeavors, if we highlight the similarities between those cultural issues young women face today which are so evident in many texts by early eighteenth-century women writers. In 2000, Isobel Grundy argued for the relevance of teaching eighteenth-century female authors, and the quotation rings true over fifteen years later:

If as students we wish to know, and if as teachers we wish our students to know, something about the workings of gender in society, then we need those early women's voices. They alone can teach us something of how it felt to live as a woman in a culture (so different from our own, yet sharing so much with it) in which the inferiority and subordination of women was utterly taken for granted. (Grundy 185)

This study, a collaborative effort between two eighteenth-century teacher-scholars, seeks to build on the calls of Runge and Grundy by addressing the "what now?" of our contemporary feminist teaching moment. The specific focus of this essay is pedagogical: we offer eighteenth-century rape scenes in Eliza Haywood's narratives alongside links, articles, and essays about the resurgence of interest in rape culture today in order to demonstrate how a 'contemporized' Haywood can "reboot" eighteenth-century women's themes in a "post-feminist" classroom. In discussing the issues of consent and agency in terms of Haywood's texts and contemporary illustrations of collegiate rape culture, this essay offers new perspectives on how to effectively teach these crucial but often challenging topics and also suggests how complicated and contemporary they remain. The contemporary relevance of eighteenth-century women's texts, beyond the insights they provide us about their historical moments, is that they offer students just enough cultural and linguistic defamiliarization to take them outside themselves and to make visible compelling truths about sex, gender, and feminism. The article uses a selection of Eliza Haywood's works as a testing ground for the contemporary feminist classroom and addresses the myriad ways Haywood's canon can speak to the nuances of rape culture in the twenty-first century, as well as the eighteenth century: what is consent? What constitutes rape? Why are the lines between rape and consent so seemingly blurry?

Early amatories

The idea that consent is ambiguous is embodied by Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams's 2013

pop hit, “Blurred Lines.” Contemporary examples of rape culture (from songs to media events such as Stanford swimmer *Brock Turner’s rape of an unconscious woman*), which our students are largely familiar with, are an excellent way to bridge the gap between the current rape culture conversation and the eighteenth century. Haywood’s interest in the blurring of socio-romantic boundaries helps to relate contemporary issues of rape culture, consent, and sex education. However, because it is imperative that students understand the distinctions between past and present contexts, critics such as Susan Staves and Toni Bowers have helpfully historicized rape in the eighteenth century and make for an excellent foreground of rape and rape history within the classroom. In order to teach the connections between historical and contemporary moments, it is necessary to shed light on the court and social system that privileged male power and stifled female voices—a system that is not unlike the one in our present day. For example, in “Fielding and the Comedy of Attempted Rape,” Staves illustrates that “some of the earliest critical modern thinking about problems of witness credibility developed in rape” (97). Furthermore, “Judges’ concern that women could falsely allege rape does not seem to have been matched by equivalent concern that male defendants could falsely allege the prosecutrix’s prior unchastity and consent” (97). The fact that issues such as witness credibility, false allegations from women, and prior sexual experience of the prosecutrix were all coming to the fore of legal thinking in the eighteenth century helps students understand that the complex legal proceedings surrounding rape culture were born in this period. Staves also concludes her essay by including a rape testimony from the Old Bailey, given by Sarah Woodcock, the co-owner of a milliner’s shop who was assaulted by a gentleman who kidnapped and raped her (107-108). Using this kind of first-hand evidence from the Old Bailey (and providing trigger warnings about content) is yet another way to bring the realities of history to bear in the current classroom.¹

Teaching the genre of amatory fiction opens up a host of critical talking points about rape and subjectivity in our current moment. Kirsten Saxton argues that amatory fiction “subtly subvert[s] and challenge[s] reigning notions of gender, insists[s] that women’s active desire is natural and inevitable, and attack[s] the double standard by which women are denied active subjectivity” (4). Approaching amatory fiction from the standpoint of revealing women’s desire and attacking double standards between women is only one reading of the genre’s subversive potential. Toni Bowers argues that amatory fiction was

...among the first to represent convincingly female subjectivity as something in its own right, beyond mere abjection, vacancy, or complement. Furthermore, seduction fiction offered readers ways to imagine agency—the ability to make effective choices—not only for women but for ‘others’ as well. (141)

For Bowers, the amatory heroine’s perceived subjectivity also has the subversive potential to educate readers simply by way of showing them that they have a choice regarding their own bodies. The benefits of teaching this in the twenty-first century include the same kind of teaching moment that Haywood imparted to eighteenth-century women.

Haywood’s early amatory fiction of the 1720’s has much to teach students about the blurred lines of consent and the societal constraints placed upon women in the eighteenth century—blurred lines that remain real, relevant problems today. More importantly, it teaches students how writers like Delariviere Manley, Aphra Behn, and Eliza Haywood *subverted* both genre

and societal constraints by writing female characters who frequently assert a kind of agency (however questionable). *Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze* (1725) is Haywood's most widely read early amatory novel, but the parallels between the protagonist's sexual adventures and contemporary "rape culture" become far more intriguing and subversive when read alongside contemporary twenty-first century examples, like the 2013 pop hit "Blurred Lines," by Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams. In the song, the two men sing, "But you're a good girl / The way you grab me / Must wanna get nasty." The assumption that even "good girls" *must* want rough sex ("But you're an animal, / Baby it's in your nature") because of the way they are dancing is reinforced by the gyrating women in the music video, who, in siren-like fashion, dance around Thicke and Williams while they stand static and waiting for what must surely come from women dressed so scantily and moving so salaciously. While the overt nature of the music video is a far cry from the subversion of tales such as *Fantomina*, these texts (one a contemporary music video and the other an eighteenth-century novella) raise many of the same questions. In both our own contemporary moment *and three hundred years ago*, the desirous female body is the object of debate.

The protagonist of *Fantomina* is not unlike many contemporary victims of rape: she is an attractive young woman who finds herself on the brink of adulthood. Fantomina is also totally uneducated in the ways of the world and is naturally vain and curious; simply put, she sounds like an average sixteen-year-old woman today. A social butterfly, Fantomina frequents the theatre and observes women (prostitutes) interacting freely with gentlemen. Intrigued, she visits the theatre the next night dressed as a prostitute in order to try her hand at what she assumes is flirting—she is Thicke's "good girl" who *seems* to "wanna get nasty." Yet, the narrator indicates that Fantomina does not understand the gravitas of this game, and the night ends with her being solicited by a gentleman she actually knows, Beauplaisir. Though a gentleman, it is socially accepted that Beauplaisir solicits the favors of prostitutes while also courting virginal young women for a potential wife, and it never occurs to him that the now-sexy Fantomina is the same gentle lady he has been "honorably" courting. This double standard, which mirrors contemporary society's penchant for shaming sexually active young women while sympathizing with young men, situates Fantomina's role-playing on very risky ground.

Haywood describes Fantomina as sexually excited, yet very confused by Beauplaisir's direct solicitation of her body: "Strange and unaccountable were the Whimsies she was possess'd of, wild and incoherent her Desires, unfix'd and undetermin'd her Resolutions" (44). At this point, the similarities between drunkenness and Fantomina's state should be very clear: diction such as "strange," "unaccountable," "wild," and "incoherent" lead the reader to believe that Fantomina is sexually aroused to the point of deep confusion. When Beauplaisir arrives at the rooms Fantomina has taken, what ensues is most certainly date rape. The scene is worth repeating here to show the juxtaposition between what Fantomina *thinks* she wants and what Beauplaisir takes from her:

She had now gone too far to retreat:—He was *bold*;—he was *resolute*: she, *fearful*,—*confus'd*, altogether unprepar'd to resist in such encounters [because she is a virgin], and rendered more so, by the extreme Liking she had to him. Shock'd, however, at the Apprehension of really losing her Honour [virginity],

she *struggled* all she could. (Haywood 46, emphasis ours)

The syntax in the first sentence contrasts Beauplaisir's forcefulness with Fantomina's fear.² She does not consent; she is punished for her sexual curiosity: *she* is ruined while *he* is satiated. Even after Fantomina confesses her ruse and reveals her virginal ignorance, Beauplaisir continues to take advantage of her by using her as a mistress until sex with her becomes "tasteless" and "insipid" (Haywood 50). Since Beauplaisir abandons Fantomina after she becomes no use to him sexually, it would seem Haywood chooses to punish the young Fantomina, but the story does not end there. Fantomina reinvents herself three more times in order to re-attract Beauplaisir, and he takes advantage of each "new" woman every time. Creating her own sexual agency, Fantomina's plot is only foiled by pregnancy and Beauplaisir's refusal to ask for her hand in marriage—a sharp reminder from Haywood that female sexual agency is short-lived in a world where women are punished for both desire and innocence.

As the ending of *Fantomina* suggests, the genre of amatory fiction is difficult to categorize either morally or ideologically. Haywood is often hesitant to come to terms with any of the questions she raises. The Broadview editors of *Fantomina* assert that her work often resists closure, and that this resistance is meant to show readers the "limitations of prescriptive didacticism, especially where matters of the heart are concerned" (Croskery and Patchias 28). In the case of *Fantomina*, Fantomina dresses as multiple characters in order to repeatedly sexually entertain Beauplaisir, who loses more interest in her with each passing masquerade. This agency seems to come at a price, as her exploits eventually leave her pregnant and at the mercy of her unforgiving mother, who withholds a midwife until Fantomina is forced—by labor pains—to name Beauplaisir as the father and reveal her sexual masquerades. The ending of the tale suggests that Fantomina's mother, though cruel, might have her best interests at heart. Both women refuse Beauplaisir's offer to take care of the female child, and Fantomina is sent to a French convent—an indeterminate ending considering the eighteenth-century implication that French convents were often sites of sexual freedom.

Fantomina opens up a dialogue about important concepts such as liberation and potential agency in the twenty-first century classroom. Students are often keen to discuss whether or not Fantomina was actually punished, or if she was shipped off to the convent in order to enjoy even more sexual freedom. What Haywood actually had to say about this matters little in our moment; in fact, an indeterminate ending is exactly the kind of liminal space in which to work out complicated ideas. Engaging in such debate allows students to think critically about shame, punishment, and the kinds of social situations that force uneducated women to make decisions that affect the rest of their lives. It also forces them to engage with various definitions of rape and how various factors (e.g. social setting) can influence and muddle consent. In short, it shows that the lines between agency and liberation are indeed rather blurry.

Haywood doesn't always leave her readers with a sense of liminality, however, and these more finite tales are also productive in terms of discussing rape culture in the contemporary classroom. In direct contrast to the blurred lines of agency and responsibility that *Fantomina* presents, heroines such as Glicera in *The City Jilt* (1726) turn their loss into gain. Glicera, daughter of a local tradesman, falls in love with Melladore, who believes that she will have a large dowry from her father. However, Glicera's father dies on their wedding day, and when

Melladore finds out that he did not bequeath her the 25,000 pounds, “Brutal Appetite alone remained” (70). Melladore’s “brutal appetite” leaves Glicera pregnant and unwed, and Melladore’s answer to her pleadings for marriage and legitimacy is that it is “not in Nature to retain perpetual Ardours for the same Object” (76). In fact, Melladore actually gives Glicera a rhetorical definition of the word “desire” as an excuse for his brutality and abandonment: “The very word *Desire* implies an Impossibility of continuing after the Enjoyment of that which first caused its being” (76). Melladore’s claim so upsets Glicera that she miscarries their child.

Here, we see that men possess the language necessary to articulate concepts like “desire,” and with that definition of language comes power. Melladore has the socially-sanctioned power to leave Glicera when the economy of her body does not provide the financial gain he expects. Unlike Fantomina, however, Glicera actually “learns” from this experience and makes a career out of dehumanizing and financially cheating men. In so doing, she lives her life the way she wants to (she is rich from her conquests and jilts), but she also makes reparations for what was taken from her by Melladore (and, one can assume, what was taken from many other women in exactly her situation). In short, she jilts men to provide for her lifestyle and to teach them a lesson about how to treat women. Haywood condones this behavior: “Few Persons continue to live in greater Reputation, or more endeavour by good Actions to obliterate the memory of their past Mismanagement, than does this Fair Jilt; whose Artifices cannot but admit of some Excuse, when one considers . . . the Provocations she received from that ungrateful Sex” (*The City Jilt* 103). Haywood represents Glicera’s treatment of the men she cheats as something that is not only morally justifiable, but also necessary in order for her to fully recover from sexual trauma.

Haywood’s justification of Glicera’s actions seems a bold move for an eighteenth-century author, and one that would certainly raise readerly interest. Pairing *The City Jilt* with the story of [Emma Sulkowicz](#), the young woman who recently finished a piece of endurance performance art related to her on-campus rape at Columbia University, reveals similarities in the two stories that carry Glicera’s burden into the present moment. In “Carry That Weight,” the title of her months-long performance piece, Sulkowicz (and others who offered to help) carried her dorm mattress everywhere she went in an effort to raise awareness about her rape and to expel her alleged rapist from the university. The expulsion of the rapist by the University did not happen, and Sulkowicz—along with several of her graduating class—carried the 50 lb mattress across the stage at her graduation, which ended the performance. While Sulkowicz does not “jilt” her former lover in the same fashion as Glicera and Melladore, she certainly publicly outs his behavior. Her courage and endurance in the nine months that she carried the mattress is reminiscent of Glicera’s ability to regain control of her life by shaming the men who treat women’s bodies as male property. Sulkowicz’s burden is also an interesting way to think about such things as sharing shame among men and women, especially since Haywood suggests that Glicera’s actions against the men who did not actually harm her are justified as a result of Melladore’s previous actions.

While *Fantomina* can help us cover the implications of eighteenth-century women as underprepared for the sexual economy in which they circulate, and *The City Jilt* and “Carry That Weight” suggest that taking agency into one’s own hands is sometimes the best mode of revenge, Haywood’s first and perhaps most successful amatory novel, [Love in Excess; or The Fatal Inquiry](#) (1719-1720), offers the contemporary student of eighteenth-century texts a

compelling critique of male miseducation that nevertheless avoids alienating or blaming men as a sex. In it, Haywood's readers learn that seduction/date rape is not the woman's fault; it springs from false male perceptions of women and miscommunication between the sexes. Indeed, *Love in Excess (LIE)* can be seen as one man's slow and difficult education about what women really want, a journey that reveals how dangerous men's misunderstandings can be to the women *they* want. When *LIE* is read beside such contemporary examples of male culture as those seen in recent [Texas and Georgia Tech fraternity scandals](#), we see that Haywood has again created a fictional interrogation of eighteenth-century male culture that remains socially relevant to modern students.

Of particular interest is the plot of *LIE* Part II, in which a now-married D'elmont becomes obsessed with a young woman, Melliora, who is living as a ward in his home. Young, but intelligent, Melliora fights her instant attraction for the off-limits D'elmont. Though D'elmont is also aware that his desire for Melliora is inappropriate, social norms support pleasure seeking for men, even against their own better judgment. This is important. Haywood shows that men *can* control their sexual urges, but *male culture* teaches them otherwise. In a compelling scene, Haywood stages the dilemma between male culture and personal conscience that men find themselves in. Melliora makes her situation plain to D'elmont when he openly declares his passion for her: "there are themes more proper [for your diversion] than the daughter of your friend, who was entrusted to your care with a far different opinion of your behaviour to her," she says (112). The hero is moved with guilt and runs to the home of a friend for consolation and council. D'elmont's friend D'espernay calls him a fool, however, for *not* molesting Melliora whenever he gets the chance:

What . . . a man of wit, and pleasure . . . a man who knows the sex so well, could he let slip so favourable an opportunity . . . Could a frown, or a little angry coiness (which ten to one was but affected) have power to freeze such fierce desires. (113)

D'espernay recasts the serious interlude between D'elmont and Melliora as a performance staged by one of "the sex." In a moment, Melliora has gone from a feeling individual with desires of her own, to one of a type whose intentions are easily read by more knowing, less gullible men. Furthermore, Delmont's manliness has become equated with his "fierce desires" and Melliora's rational refusal of those desires with a stratagem to dominate him.

The conversation between these men allows us to witness the defeat of *true* male sympathy with women by male-versus-male competition. D'elmont is first described as sorry that he ever offended Melliora with his forwardness, and *glad* that he had not taken advantage of her further. But, D'espernay has his own ends to satisfy: he "made use of all the artifice he was master of, to embolden this respective lover [D'elmont], to the gratification of his wishes" (113). This he achieves by miseducating D'elmont in regard to female communication and by shaming him as a man: "'my lord,' said he, 'you do not only injure the dignity of our sex in general, but your own merits in particular, and perhaps even Melliora's secret inclinations'" (113). Melliora, he says, has clearly shown that she wants to be ravished. His speech at this point is worth quoting at length:

Have you not confest that she has looked on you with a tenderness, like that of love, that she has blushed at your sight, and trembled at your touch? – What would you more that she should do, or what indeed can she do more, in modesty to prove her heart is yours? A little resolution on your side would make her all yours—Women are taught by custom to deny what most they covet, and to seem angry when they are best pleased; believe me, D’elmont that the most rigid virtue of ‘em all, never yet hated a man for those faults which love occasions. (113-4)

Finally, when D’elmont balks at “ruin[ing] so much sweetness” as “daggers to [his] cool reflections,” his friend “could not forbear laughing at [his] words” (114).

D’elmont is no saint in this scene; we learn that he “easily suffered himself to be perswaded to follow his inclinations,” but the point is clearly made that opportunities to prevent what we might now call “sexual assault” and “date rape” are not only missed in the eighteenth century because of social constructs, they are strategically defeated even against the potential rapist’s better judgment (114). The segment perfectly dramatizes the longevity of the contemporary, sexist assumption that “no” means “yes” and that women consent with their bodies, not with their words—a compelling current example of which might be suggested to students in the 2013 how-to email sent to the entire ΦKT chapter by its social chair, entitled “[Luring Your Rapebait](#).” In this email, the upperclassman author coaches his ‘newbie’ brothers on how to intoxicate a woman, dance suggestively with her, and then pressure her for sex.

A close reading of the fraternity brother’s text (who signs off with “In Luring Rapebait”) reveals stark parallels to *LIE*’s Part II, and makes for a compelling class discussion on the continual relevance of eighteenth-century themes to contemporary male culture. After going on at considerable length about the effeminacy of talking to one’s own ‘brothers’ at social events instead of women, supporting each other in hooking-up, and getting women drunk enough to manipulate sexually, the author has this to say about dancing with women:

ALWAYS USE YOUR HANDS OR ARMS TO GUIDE THEIR DANCING in order to maximize your pleasure. If she starts putting her hair over her ear, THAT MEANS SHE WANTS A KISS. Therefore, try to give her a kiss on the cheek. They usually like that and nothing really should ebcome [sic] of it. In the case, go for the neck kiss. If for some reason they aren’t down for a cheek kiss, just dance through it or say you are going to get another drink and see if they want one. And then repeat from the beginning. (qtd in Cheverere)

In this excerpt, the author emphasizes an approach to meeting women that has nothing to do with the woman herself and everything to do with “maximize[ing] [male] pleasure” and wearing women down by sheer persistence. Like D’esparnay, this Social Chair justifies this relentless sexual pursuit by claiming to know “what women want.” He teaches his brothers that random, nervous female actions are actually invitations of intimacy. He even goes so far as to agree with D’esparnay that a woman’s attraction for her partner indicates that whatever happens next—even if initiated entirely by the man—is consensual:

Here is how to escalate: Try to twist her hips around to face you and dance front to front. FROM THERE THE OPTIONS ARE UNLIMITED! You can make-out with her (tongue on tongue), you can stick your hand up her shirt (not right away though), you can go for a butt grab (outside or inside the shirts), or use your imagination. ALWAYS START WITH THE MAKING OUT!!!! NO RAPING. (qtd in Cheverere)

“ALWAYS START WITH THE MAKING OUT!!!! NO RAPING.” This language hints to its readers: as long as there is kissing, rape is impossible. Whether she says ‘no’ or ‘yes’ is never mentioned. Although it is important to remember the very real distinctions between the historical contexts of *LIE* and this real-life example of fraternity life, it is also useful to point out persisting sexist ideologies and how they are perpetuated. While it is common to discuss matters of female agency in Haywood’s texts, comparisons such as this make interesting avenues into feminist readings of male culture, ones with which male students can more freely engage.

Suggesting students consider this fraternity Social Chair as a sort of modern D’esparnay, and the fraternity audience as eagerly gullible D’elmont’s, can be an effective way to open a [conversation about eighteenth-century rape culture](#), its differences and its similarities to the present. In Haywood’s texts and these fraternity examples, we come to see this facet of rape culture as a symptom of miseducation and miscommunication between men and women. Such classroom conversations create space for both women and men to consider the ways in which eighteenth-century authors such as Haywood may have been attempting to address rape culture in their own moments, and to discuss their concerns regarding consent (or the lack thereof).

Later work: *The Female Spectator*, Book I

For a work regarded by some as didactic and even dull, Haywood’s most famous periodical is quite the opposite, and a perfect text for illuminating the discourse of eighteenth-century rape culture for the twenty-first century student (Pettit 42). Even knowing this, many may balk at teaching a tome like *The Female Spectator* because the nature of the periodical makes it difficult to find an appropriate entry point for students that will be both interesting and comprehensible without assigning too much. Moreover, unlike Haywood’s novels, the eighteenth-century periodical requires some explanation as a genre in its own right, so that students may see the space it occupies along the trajectory to the magazines of today. Preparatory attention to Haywood’s relationship with androcentric predecessors like *The Spectator* and to the format, audience, and production value of her venture may tell us about the possible ways readers encountered its essays and narratives. Contemporaneous context for reading also helps students consider *The Female Spectator*’s relationship to more modern female-driven periodicals, such as *Vogue* or the online-only *Everyday Feminism* and *Jezebel*.

The kind of foreground lecture, reading, and discussion may be a lot of effort on behalf of one text (if included in a survey course), but it is worth the effort. *The Female Spectator* is a teaching trove for complicating the discussions of sexual blurred lines in the “post-feminist” classroom. As the periodical’s first editor Patricia Meyer Spacks suggested, “it conveys insights relevant beyond its own time and place” (xx). The various stories of Book I in particular are relatively

short and easily excerpted for pairing with contemporary examples. We will demonstrate how just two stories from Book I of *The Female Spectator* can open lively discussion about the longevity of important feminist themes.

In the story of Flavia, for example, Haywood problematizes male perceptions of women in public spaces, where desires for innocent experiences conflict with eighteenth-century ideologies in which women who venture out of the home are sexually suspect. Thematically speaking, the story makes a perfect segue from the contemporary frat culture previously discussed in this essay. Haywood opens the story by introducing what our students might identify as a more genteel version of the ΦKT Fraternity's Social Chair—more genteel, that is, so long as he's addressing the opposite sex. This unnamed "ladies' man" claims he can find virginal sexual partners for his high-class pals by cruising public pleasure gardens, like Vauxhall, for attractive ladies. His "prey" are the sort of women who have "every thing that could inspire an amorous Inclination," that is, they have "no less Wit and Address, than . . . Beauty," and of course they must venture into public spaces (*FS1*, II:2, 45-6).

As Flavia's story shows, a woman's vulnerability to predatory male attention is entirely owing to a change in male perception of her, rather than the woman's construction of herself. By virtue of her location, a public space from which she hopes to take pleasure, she has made herself "fair game" in the eyes of men. As a result, Haywood's eidolon, Mrs. Spectator, raises the question of whether such public spaces are appropriate for young women, making room for classroom debate about Haywood's position on female agency in public spaces.

Many students initially declare the twenty-first century to be beyond the kind of restrictions implied by the Flavia scenario, but they quickly find a foothold in the discussion with a little textual juxtaposition between past and present. Another excerpt from our contemporary example "Luring Your Rapebait" might establish an attitude towards mixed parties popular among college-aged men today:

Alright chods, some of you could use some help on how to mack and succeed at parties. . . . For anytime throughout the party... [. . .] If you are talking to a brother of your pledge brothers [sic] when there are girls just standing around, YOU ARE OUTTA HERE!!! (qtd in Cheverere)

"Chod," according to *Urban Dictionary*, is a penis "that is wider than long"—hence, a sexually-charged way of saying "romantically useless with women" ("Chod"). ΦKT's Social Chair casts the party atmosphere as entirely sexual, a space in which getting laid is the ultimate goal—not chatting with friends, not getting to know women, and not even having fun. The assumption in this modern-day scenario is that the women in the party space understand and concur; all that remains is for someone like ΦKT's Social Chair to show other guys how to read the female body.

Haywood's setting, Vauxhall Gardens, makes an engaging parallel. Vauxhall carried similarly blurry connotations for eighteenth-century pleasure-goers; it was both innocent pleasure garden, with a variety of entertainments, and illicit sexual meeting place where the public and private intertwined. Just as the twenty-first century often blames women for expecting less than sexual

assault when they venture to a party, eighteenth-century audiences voiced anxieties about young women in public spaces where they may be subject to misinterpretation. This is what happens to Flavia. Haywood's anonymous ladies' man is out to find a mistress for his noble friend, Rinaldo, telling him that Flavia is "a Treasure of Charms, fit only for his Possession" (*FS1*, II:2, 47). Once Haywood's anonymous gentleman gains enough of Flavia's trust, the setting shifts from public space to private, where he finally reveals his intentions while visiting her at home: an offer of sex with Rinaldo for material gain.

Unfortunately for Flavia, her own mother presses her compliance. The family is desperate for money, and Rinaldo's importance makes a liaison profitable. Her mother calls Flavia "a thousand Fools" for resisting, and grows more and more "vexed" when Flavia holds firm, eventually "proceed[ing] to Threats, and even to Blows . . . and us'd [Flavia] with a Cruelty scarce parallel'd" (*FS1*, II:2, 49). It seems outlandish, and when combined with the sense of distance created by Haywood's archaic syntax, the scenario can present difficulties for a contemporary feminist reading among twenty-first century undergraduates. However, helping students find a foothold in Flavia's dilemma isn't as difficult as one might think: a similar contemporary scenario comes to hand, again from Greek college life.

In yet another [email from a Greek Social Chair](#), this time from the University of Maryland Delta Gamma Sorority, sisters are 'coached' on successful behavior with the opposite sex. Like the verbal baiting from Φ KT's Social Chair, this sorority Social Chair's tirade verbally accosts her sisters for their ignorance of party expectations. Unlike Φ KT's letter, this letter focuses on how to properly *receive* the attentions of men. In language so foul that introducing it will require serious warning, the Social Chair calls her sisters "stupid cocks" for *not* understanding what they are supposed to do at parties. She writes:

. . . we have been [F*CKING] UP in terms of night time events and general social interactions with Sigma Nu. I've been getting texts on texts about people LITERALLY being so [f*cking] AWKWARD and so [f*cking] BORING. (qtd in Weaver)

While Flavia's mother is concerned with capital gain and the "Sense of [. . .] Duty" owed to a man of Rinaldo's status, the Sorority Chair is focused entirely upon social capital, and women's duty to please at heteronormative social gatherings.³ The sisters addressed in the letter have been pursuing their own enjoyment ("I do not give a flying [f*ck...] about how much you [f*cking] love to talk to your sisters" and "you SHOULDN'T be post gaming at other frats. . .") instead of entertaining the male members of their fraternity "matchup." Near her closing, the Social Chair goes so far as to threaten her sisters "to stop being a goddamn cock block for our chapter" or she will send them home—or even "assault" them (qtd in Weaver).

Compared to the University of Maryland Delta Gamma Sorority Social Chair, Flavia's mother sounds downright reasonable. Shortening the distance between the modern-day college experience and Haywood's works may not be as difficult as we think. *The Female Spectator's* conclusion to Flavia's drama may also seem strange to our students at first, but again, some simple contemporary analogies can assist us in making the scenario relatable. Flavia's innocence and her shock at the way these men have interpreted her body and her actions do not inspire Rinaldo to marry her; they only pique his sexual interest. Rinaldo considers Flavia's situation,

appearance, and the encouragement he receives from his friend and her mother as invitations enough—indeed, though Flavia has already refused these advances, she is argued into silence, and that silence becomes “a kind of Consent,” (*FS1*, II:2, 49). Finding no support from other women and no respect for her own refusal, she must turn to other men: she quickly becomes the wife of an aging clergyman, who promises to protect her from Rinaldo through marriage.

This seemingly drastic act becomes less strange to a contemporary college student when we consider that what Flavia actually *does* (bind herself to one man to escape the advances of another) is still enacted by single women today every time they say, “Sorry, I have a boyfriend.” One writer for *Marie Claire*, Rich Santos, actually recommends “[The Phantom Boyfriend](#)” to women as a way to avoid giving out their phone numbers to creepy guys. *Time* writer and self-proclaimed feminist Eliana Dockterman maintains that “[I have a boyfriend](#)” is “still the best way to turn a guy down.” And, feminist magazine *Jezebel*’s “Groupthink” column featured a [concerned discussion about whether it is safe to stop using the boyfriend excuse](#), citing multiple cases of women being assaulted for “giving a hard ‘no.’” The author herself admitted to once going out wearing a fake engagement ring to avoid unwanted male attention (Zokajo). Today, women still don’t feel empowered to reject a man’s advances with a simple “no.” Today, men are taught to distrust a woman’s “no” and to respect nothing less than another man’s “ownership” as proof that a woman really does mean it. The result is a dangerously blurry heterosexual atmosphere for both men and women still resonating with the echoes of “the past.” By bringing this perspective to bear on Flavia’s tale, we make it possible for students to enter a discussion about the very real feminist themes Haywood may be trying to address with her own audience.

The second story that we will discuss from Book I involves similar issues in a far more disturbing scenario: sexual assault. In the story of Erminia, Haywood depicts the same problem of misinterpreting female desire in public spaces, but this time, she problematizes the fetishizing of female virtue, as well. The paradoxical belief that female virtue is desirable is at the root of a blurred lines discussion because it encourages both parties to assume that what is on the surface is false. As Staves asserts, the eighteenth century found it difficult to believe women who reported sexual assaults because ‘good women’ didn’t find themselves alone with men, and ‘good women’ didn’t talk about sex—even to a judge (105). Eighteenth-century society raised the importance of virtue in young women to such a pitch that they must either be truly ignorant of sexual dynamics, or they must pretend to be. Yet, should such ignorance lead them into seduction, or rape, the young victim still bore the shame of “ruin” in the public eye.

Erminia’s story from Book I of *The Female Spectator* pointedly dramatizes the dark side of fetishizing female innocence in the eighteenth century. Though, according to Staves, eighteenth-century publications seemed loath to describe rape or write about it at all, Haywood’s depiction of rape is uncharacteristically disturbing, without being graphic (105). Haywood stages this narrative at a masquerade, where ‘blurred lines’ and identities might serve as a metaphor for the socially-constructed distance between young men and women, their hopes and desires. And, although there is no sympathy for the male attacker in the scenario, it is clear that both he and his victim are blundering in the social fog between reality and expectation. The truth about women is masked from men of privilege (who are taught to expect female compliance), just as the kind of masculinity this ignorance creates is masked from women.

Erminia is ignorant to gender “masks,” yet her rapist assumes that all female desire wears the “mask” of virtue—and that innocence is sexually desirable.

The eighteenth-century atmosphere of male miseducation and fetishizing of virtue can be facilitated by sharing such excerpts as this one, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762), which unwittingly encapsulates a paradox:

On these occasions the most delightful circumstance a man finds in his victory is, to doubt whether it was the woman’s weakness that yielded to his superior strength, or whether her inclinations spoke in his favour: the females are also generally artful enough to leave this matter in doubt. (7-8)

In this perception of women, men have little choice but to “force” a sexual encounter because a woman’s very being is an act of seduction in which she says “no” when she means “yes.” A culture of blurred lines means that sexual relationships between men and women are always already cast as a form of rape, making it difficult for young men to recognize that women’s apparent shock and distress is meant to quell their desire and not enflame it.

In Book I, Erminia’s story takes a similarly conservative stance on public pleasures as in the story of Flavia. The masquerade party that Erminia and her brother attend is presented as responsible, in part, for the violent outcome—a “dangerous Diversion,” Mrs. Spectator calls it (*FS1*, II:2, 40). Our contemporary students can hold this view against modern versions of this attitude and debate the periodical’s role in enforcing or challenging eighteenth-century gender ideology: Does Robin Thicke really know that the object of his song, “Blurred Lines,” “wants it” because of the way she’s dancing with him? Does Mrs. Spectator believe Erminia “asks for it” by going to the masquerade and being so naive? These parallels can help students feel invested in a critical feminist discussion about eighteenth-century narrative.

Erminia is certainly ignorant of “the Methods practised at [Masquerades]’s,” as Mrs. Spectator calls them, and is therefore vulnerable to attack (*FS1*, II:2, 40). Hers may be an eighteenth-century take on date rape, at a time when dating did not exist. Although the gentleman in the story is a stranger to Erminia, he does not attack her out of the shadows in a dark alley. Rather, he is another partygoer who ‘masquerades’ as her brother (wearing a similar domino) and takes advantage of her trust to get her to leave with him when she proclaims that she is tired and ready to go. But, once he has her alone, everything changes, and he removes the “mask” of familiarity, becoming someone both monstrous and—sadly—mundane:

She wept, she pray’d, she conjur’d him by every thing that is call’d sacred or worthy of Veneration, to suffer her to depart; be he was one to whom had she been less beautiful, her Innocence was a sufficient Charm. The more adverse and shock’d she seem’d at the rude Behavior with which he immediately began to treat her, the more were his Desires inflam’d, and having her in his Power, and in a House where all her Skrieks and Cries were as unavailing, as her Tears and Entreaties, he satiated, by the most barbarous Force, his base Inclinations... (*FS1*, II:2, 41-42)

Haywood's language is both sensational and stark. What is clearly the most horrifying experience of Erminia's life is by default a highly erotic one for her attacker (*FS1*, II:2, 41). Mrs. Spectator's own reflections on the situation are characteristically difficult to pin down: on the one hand, Haywood praises the victim for removing herself from society and refusing to marry, and the other Haywood hints that such a dramatic act of shame is going too far. Earlier in Book I, Mrs. Spectator also argues that restricting young women in order to preserve their innocence is a danger to them, adding fuel to class discussion about Haywood's own potential views on who bears responsibility for rape in the eighteenth century and the complexity of the topic within the period.

Concluding a class reflection on Erminia's story this way reveals what modern readers might take away from *The Female Spectator's* presentation of the event: can one imagine a contemporary scenario like Erminia's happening after any one of the parties described by the fraternity and sorority Social Chairs previously discussed? Both excerpted emails suggest the potential for a 'brother'—who believes he's doing what both his peers and his dance partner want—assaulting a 'sister' who doesn't realize that her words and actions have been misinterpreted before they even meet. Moreover, despite the vulgarity of the sorority Social Chair's language, twenty-first century culture still prizes virginity to the detriment of women. Women are paying thousands for surgeries that will reconstruct their hymens so that a "husband [can] 'take [their] virginity again;'" can we really claim to have moved away from fetishizing virginity, despite the "sex positive" movement (Valenti 75)? 'Virgins are hot' abstinence-only campaigns further confuse young women into mistaking their virginity for personal integrity. And what are they to do when the experience of adulthood includes an active nightlife, parties, and situations of potential vulnerability? Are our young students to blame when they seek fun and dancing, and find themselves the perpetrators or the victims of assault instead?

We hardly treat our victims better today than Haywood's contemporaries did. Staves' piece frames rape in the eighteenth century as a contentious issue for which new laws (many of which we still share) entered the books regarding the nature of sexual assault. Yet, few rapes were ever reported, even fewer prosecuted. Then, as now, women were put on trial and forced to share the lurid details of their assault, only to have their stories doubted (Staves 103-104). "Contemporary" culture echoes the attitude that women are suspect in cases of rape, despite the relative security our students feel. When victims speak out, it is always to face public contention and doubt. The reported victims of our universities' star football players are given the runaround by police, their cases allowed to stagnate, or to be buried under a fog of victim-blaming, as in [the case of Florida State University's Jameis Winston](#), while young women are driven to carrying around their own dorm mattresses in an effort to have their stories heard, as in the case of Emma Sulkowicz.

Conclusion

Our goal here has been to show that our own contemporary moment (unfortunately) shares more teachable material for understanding rape culture with eighteenth-century women writers like Eliza Haywood than a normal, semester-long course could possibly cover. By showing that these "blurred lines" existed in the eighteenth century and that women like

Eliza Haywood were showing both men and women the possibilities for educating themselves in a society that sexually shamed and put women continually at risk—no matter their social or class positioning—we open up this important dialogue. Conversation must be the starting point to educating our fatigued-with-feminism students. *How* we dialogue about this is almost as important as the issue itself. As bell hooks suggests,

[There] are the people who talk at us, who by refusing to converse, promote and maintain a hierarchy of domination wherein withholding gives one power over another person. Conversation is always about giving. Genuine conversation is about the sharing of power and knowledge; it is fundamentally a cooperative enterprise. (45)

The cooperative enterprise that equates eighteenth-century themes of rape and women's suffering with the suffering of women and girls in our society (and those across the world) is the one that will carry the eighteenth century off the page and into the classroom.

Even as we complete this article, new instances of rape culture, particularly at the collegiate level, continue to make headlines. With the recent conviction of former Stanford star swimmer, Brock Turner, whose sentence for raping an unconscious woman at a party was reduced by a white male judge to six months in county jail, our article is—sadly—already outdated. These occurrences stress to us the need for stories that show students the broader socio-sexual correlations between themselves and eighteenth-century literature. To consider Haywood in her context defamiliarizes and opens space for critical reflection on both the eighteenth century and the current moment. The differences between our historical moments thus become an excellent way to help students evaluate their own participation in notions of sexuality. For one example, students are encouraged to question the assumption that men are irrepressibly inflamed by female beauty. In pointing out that many in the eighteenth century assumed men could not readily control their own sexual desires, and that women's behavior, their ability to move freely in public spaces, and their dress, was strictly controlled as a result, students can decide how far we have come and where we stand now in our perceptions of masculinity and femininity. As teacher-scholars, our most fulfilling moments are those in which we see proof that our classes have changed students' perceptions of our beloved period narratives and given them something they can carry with them across the graduation stage and into the rest of their lives. We offer these suggestions as a feminist strategy for creating those moments.

¹ While we do not have the space to elaborate regarding the history of rape culture here, we do suggest several excellent resources besides Staves, including *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660-1700* by Toni Bowers (Oxford University Press, 2011), and/or her essay "Representing Resistance: British Seduction Stories, 1660-1800" (*A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*, Blackwell, 2005, 140-163).

² See Richetti, *The English Novel in History, 1700-1780*. Haywood's amatory style, according to Richetti, mimics the sexual act and "signals her audience to imagine a blocked erotic intensity that can only be evoked rather than named (41)."

³ For more contemporary work on this, see Fazlalizadeh, Tatyana. *Stop Telling Women to Smile*. n.d. Web. 9 April 2015. <http://stoptellingwomentosmile.com>

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