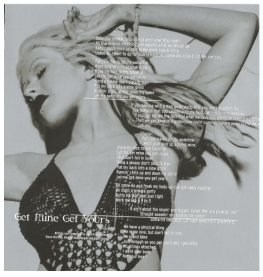

Stripped Says to Stand Strong

Christina Aguilera's Voice and Feminist Narratology.

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Abstract

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Throughout history women have been subject to oppression by patriarchal society. However, there have always been those who have tried to rise against it. This study will shed light upon one example: a female artist who personally defies the patriarchal norms at the same time as her music encourages others to do the same. The musician in question is Christina Aguilera, and the album studied is *Stripped*.

What this study shows is that *Stripped* can be read as a feminist statement. The lyrics deal with two main themes: patriarchal society's objectification and oppression of women, and the struggles of love and relationships. What these two themes have in common is that they both encourage women to stand their ground and believe in themselves.

However, the lyrics on the album also suggest that Aguilera is aware of the fact that her message will not suit everyone. She knows that she works within an industry whose goal is to make money out of its artists, and therefore she has to keep repeating like a mantra to herself and to others that she, and her music, is not just a product of this industry. The message her music brings actually matters.

To come to this conclusion I have examined Aguilera's lyrics in terms of what messages they bring and who their narratees might be, all in accordance with feminist narratology. Secondary sources from the fields of popular music studies, media studies and gender studies as well as interviews with and about Aguilera and biographies have been consulted.

Keywords: Christina Aguilera, *Stripped*, lyrics, feminist narratology, narrator, narratee, voice, patriarchal society, feminist statement, empowerment.

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Introduction:
Allow me to introduce myself

To be a woman in society has never been easy. Not only does one have to meet all the everyday challenges that men too meet. Patriarchal society also imposes restrictions on the female sex in forms of strict normative expectations as to behaviour. The norm tells a woman how to talk, what subjects are appropriate for her to voice, and often even how she should present herself visually. It also restricts what types of social activities are suitable for a woman to engage in, including sexual and aggressive situations. In other words, society restricts the definition of what it means to be a "proper woman." If these expectations are not met and if a woman goes against the norm, patriarchal society will most likely react.

One woman who has had first-hand experience of this reaction is Christina Aguilera. In 2002, she launched her album *Stripped* as a re-introduction of herself, and as a way to empower women. However, not everyone was ready for her new persona. At the release of this album, the public was already familiar with the singer's commercial image, which was constructed to fit the profiteering pop-market. This meant that Aguilera was mainly associated with the cute pop artist she had been marketed as. However, after breaking with her personal manager,[1] who to a great extent controlled the singer's creative direction, Aguilera now wanted to show her true colours:

> Coming off of the height of being a part of such a big pop-craze phenomenon, that imagery of that cookie-cutter sweetheart, without I being me, I just had to take it all down and get it away from me. And this is why I actually named the album *Stripped*, because it is about being emotionally stripped down and pretty bare to open my soul and heart. (Deol & Vineyard)

This image change revealed a more aggressive, rawer and sexier Aguilera singing about domestic abuse, the unjust treatment of women in society, female sexuality, and the need to take control of your own life. It would be an understatement to say that it challenged society's norm of what constitutes a woman.

The main target for people's criticism was what was labeled Aguilera's new, raunchy image and her approach to sex in the album's lyrics. MTV ordered one of

[1] On October 13, 2000 Aguilera filed a Breach of Fiduciary Duty lawsuit against her exclusive personal manager Steven Kurtz for improper, undue and inappropriate influence over her professional activities, as well as fraud. According to legal documents, Kurtz did not protect Aguilera's interests, but looked after his own interests, at the cost of hers (Dominguez 171-172).

Aguilera's videos to be toned down in order to be aired (House). The Independent Television Commission recieved numerous complaints saying that the singer's performance was too suggestive to be broadcasted early in the day (Worthington) and among the critics there were even some who accused the feminist movement for the singer's new image. Syndicate columinst Michelle Malkin, for instance, argued in *Jewish World Review* that "Aguilera is a sad symptom of this cultural zeitgeist. . . . The era of radical-feminist sexual liberation has produced a generation of shameless skanks." In short, the controversy Christina Aguilera caused may be seen as an example of how society reacts when a woman steps outside of the expected normative behaviour boundaries.

Another possible reason why Aguilera's album *Stripped* stirred emotions can be traced back to the importance of music's function as an agent of socialization. Several scholars have suggested that music is used to create an identity (e.g. Frith, Whiteley). If the music then promotes a female identity which defies what is socially constituted as appropirate, patriarchal society may very well attack the artist conveying this message. As John Sheppard suggests,"[T]he existence of music, like the existence of women, is *potentially* threatening to men to the extent that it sonically insists on the social relatedness of human worlds . . . music reminds men of the fragile and atrophied nature of their control of the world" (159). Consequently, men have to subordinate women to maintain the illusion of male centrality. This is, according to Sheppard, achieved through male control of cultural reproduction: "[A]s reflections of the male desire to control the world, women themselves must be controlled and manipulated. This is accomplished by means of isolation and objectification" (156). Female artists must therefore "package themselves (or be packaged, as in advertising images) as objects amenable to control by men" (154) in order not to offend patriarchal society. However, not everyone conforms to this.

There are numerous studies which elucidate how female artists have created a stir in society by not conforming to what is expected of them due to their sex. The solo artist who has probably generated the greatest number of studies is Madonna. Since she makes creative use of the fundamental dichotomy of the virgin and the vamp, her constant image changes have been studied. Moreover, it has been suggested that her music serves as a reflection of society and its attitudes towards sexuality and religion. Thus, her control over her own career has been analyzed over and over again by experts in multiple academic fields (for example Guilbert, Lewis and Whiteley). In some of these studies it

has furthermore been argued that Madonna should be viewed as someone who knows the social norms and chooses to provoke them to make a statement. Martine Trittoléno is one who makes this claim:

> Madonna is more than a witness of her epoch, she is an active reflection of it, she is an iconoclast, and her aesthetics do not give a damn about 'good taste'. She seizes the trends ot he moment with vampire-like gluttony, recycles them in her very own way and then throws them in the face of the establishment. (qtd. in Guilbert 148)

An even more aggressive feminist approach to society can be found in the studies done on the Riot Grrrls. The movement began in 1991 as a result of a decision made at a meeting held in Washington state, USA. The women who participated in this meeting wanted to discuss how to address sexism. They felt that society did not offer any validation of women's experiences, and inspired by the antiracist riots in Washington D.C. they decided to start a "girl riot," which included allfemale bands and zines[2] that expressed feminist and antiracist viewpoints. They dealt with topics such as rape, incest, eating disorders, and how society teaches women to hate themselves (Schilt 6). Moreover, the Riot Grrrls became known for their provocative ways to reclaim stereotypes and feminine glamour. They wrote slogans and words on their bodies, and one frequently recurring word was 'SLUT.' This word is generally viewed as depreciatory, but The Riot Grrrls made the word their own by writing it on their bodies. Bikini Kill singer Kathleen Hanna explains the tactics in *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock 'n'Roll* (Reynolds & Press): "When you take off your shirt [onstage] the guys think "Oh, what a slut" and it's really funny because they think that and then they look at you and it says it" (325). Thus, The Riot Grrls appropriated the word in order to criticize and challenge the patriarchal objectification of women.

The artists associated both with Riot Grrrls and Madonna can thus be seen as examples of female artists who have used their artistry to make a feminist statement, and in this study I will claim that Aguilera is yet another. This is a conclusion I have arrived at after analysing the album's lyrics within the frames of feminist narratology. I have also used interviews and biographies connected to Aguilera and findings from several academic fields such as popular music studies, media studies, and gender studies in general to support my thesis.

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[2] Zine is a small magazine, usually about popular culture written by people who are not professional writers (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1921).

Feminist narratology is a fairly new discipline. According to Kathy Mezei in *Ambiguous Discourse*, the first one to call attention to it was Susan S. Lanser (8). In 1986 Lanser suggested in "Toward a Feminist Narratology" that there are advantages to be found when combining narratology and feminism. Her argument is that a combination of narratology's ordered heritage from structuralism together with the feminist aim to study the narrative's context benefits both traditions when an analysis is conducted. She suggests that:

> A narratology for feminist criticism would . . . . [i]n both its concepts and its terminology, . . . reflect the mimetic as well as the semiotic experience that is the reading of literature, and it would study narrative in relation to an referential context that is simultaneously linguistic, literary, historical, biographical, social, and political. (345)

As an example, Lanser discusses how a structural analysis of narrators and narratees, narrative levels, and different voices operating within the narrative, combined with a more feminist distinction between public and private narration can open up new meanings to a narrative. She argues that "being a woman in a male-dominant society may necessitate the double voice, whether as conscious subterfuge or tragic dispossession of the self" (349). Drawing on this theory, the main concerns in my analysis of Aguilera's lyrics will be to discover what different messages these narratives bring to what narratees.

Furthermore, even though the main focus of this study will be to examine the lyrics as text, one cannot ignore the fact that they constitute only one part of a complex musical experience. Thus, it is also important to take into count the aspect of how the performer uses what Simon Frith calls his or her singing voice. Frith points out that "Today's commercial pop musics are . . . song forms, constructing vocal personalities, using voices to speak directly to us" (43). This singing voice does not only implicate obvious elements such as the gender of the artist, but it also gives the listener hints about how the song should be interpreted, that is through the mood the lyrics are presented in. Consequently, it is important to listen to the singing voice as well as the textual voice when one is conducting an analysis.

As has been shown above, Frith and Lanser use the term 'voice' in different ways, which can be confusing unless some distinction is made between them. Frith relates to the performer's singing voice, which utters sounds through the use of his or her speech organs. Lanser, on the other hand, is concerned with voices in a more textual reading of

the narratives. In this study I will therefore separate the two by using Frith's term "singing voice" when I refer to the actual sound of Aguilera 's voice, and simply write "voice" when referring to Lanser's more textual reading.

All in all, this study will show that Christina Aguilera's album *Stripped* can be read as a feminist statement. I am not claiming that this is the only message embedded in these lyrics, simply that it is one possible reading. In order to come to this conclusion I have examined Aguilera's lyrics in terms of what messages they bring and who their narratees might be. This is done in accordance with feminist narratology. Results from studies conducted in the academic fields of popular music studies, media studies and gender studies, together with interviews with and about Aguilera and biographies of her, have also been used as secondary sources. Finally, it is important to point out that throughout this essay I will use the term "narrator" instead of "speaker" when referring to the one transmitting the messages in the lyrics. Normally, the latter term is the one in use in relation to poetry and song lyrics, but since I categorise these lyrics as mainly narrating prose, I find the term "narrator" to be more appropriate.

Nobody Can Hold Us Down

There are two main threads or themes that run through the lyrics of the album *Stripped*. Tied to the first thread are lyrics which deal with patriarchal society's objectification and oppression of women at the same time as they encourage women to stand their ground against this suppression. Tied to the second main thread are lyrics concerning the struggles of love and relationships. These lyrics can be claimed to depict the "dos and don'ts" within these areas. What is common for the two main threads is that they both hold feminist statements.

The major part of the lyrics on *Stripped* can be tied to the album's first main theme. These lyrics deal with patriarchal society's oppression of women illuminating for instance how society attacks a woman's behaviour, her looks, and her sexuality in order to suppress her. The song "I'm OK" even deals with domestic abuse. In other words, these are lyrics which shed light upon men's endeavours to subordinate women in order to maintain control. However, the lyrics do not only point out this social suppression. It is also very clear that they hold a voice which opposes it, and which exhorts others to do the same. Narratologically, this is all achieved in accordance with Lanser's theory of polyphony, and the strategy to go public with the personal.

For Lanser 'polyphony' goes beyond Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the term. She suggests that not only does a narrative hold several voices mediated through its characters within the text but there are additional voices to be found if the narrative is analyzed within a context. Hence, a text can hold voices which give rise to readings on a private and on a public level at the same time as on a third level it addresses the real reader/listener, who can see beyond the context of the two first readings and thus create a third (348-355). This can be argued to be especially true in relation to celebrities such as Aguilera since her private and public lives can indeed be considered more open than the lives of people who are not famous.

There are two lyrics on *Stripped* that can be said to summarize the album's elaborate use of multiple narrative levels in order to convey different messages to different narratees. These lyrics hold a first person narrator whose aim at first only seems to be to mediate a personal message to someone. However, this personal narration can be read in different ways depending on which context it is placed in. It can even be argued

that when it is placed in a more public context, the message turns highly political. The two lyrics in question are “Stripped Intro” and “Stripped Pt. 2.”

In the first verse of “Stripped Intro” three narratees can be found depending on what context one places it in. The most obvious narratee is probably the album’s listener who hears the lyrics as he or she plays the album. In these lines this listener is welcomed by Aguilera, the narrator, to partake in something which she has been looking forward to presenting for a long time: “Waited a long time for this, feels right now / Allow me to introduce myself, want you to come a little closer.” She also gives the impression of wanting to tell the listener that she is now able to present her true self to him or her: “I'd like you to get to know me a little bit better, meet the real me.” Moreover, this last line suggests that up until now Aguilera has not been able to give the listener her “real me”; within this message lies the key to detecting a second narratee.

The second narratee can be claimed to be Aguilera’s sacked manager Steven Kurtz who was, until the production of *Stripped,* the one in charge of Aguilera’s career. However, when *Stripped* was produced, Aguilera made sure that she was allowed full control of the whole production process. By this time she was, together with Ron Fair, the executive producer of the album, and on every song but two she is the writer and/or composer. As Pier Dominguez says in *A Star is Made*, “In fact, it had been clear to most inside Christina’s camp that she was now entirely in control of her career as well as her artistic destiny, and this “unexpected” turn was going to happen whether people liked it or not” (210). Hence, within this context, the first verse of “Stripped Intro” can be read as Aguilera accusing Kurtz of suppressing her real identity. On her official website she makes a statement justifying such a reading:

> For a long time, I’d been uncomfortable with the image that had been built around me and my music. It felt like I was pretending, trying to hide the real me, and hurting inside because of it. This time I was determined to step beyond the hype and glitter, to take it back down to the bare necessities. It was like starting all over again.

Finally, if this first verse is placed within the larger discourse of the general music industry, it can be argued that the narratee is one of the men who dominate that industry. As illustrated above, Aguilera has personally experienced how the “production [in the music industry] continues overall to be gendered in quite conventional ways, especially with regard to positions of power (producers, managers, executives, technicians)” (Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music* 4). She has felt what it is like to be turned into an

object that is in the hands of men in power. “These people twenty years your senior are seeing you as a product. That can be scary. I just wanted to make music, and all of a sudden it was all about this package – what your look is going to be. All these decisions are made for you” (Dominguez 58). As a result of this experience, Aguilera now addresses the male-dominated music industry to show them that she, as a representative of the female artists, can make it on her own; opposing their dominance (by being her own executive producer), she is allowed to be her “real me.” It can even be argued that Aguilera can be seen as a spokesperson for all female artists who have been exposed to patriarchal values in the music industry and as such, she challenges the dominant order.

“Stripped Intro” and “Stripped Pt.2” do not only challenge the male order within the music industry. They also hold a general resistance to the patriarchal urge to objectify women. In fact, it can be claimed that all the lines which some people might read as personal apologies are actually a cunning way to publicly criticize society’s stereotypical depiction of women. They are, in other words, clear examples of what Lanser has suggested to be a female author’s use of a double voice in her narrative (349-350).

This double voice is revealed when the lines which start with “Sorry. . .” are studied within different contexts. First, there is Aguilera’s private voice which addresses narratees within her private life. Then, if the lines are placed within the context of society in general, they can be read as Aguilera’s public voice which addresses the patriarchy. This means that the first line of “Stripped Intro”: “Sorry you can't define me, sorry I break the mold,” can be interpreted as Aguilera’s personal statement to those who have criticized her image changes. In addition, it can also be read as her public voice addressing patriarchal society and its need to categorize all women in order to subordinate them.

Following the same narrative strategy, the private narratee in the next few lines are those who have criticized Aguilera for speaking her mind and not conforming to what is expected of her as a female artist. For instance, Aguilera has been criticized for tattling on some male artist whom she had seen when she visited a strip club in Atlanta (Dominguez 94-95) and on several occasions her own behaviour has been characterized as inappropriate by journalists, artists and the general public (Dominguez 107-108, 182-183). These lines can thus be viewed as her personal revenge on these persons: “Sorry that I speak my mind, sorry, don't do what I'm told / Sorry if I don't fake it, sorry I come too real.” Moreover, read within the public discourse, it can be suggested that these lines are the female artist’s message to society. The message is then that she knows that

society considers it inappropriate for a woman to speak her mind, and that it does not approve of a woman who defies the behaviour expectations placed upon her.

This narrative strategy is used again in "Stripped Pt.2." In the first two verse lines Aguilera once again addresses the critics who have accused her of being a bad role model due to her image (Dominguez 72, 108) as well as those who have called her rude, showy and superficial because she chooses to do it her own way in her quest to get what she wants (182): "Sorry if I ain't perfect, sorry I don't give a -what- / Sorry I ain't no diva, sorry just know what I want." Moreover, within the public discourse of this album's publication, it can be argued that the narratee once again is patriarchal society. It can thus be claimed that Aguilera's intent in these lines is to show society that she is conscious about its model for a perfect woman, its need to make women feel inadequate if she does not conform to this model and its way of attributing negative characteristics to all women who resist categorisation.

In the third line Aguilera addresses those who have attacked her suggestiveness and sexuality on stage. There were, for instance, rumours depicting Aguilera as a promiscuous woman. These rumours started after she had been seen together with several men (Dominguez 106-107), and the rumourmongers who spread these allegations are most likely among the private narratees that Aguilera addresses in the line "Sorry I'm not a virgin, sorry I'm not a slut." In analogy with my line of reasoning above, it can be argued that this statement is also an address to patriarchal society. This time it is society's stereotypical binary division of female sexuality which is attacked. In other words, this line challenges society's traditional view that a woman is either a slut or a virgin based on her sexual behaviour, but she can never be anything in between. Put together, it can be argued that all the lines which start with "Sorry . . ." show an awareness of what Sheppard has suggested to be patriarchal society's desire to isolate and objectify women in order for men to remain in control (156). Read in relation with the "Sorry. . . " verses' last lines, it can even be suggested that they do not only show awareness of this social desire, but that they also hold a voice which opposes it.

The key to this oppositional voice is found in these last few lines of the "Sorry. . ." verses, and in Aguilera's singing voice, which can be characterised as provocative and ironic. In "Stripped Intro" the narrator ends by stating that "I will never hide what I really feel, no way no," and in "Stripped Pt. 2" the last line reads "I won't let you break me think what you want." These lines reveal a self-confident voice which would never ask for forgiveness as is done in the former lines. Instead they suggest that the apologies are

not genuine. One can even argue that a great many of the lines which start with “Sorry. . .” in fact should be seen as proof of what Robyn R. Warhol would call the narrator’s “doubleness.” According to Warhol, to be “double” is to resist categorization as one thing or the other; to invoke “doubleness” is to address binary oppositions without resting comfortably in either of the two terms being opposed” (857). This is what the narrator does in lines such as “Sorry I’m not a virgin, Sorry I’m not a slut.” It can even be stated that the narrator summarizes this “doubleness” in her first “Sorry . . .”-line: “Sorry you can't define me, sorry I break the mold.” This interpretation is backed up by the ironic, almost challenging tone which is heard in Aguilera’s singing voice as she delivers the text. Hence, the apologies should not be taken literally. They can instead be read as an indictment of male society’s desire to categorize women.

Last but not least, there is an important additional message found in the last verse of “Stripped Pt. 2”. In its last three lines Aguilera uses a mixture of her private and public voice to give an overall message to those who are oppressed that she knows what they go through; she shares their pain and their dreams. Through these lines she also encourages them to be proud of whom they are, and to stand their ground:

> To all my dreamers out there, I'm with you
> All my underdogs, I feel you
> Lift your head high and stay strong keep pushin' on

In other words, this last verse can be seen as the narrator’s overall exhortation to those who see themselves as oppressed to rise against their oppressors. They can, for instance, follow her example and evade categorization and oppose patriarchal society’s desire to subordinate women. These narratees can either be said to be found within Aguilera’s personal life or among this narrative’s real readers/listeners. The latter case would thus suggest that it is possible to view this narration in accordance with Lanser’s theory of a possible third reading. That means that the real reader/listener can turn the narrative into a third and entirely different reading due to the context of their lives and his or hers knowledge of the private and public voice that works within this text.

The oppositional voice working in “Stripped Intro” and “Stripped Pt.2” can also be found in the lyrics of “Can’t Hold Us Down.” Here the female narrator takes on society’s sexual double standards, and its objectification of women. The first issue to be attacked is objectification:

> So- What, am I not supposed to have an opinion
> Should I keep quiet just because I'm a woman

Call me a bitch cause I speak what's on my mind
Guess it's easier for you to swallow if I sat and smiled

Through these four lines the narrator illustrates what in *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* Naomi Wolf suggests has been a part of society's male culture since the fourteenth century, that is patriarchal society's attempt to silence women. Wolf claims that male-dominant "[c]ulture stereotypes women . . . by flattening the feminine into beauty-without-intelligence or intelligence-without-beauty; women are allowed a mind or a body but not both," and because of this, women are paralyzed into "beauty's silence" (59). This is exactly what the narrator questions in the lyric's first four lines. Hence, the narratee "you" in this verse can be said to represent male society which imposes these stereotypes on women. However, it can also be argued that "you" is someone within Aguilera's own personal life. As we will see, the identity of this private narratee becomes clearer as the narrative continues.

If the first verse sheds light upon patriarchal society's attempts to silence women, the second verse shows what happens to a woman who does not keep quiet.

When a female fires back
Suddenly big talker don't know how to act
So he does what every little boy would do
Makin' up a few false rumors or two

These lines suggest that a woman who states her opinion about a man will be punished for it. In fact, they suggest that it is not uncommon for men to retaliate by attacking women with lies. This is a behaviour which the narrator criticizes in the following few lines even though she knows that her words might cause a counterattack.

That for sure is not a man to me, slanderin' names for popularity
It's sad you only get your fame through controversy
But now it's time for me to come and give you more to say

Thus, it can be argued that the second verse could be seen as criticism of patriarchal society's inability to handle a woman's opinion. As Aguilera says herself, "This is directed to any male who puts down a female for stating her mind" (Deol & Vineyard).

However, it can also be suggested that this verse can be read within the context of Aguilera's personal life, that is, that the narrated "female" and the narrator Aguilera actually are one and the same person. In this reading a famous musician soon comes to mind as a possible narratee: the rapper Eminem. He fits perfectly into the narrative's

suggestion that men make up “a few false rumors or two” “[w]hen a female fires back.” This is, in fact, quite literally what he did when Aguilera voiced her opinion about him.

What happened was that Eminem made sexual allusions to Aguilera to get back at her for what she had said about him on MTV. It all started when Aguilera bantered about how she thought Eminem was cute, but that she would stay away from him since she had heard that he was married. Also, in a more serious tone, she criticized Eminem’s way of joking about domestic violence in his lyrics, and told her fans that they should never hesitate to get out of such a relationship (Dominguez 94). This irritated the rapper to such a degree that he felt an urge to incorporate some rumours about Aguilera into his music. According to the rumours, Aguilera had been romantically involved with Limp Bizkit’s lead singer Fred Durst and MTV’s host Carson Daily. Eminem took these rumours and spiced them up some more as he used them in his music video “The Real Slim Shady.” The video alludes to Aguilera performing fellatio on Durst (who actually played himself) and on Carson. It also suggests that Aguilera had given Eminem a venereal disease (Dominguez 109-112). Hence, it is not farfetched to view this detractor as Aguilera’s personal narratee in the two first verses of “Can’t Hold Us Down” or to read these verses as Aguilera’s public criticism of Eminem for the way he spread rumours about her.

The second target in “Can’t Hold Us Down” is society’s sexual hypocrisy and double standards. First Aguilera raises the question herself:

> If you look back in history it's a common double standard of society
> The guy gets all the glory the more he can score
> While the girl can do the same and yet you call her a whore
> I don't understand why it's OK,
> The guy can get away with it, the girl gets named

Later on the female rapper Lil’ Kim deals with the same issue in her rap:

> Now here's something I just can't understand
> If the guy have three girls then he's the man
> He can even give her some head, or sex her off
> But if a girl do the same, she's a whore

Together these lines can be seen as a feminist statement against these double standards. A possible narratee is thus patriarchal society which enforces it. In other words, the message is aimed at patriarchal society which has “differential sexual standards for women and men, with harsher, more restrictive standards almost always applied to women” (Bryan et al.).

Viewed within a more private context, it could be argued that these two female artists address the way media, and sometimes the public in general, scrutinize their image and behaviour within a sexual discourse. This is an issue which seems to be close to Aguilera's heart and she has addressed it in several interviews. The following statement appeared in an article in the monthly magazine *Interview*:

> I think there are double standards. If Justin from 'N Sync were to appear on the cover of some magazine nude or in the least suggestive, people would say, "Oh my gosh, that guy's hot." Whereas they would look at Britney and say, "Oh my gosh, look, she's being a little, um, well, slutty." (McDonnell)

Moreover, the female artists do not only explicitly question what they think is wrong. They also exhort other women to join them in their quest for parity. This becomes apparent as both Aguilera and Lil' Kim address other women as their narratees. The last two lines of Aguilera's verse read: "All my ladies come together and make a change / And start a new beginning for us, everybody sing." Lil' Kim then joins forces with Aguilera in her rap: "You need to let him know that his game is whack / And Lil' Kim and Christina Aguilera got yo back." The message to women is thus that they are not alone in their struggles, and that they have to fight patriarchal society's suppression together. This is a message which is also repeated every time the chorus is sung:

> This is for my girls all around the world (around the world)
> Who have come across a man that don't respect your worth
> Thinkin' all women should be seen not heard
> So what do we do girls, shout out loud
> Lettin 'em know we're gonna stand our ground
> So lift your hands higher and wave 'em proud
> Take a deep breath and say it loud
> Never can, never will
> Can't hold us down

Hence, the total effect of the lyrics of "Can't Hold Us Down" is an encouragement for women to stand up for themselves and their rights, so that they can show patriarchal society that women are a power to be reckoned with, a power which cannot be suppressed.

Another song which can be argued to convey a message of female power is "Dirrty." This might seem like a strange suggestion since these lyrics can easily be read as a text which yields to men's desire to reduce women to sex objects. Many critics have

argued just that and there are indeed several explicit sexual connotations in these lyrics which may be seen to satisfy men's need to view women as "objects amenable to control by men" (Sheppard 154). However, this is not the only possible reading of "Dirrty." In fact, these lyrics can be read as a feminist battle song due to their way of defying the normative behaviour expectations that society places on women.

One contextual aspect that may be seen to support this interpretation is that "Dirrty" was written as a female reply to a male rapper's earlier hit. The hit in question is "Let's get Dirty (I Can't Get in the Club)" with the rapper Redman.

> "I loved 'Let's Get Dirty,'" Christina reveals, "So I asked Rockwilder [3] to put something together kind of like that for me. . . . What I got was a little too close, but then I figured, 'Why not?' The track is like an answer song to the original, only from a female point of view." (*Christina Aguilera*)

Hence, the intertextual status of "Dirrty" enables Aguilera to address the same issues as Redman in language similar to what is used in the original, but from a female point of view. So, for instance, where Redman's original mediates a message about phallic superiority (Robinson 50), Aguilera's lyrics turn the tables and challenge this message by stating that it is women who are in control of the sexual act. In other words, it can be argued that this intertextuality has made it possible for the two songs to have a dialogical relationship even though they work within different genres.

This reading is further emphasised by the fact that the rapper Redman is actually featured in "Dirrty" as the one that Aguilera seems to address her message to. There is, for example, a dialogue between the two artists in the very beginning of the lyrics:

[Redman:] Ah, dirrty
Filthy
Nasty Christina, you nasty
[Christina:]yeah
. . .
[C &R:] Ladies (move), Gentlemen (move)
[R:] Somebody ring the alarm, a fire on the room
[C &R:] Ring the alarm…and I'm throwin' elbows [7x]

[C:] Uh- let me loose
Ooooh, I'm overdue, gimme some room, comin' through
Paid my dues, I'm in the mood, me and my girls come to shake the room

[3] Rockwilder is the hip hop and R&B producer Dana Stinson's stage-name. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockwilder)

Consequently, it can be argued that Redman is the narratee in these lyrics. Moreover, as Aguilera later, on several occasions, exhorts Redman to "get your boys" as she is "Gonna get [her] girls," it can also be claimed that he can be read as a representative of patriarchal society in general, and that she is a spokesperson for all women. In other words, when Aguilera challenges Redman in these lyrics, it can also be said that she challenges the patriarchy.

What first and foremost is challenged in the lyrics of "Dirrty" is the social norm that presupposes that women's sexuality is for men and that it is men who are in charge of every sexual relation. These lyrics communicate this message by depicting the female narrator as the dominating part of the sexual act. She is the one who both tells her partner when it is time to "get dirty" and what she needs of her partner in order to be sexually satisfied:

> Let's get dirty, that's my jam
> I need that, uh to get me off, sweatin' till my clothes come off
> . . .
> Wanna get dirty, it's about time that I came to start the
> Party, sweat drippin' over my body
> Dancin', getting' just a little naughty
> Wanna get dirty, it's about time for my arrival
> . . .
> Give all you got (give it to me), just hit the spot

In other words, these lines portray a sexual assertiveness in the female narrator's character which definitely goes against the social view that "male dominance and female submission are the norm in something as fundamental as sexuality" (Tong qtd. in Whiteley 56). This is an issue which is further emphasised in the lyrics of "Get Mine, Get Yours" as the female narrator demands to be satisfied before her partner.

A second social norm which is challenged in "Dirrty" is the one according to which it is considered inappropriate for a woman to engage in aggressive behaviour. As Neil Nehring points out in *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism: Anger is an Energy*, anger is the only emotion that is approved of in men, but "simply considered an abnormality that must be suppressed [in women]" (xx-xxi). This is a notion the female narrator can be argued to defy several times in "Dirty." For instance, the phrase "me and my girls come to shake the room" can be read as an indication that the women are going

to dance, but it can also be read as a warning of their intentions to start a fight. This can also be seen in the following lines:

Temperature's up (can you feel it)
'bout to erupt
Gonna get my girls, get your boys, gonna make some noise

Gonna get rowdy, gonna get a little unruly
Get it fired up in a hurry

Here the female narrator can be said to allude to how the temperature has risen in the room due to all the bottled-up emotions it holds. These emotions might first be read as sexual since the line "'bout to erupt" can easily be associated with an orgasm. However, it can also be argued that they are of the aggressive kind since aggression is often characterized as a hot emotion. This would then suggest that the female narrator initiates some sort of battle when she exhorts her male narratee to gather his forces just as she gathers hers. The battle can thus be seen as a battle between the sexes in which it seems to be the women who as a group are in control.

While "Can't Hold Us Down" and "Dirrty" show women to be powerful as a group, the lyrics I will now go on to study show the inner strength of each and every woman individually. First I will turn to "Fighter." In short, the message of these lyrics support the general truism of Nietzsche's famous saying that what does not destroy me, makes me stronger. On the surface this message seems to be conveyed by Aguilera to those who have tried to put her down. The aim would then be to tell these private narratees that they cannot break her. However, seen in the light of this album's public character, it can also be suggested that Aguilera sends a message to those who have been in her shoes, as a way to empower them.

When the lyrics are studied within the context of Aguilera's personal life, several private narratees surface. The first ones addressed are people who used to belong to Aguilera's inner circle, those who in an article she characterizes as "people I trusted like family," but who ended up stealing money from her or snitched to the tabloids (Farber):

Well I thought I knew you, thinking that you were true
Guess I, I couldn't trust called your bluff, time is up
Cause I've had enough
You were there by my side, always down for the ride

But your joy ride just came down in flames cause your greed sold me out in shame

As one continues to study "Fighter" within the context of Aguilera's life, it is hard not to draw a parallel once again between the next narrated "you" in the song and the rapper Eminem. This time it can be suggested that Limp Bizkit's lead singer Fred Durst is one of the narratees due to the way he betrayed his friendship with Aguilera. Durst and Aguilera used to be friends until he agreed to play himself in Eminem's music video "The Real Slim Shady"(Dominguez 106-111). This betrayal can be said to be portrayed in the following lines: "Never saw it coming, all of your backstabbing / Just so, you could cash in on a good thing before I'd realize your game." Then in the next line Eminem can be seen as the narratee: "I heard you're going round, playin' the victim now." This last interpretation is supported by the fact that Eminem actually did portray himself as the victim in connection with the quarrel with Aguilera. In his autobiography *Angry Blond* he states that "Aguilera was talkin` shit about me on MTV, putting me on blast about being married during a time when I wasn't ready for the public to know that about me yet"[4] (qtd. in Dominguez 110).

The third private narratee in these lyrics is not as easy to pin down to one actual person as the earlier ones. The "man" in the following lines can actually be related to several men within Aguilera's personal life.

How could this man I thought I knew
Turn out to be unjust so cruel
Could only see the good in you
Pretended not to know the truth
You tried to hide your lies, disguise yourself
Through living in denial
But in the end you'll see
YOU- WON'T- STOP- ME

"This man" can be interpreted as Durst, who helped Eminem out with "The real Slim Shady" even though he knew that Aguilera never had performed fellatio on him. He did in fact tell Howard Stern that they had not been involved in any sexual activity (Dominguez 111). Another possible candidate for a narratee is Steven Kurtz who was

[4] A possible reason why Eminem did not want the public to know about his marriage was that he was in the middle of a separation around the time of Aguilera's comments. Shortly after this, the marriage ended in divorce amid allegations of domestic violence (Dominguez 94).

supposed to look out for Aguilera's best interests within the music industry, but placed his own interests before hers (Dominguez 164, 171- 178). Finally, it can be argued that "this man" is Aguilera's father who exposed his family to domestic violence when Aguilera was a kid, but who denied the full extent of it when faced with public accusations (Dominguez 1-12). But whoever is addressed in these lines, still gets the same message as the rest of the narratees read within the context of Aguilera's life.

The personal message that Aguilera sends to these narratees is that they will not stop her; their malicious acts will only make her stronger. In fact, it is due to their attempts to put her down that she has truly found her inner strength, her self-confidence. The first private narratees addressed with this message are those who used to belong to Aguilera's inner circle, but who betrayed the friendship by stealing from her and selling her out to the tabloids:

> After all of the stealing and cheating you probably think that
> I hold resentment for you
> But uh uh, oh no, you're wrong
> 'Cause if it wasn't for all that you tried to do, I wouldn't know
> Just how capable I am to pull through

To Eminem and Fred Durst, who could be her second private narratees, she states that:

> After all of the fights and the lies cause you're wanting to haunt me
> But that won't work anymore, no more, uh uh
> It's over
> 'Cause if it wasn't for all of your torture
> I wouldn't know how to be this way now and never back down

These two verses then share the last two lines, which work as a bridge to the chorus. Moreover, together they emphasise Aguilera's message to her narratees:

> So I wanna say thank you
> 'cause it
>
> [Chorus:]
> Makes me that much stronger
> Makes me work a little bit harder
> Makes me that much wiser
> So thanks for making me a fighter
> Made me learn a little bit faster

Made my skin a little bit thicker
Makes me that much smarter
So thanks for making me a fighter

This message is later enhanced in relation with the third narratee who Aguilera addresses as "this man." For once, the chorus is repeated over and over again. The narrator also stresses the part about being a fighter, who will never back down. Moreover, the use of capitalized letters textually emphasises the strength behind the words. This is also heard in the singer's singing voice as she performs these lines:

. . . .
But in the end you'll see
YOU- WON'T- STOP- ME

I am a fighter and I
I ain't gonna stop
There is no turning back
I'VE HAD ENOUGH

[Chorus x2]

To conclude, to whoever has attacked or plans to attack, the message is that whatever they do or say will not hurt Aguilera; it will only strengthen her.

It can also be claimed that this personal message of Aguilera's empowers others. Just as the Riot Grrrls extremely personal lyrics about rape, incest, and eating disorders helped their listeners to realize how their own personal problems fit into larger political structures (Schilt), the lyrics of "Fighter" can be said to do the same through the public form of publication. Hence, people who have been bullied, backstabbed, cheated on or told lies about might relate to these lyrics and find strength in them. In other words, the forth narratee of these lyrics is someone who in one way or another can relate to what Aguilera has been through. This is a person who, in accordance with Lanser's theory, hears both Aguilera's private and public voice and then creates a third reading of the narrative within the context of his or her own life. The message to this person is thus that he or she can also become this stronger person: a real fighter.

Other lyrics which can be said to give a message about individual inner strength are "The Voice Within" and "Soar." It can even be suggested that they hold a more explicit empowering message since they directly address the narratee whom Aguilera

seeks to empower through her lyrics as opposed to the case in “Fighter” in which the general message of empowerment is to be found in the subtext. In “The Voice Within” insecure young girls are exhorted to trust themselves and choose their own paths in life. They are also informed that most likely there will be obstacles on their way and people who will try to put them down:

> [Chorus:]
> When there's no one else, look inside yourself
> Like your oldest friend just trust the voice within
> Then you'll find the strength that will guide your way
> You'll learn to begin to trust the voice within
> . . .
> Life is a journey
> It can take you anywhere you choose to go
> As long as you're learning
> You'll find all you'll need to know
> You’ll break it
> (Hold on)
> You'll make it
> (Be strong)
> Just don't forsake it because
> No one can tell you what you can't do
> No one can stop you, you know that I'm talking to you

The “voice” to which Aguilera refers in these lyrics should not be confused with the type of voices that this study explores; it can instead be seen as a third type of voice. In other words, this “voice within” does not refer to Frith’s singing voice nor to Lanser’s definition of voice. It is a voice which, paradoxically enough, is not heard at all.

In “Soar” a similar message is conveyed. It tries to boost the narratees’ confidence at the same time as it shows the hardships of trying to conform:

> Now in life there's gonna be times when you're feeling low
> And in your mind insecurity seems to take control
> We start to look outside ourselves for acceptance and approval
> We keep forgetting that the one thing we should know is
>
> [Chorus:]

Don't be scared to fly alone, find a path that is your own
Love will open every door it's in your hands, the world is yours
Don't hold back and always know, all the answers will unfold
What are you waiting for, spread your wings and soar

In addition to the message that one should believe in oneself, "Soar" can be seen to approach another issue which is recurring in "Beautiful" and Make Over," and that is how beauty is used to perform social control over women. In fact, these lyrics can be argued to touch upon what Naomi Wolf calls "the beauty myth." According to Wolf, "the beauty myth" is a "violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement" (10). She suggests that it was created by men around the time of the Industrial Revolution "to take over the work of social coercion that myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity no longer can manage"(11). Moreover, Wolf argues that "[i]t is about men's institutions and institutional power" and "the need of today's power structure, economy, and culture to mount a counteroffensive against women" (13). To sum it up, "[f]or Wolf, the beauty cult is nothing less than a patriarchal conspiracy to distract young women from feminist politics, by making them believe their problems can be solved and their dreams satisfied if they just reach that perfect body weight, that ideal facial profile" (Reynolds and Press 333-334).

It can be argued that all these three lyrics approach "the beauty myth" in an attempt to make women reject it, and patriarchal society to acknowledge its wrongful treatment of its female citizens. Narratologically, different strategies are used in the three lyrics to convey this message. In "Soar" Aguilera has chosen to use some of the song's verses to illustrate the effect that "the beauty myth" has upon women; I argue that she has chosen to include these narrations in order to deter others from conforming to the myth. One example of this strategy is the story about a woman who has tried to change her looks to please a man throughout her life. However, it is made clear that no matter what she does, it will never be enough, and all that has come out of her attempts is that the woman no longer recognizes herself:

Then there's the girl who thinks she'll never ever be good enough for him
Keeps tryin' to change and that's a game she'll never win
. . .

In the mirror is where she comes face to face with her fears

Her own reflection, now foreign to her after all these years
All of her life she has tried to be something besides herself
Now time has passed and she's ended up someone else with regret

The underlying message in theses lines thus seems to be that you should not change to please others. The narratees to whom it is primarily aimed are most likely the album's female listeners. However, the narrative can also be seen as a way to point out to patriarchal society (which is held responsible for imposing the myth on women), the beauty myth's awful effects on women, that is, it can be seen as a way for the narrator to tell the patriarchy "look at what you and your beauty myth do to women."

This narrative strategy is to some degree also used in the lyrics of "Beautiful." Here the narrator opens the narration in a voice which can be argued to be the voice of a "beauty myth" victim. It is the voice of someone who feels guilt and shame over her looks:

[Whisper:]Don't look at me
Mm, mm,
Yeah, oh, ooh,

Everyday is so wonderful, then suddenly, it's hard to breathe
Now and then, I get insecure, from all the pain,
I'm so ashamed

Similar to what was said in connection with "Soar," it can be suggested that the narratee is patriarchal society which imposes the beauty myth on the female narrator. The intent in these lines is thus to show society what the beauty myth has done to the narrator. However, it can also be claimed that this narrative is aimed at listeners who harbour the same type of feelings as the narrator. The aim would then be to create a bond between the narrator and these narratees, so that the latter will be more receptive to the empowering message which is given in the next few verses.

The message that the narrator conveys in these verses is that everyone is beautiful in their own way. She starts out in a private discourse and claims that she is beautiful herself:

I am beautiful no matter what they say
Words can't bring me down
I am beautiful in every single way
Yes, words can't bring me down,

So don't you bring me down today

Then she moves on to address her narratees directly as “you” in order to emphasise that just as she is beautiful each and every one of them are as well. This narrated “you” can be read as either an entirely private narratee or in accordance with Lanser’s third narrative level reading, thus suggesting that the addressee is the real reader/listener:

You are beautiful no matter what they say
Words can't bring you down,
Cause you are beautiful in every single way
Yes words can't bring you down, oh, no
So don't you bring me down today

Finally, in the last verse the personal pronoun “we” are used by the narrator. This might suggest that she wants to emphasise the fact that they are all the same; that they are part of the same discourse. It can also be argued that this is Aguilera’s way of showing that she is aware of the fact that the real readers/listener can apply her narration onto their lives, and thus create what Lanser has suggested to be a third reading:

'Cause we are beautiful no matter what they say
Yes, words won't bring us down, no
We are beautiful in every single way
Yes words can't bring us down, oh no
So don't you bring me down today

Hence, these verses can be seen to defy the beauty myth which, paradoxically enough, will not allow us to feel beautiful. This can be argued since the narrator has gone from giving voice to a “beauty myth” victim in the first verse to finally claiming in a very confident voice that “we are beautiful no matter what they say.” Moreover, the last line of each verse: “So don’t you bring me down today,” can be argued to be the narrator’s exhortation to the patriarchy to stop imposing the myth on its citizens. In fact, it can be claimed that this line is actually the narrator’s way of telling patriarchal society that there is no use clinging to this myth. She has seen through it, she defies it in real life, and through her lyrics she will keep on telling others not to obey it.

The last few examples along the lines of the album’s first main thread are the lyrics which arguably give the strongest public message on *Stripped*. The lyrics in question are those of “I’m OK,” which on the surface are the most private ones on the whole album. This is where Aguilera uncovers how she was exposed to domestic abuse as a child. She also assures her narratees that she is alright now. Narratologically, this song elaborates a

great deal with polyphony and different narrative levels. They contain several possible narratees and one can find multiple messages brought forward by multiple narrating voices.

The song starts out as a fairytale about a girl who lives a hard life:

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

In these first few lines the voice of a third person narrator seems to tell the girl's story to an unnamed narratee. However, in the fifth line the narrative situation is altered:

It hurt me to see the pain cross my mother's face
Every time my father's fists would put her in her place
Hearing all the yelling I would cry up in my room
Hoping it would be over soon

Here the voice of a first-person narrator enters the narrative. This indicates that the content of the lyrics is in fact a very private experience narrated from within. The girl in the fairytale is the narrator's narrated self, and the home in the narration is the narrated self's own home. Having established this, the narrator also starts to address a personal narratee, her father:

Bruises fade father but the pain remains the same
And I still remember how you kept me so afraid
. . . .

I often wonder why I carry all this guilt
When it's you that helped me put up all these walls I've built
Shadows stir at night through a crack in the door
The echoes of a broken child screaming please no more
Daddy don't you understand the damage you have done
For you it's just a memory but for me it still lives on
. . . .
It's not so easy to forget, all the marks you left along her neck
When I was thrown against cold stairs
And everyday afraid to come home in fear of what I might see, next

These lines directly address the narrator's father as the narratee. In them the narrator accuses him of both physical and mental abuse. Moreover, by choosing to make this personal accusation public on her album, Aguilera also voices her political standpoint against domestic violence.[5]

However, as the title "I'm OK" indicates, this is not just a song which illustrates the horrors of domestic abuse. It also holds a loving voice, a victorious voice and an encouraging voice, summed up in the last three lines of the chorus:

> Strength is my mother for all the love she gave
> And every morning that I wake I look back in yesterday
> And I'm OK

Through the use of tense and time markers in these lines the narrator indicates that she has moved on. The memories are still with her each day, but she is now "OK," and she thanks her mother for this. It is her mother's strength and ability to give love which has made it all possible, and in the last chorus Aguilera also directly addresses her mother as a narratee. The personal pronoun "she" used in the first two choruses is changed into "you." This is probably done to further contrast her mother's ability to give love with her father's cruelty:

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

In addition to what has already been said about "I'm OK," it is important to point out that through these lyrics Aguilera gives a public face to the many victims of domestic abuse. Once again it can be claimed that Aguilera helps others by putting her own problems on display. Above I have shown how "Fighter" illustrates how Aguilera's personal problems made public could be said to empower those who have been backstabbed, bullied, cheated on or told lies about. Now I suggest that "I'm OK" can have the same effect on victims of domestic violence. In fact, Aguilera has stated that one reason why her personal experience of abuse is included in the album is to show others that they are not alone:

[5] This is a political standpoint which is repeated in interviews with Aguilera, and through her cooperation with organisations that work to help victims of domestic abuse.

> I've spoken openly about trying to get the word out about domestic violence and child abuse . . . I'm not afraid to do that, because I feel like so many other young people in certain situations like this [can see that] someone coming from that background could grow up and . . .use a bad experience and turn it into a good one (Dominguez 209-210).

To sum up, the lyrics of "I'm OK" can be read on three levels. First, Aguilera shows her father on a personal level that she has succeeded despite his abuse. Secondly, the lyrics convey a message on a public level which states that Aguilera opposes this sort of treatment in general, and finally, these lyrics also suggest that others can do the same. In other words, there is a third reading to this narrative and this reading is made possible since the real readers/listeners are able to see beyond the immediate context of Aguilera's private life and place the general message within the context of their own lives.

Love's Embrace

The second main thread found in Aguilera's lyrics is the one about love. There are not as many songs tied to this theme as to the first, but it is nevertheless important for the album's overall statement. Love is usually a very private matter, but on *Stripped* it can be argued that Aguilera makes one of her love relationships public to illustrate what love can do to you. She lets her listeners take part in the joys and disappointments of her first real relationship to state what it should and should not be like. In other words, these lyrics as a whole, placed within the context of Aguilera's personal life, make a strong public statement about love and relationships. The message is: walk away from relationships in which you are not appreciated – you deserve to be loved for who you are.

The relationship that Aguilera depicts on her album is her previous one with Jorge Santos.[6] He was one of Aguilera's dancers during her first tours and they became a couple on the road. At first it seemed as if their relationship would turn out to be a fairytale love story. They are both of Hispanic descent and they both work within show business, and this common ground brought them very close (Dominguez 84-85). However, their similar backgrounds were not enough to keep them together. After a little more than two years the couple split up, and a decisive factor behind the break-up was the wide gap between their economic positions and degrees of fame (Dominguez 181, 207). According to statements made by Aguilera in interviews, this gap was more than Santos' male ego could cope with: "It was scary because we come from two different places, as far as, like, he's a dancer and I'm a star – as bluntly as I can put it. It can be hard for a guy's ego." (qtd. in Dominguez 207). However, some of Aguilera's lyrics on *Stripped* indicate that this was not the only problem they had.

Both "Impossible" and "Underappreciated" illustrate what a destructive relationship is like. "Impossible," which seems to be about communication problems within a relationship is placed first of the two songs on the album Here the narrator addresses a male narratee with what can be read as a certain degree of desperation in her voice:

It's impossible

[6] This is fairly obvious since Aguilera chronicles more or less in detail the relationship in the lyrics of "Primer Amor Interlude" and "Infatuation" and she describes Jorge Santos' heritage, profession and looks minutely. She has also stated this explicitly in interviews. This quote from *Rolling Stone* is just one of many in which Aguilera comments on their relationship: "If you wanted to know what I was up to . . . with my last boyfriend, just listen" (Wild).

It's impossible to love you
If you don't let me know what you're feeling
It's impossible for me to give you what you need
If you're always hiding from me
I don't know what hurt you, I just
Wanna make it right, 'cause boy I'm sick tired
of trying to read your mind

Viewed within the context of Aguilera's personal life, it can be argued that this male narratee is Santos. The verse quoted above can thus functions as an analeptic depiction of how Aguilera tried to explain to Santos that he has to communicate with her in order for their relationship to work. It can also be viewed as Aguilera giving Santos a retrospective explanation of why their relationship did not work out. However, placed within the discourse of relationships in general, these lyrics can be seen as a general critique of men's inability to talk about emotions. In other words, the overall message of these lyrics is that a good relationship has to include a two-way communication.

The necessity for communication is also one of the issues in the lyrics of "Underappreciated," but it is not the only one. This song portrays a relationship in which the man puts a great deal of effort into catching the woman, but more or less seems to ignore her after a while. The narrative is told from the female's point of view, and through the lyrics she lists what she misses in the relationship. In other words, the female narrator explains why she feels underappreciated:

I remember when it all first began, we were tight right from the start
It wasn't long before you came on strong, trying hard to win my heart
I played hard to get but I couldn't help but give up my heart in the end
You were thoughtful, careful not to hurt the relationship

What happened to those days when you used to be compassionate
Caring what I thought and said, so attentive, a gentleman
Now it's hard to turn your head away from the TV set
Taking me for granted lately and frankly, it's gotta quit

If these verses are placed within the context of Aguilera's personal life, the narratee will once again be Santos, and the message then is that his negligent behaviour is the cause of their failed relationship. However, I will argue that this is not the main point of these

lyrics. Instead it can be claimed that they constitute a textbook example of where personal narration is used to make a more general statement.

What is actually suggested in the lyrics of "Underappreciated" is that men often take women's commitment for granted. This is illustrated in these lyrics as the narrator calls out to other women who have been neglected as well:

> Ooh I feel underappreciated
> Now girls help me out if you know what I'm talking about
> I said, I'm feeling underappreciated for all the time and effort
> I have put in this commitment

In other words, these lines claim that men do not put as much effort into the relationship as women do. One explanation to this might be that in a patriarchal society men are socialized into believing that they are superior to women and therefore they feel that it is only natural that women should have to prove that they deserve their love.

However, in "Underappreciated" the narrator tries to explain to her male narratees that they cannot hold on to a similar attitude. She uses her private narration in order to illustrate that men also have to work in order for a relationship to have a future:

> Let's take it back again to the very beginning
> when our love was something new
> Back when romance was important not just another thing to do
> I was feeling high loves delight, thought I'd never come back down
> Now it seems that you and me have lost our solid ground
> . . .
> I miss those days when you stayed awake,
> now you roll over and snore instead
> . . .
> I miss the nice massages
> The long phone calls and the
> Way you talked how it'd turn me on
> Miss the bubble baths, had the sweetest laughs
> I'm needin' those days back

To sum up, it can be claimed that these lyrics tell men that unless they acknowledge that women have as much right to be appreciated in a relationship as they, there will be no love, no passion and no communication in it and ultimately the relationship will crash.

Furthermore, theses lyrics can be seen as a message to women that they should not put up with the treatment depicted in "Underappreciated." In fact, the narrator explicitly addresses other women in these lyrics and she actively turns to them in order to have their attention, as can be seen in the line that starts "Now girls. . ." These narratees can be both women within Aguilera's personal life and women in general. The message to them is the same though: they have to stand up for themselves just as the narrator does when she tells her partner that his neglectful treatment has ". . . gotta quit." In other words, Aguilera's private narration placed in a public context has opened up for what Lanser suggests to be a possible third reading, which is based on the real reader/listener's understanding of the lyrics' different voices within the context of the real reader/listener's life.

Even though many of the lyrics on *Stripped* portray relationships with problems, there are still those that picture the reverse situation. In "Loving Me 4 Me" Aguilera illustrates what can be claimed to be the perfect relationship. In the context of her personal life, these lyrics constitute yet another example of an analeptic narration addressed to Santos as Aguilera's personal narratee. The message to him is that she treasures how he initially saw and loved her for the person she was:

> Now people ask why I'm in love with you
> Well, let me start by sayin' you got my heart by just bein' who you are
> And what we got is between me and you
> It doesn't matter 'bout the money I make or what I do, or that I'm a star
> . . .
> You please me, complete me, filling me
> . . .
> But the best quality that's hookin' me
> is that you're lovin' me 4 me
> Is that you're lovin' me 4 me

In retrospect it can be argued that these lyrics are not truthful to the context of Aguilera's relationship with Santos. The real life story suggests that somewhere along the line Aguilera's money and her fame started to bother Santos. They even went their separate ways because of it. Hence, it can be suggested that on a personal level Aguilera deceives herself when it comes to her relationship with Santos. She wants her relationship to fit the utopian depiction of what a romance should be like so she ignores what was wrong. However, even though this narration is not true to Aguilera's personal

context, the message which comes across is nevertheless the same: the best quality of the relationship was that the male narratee once loved the female narrator unconditionally.

This personal narration can also be claimed to mediate a message of more general importance. I would even argue that it is made public on *Stripped* in order to make a statement about what all relationships should be like. The message is thus that everyone deserves to be loved for who they are, just as Aguilera in these lyrics tells the world that she has been:

> Stripped of all make-up
> No need for fancy clothes
> No cover ups, push ups,
> With him, I don't have to put on a show
> He loves every freckle, every curve,
> Every inch of my skin
> Fullfilling me entirely
> Taking all of me in
> He's real
> He's honest
> He's loving me 4 me
> Yeah

In other words, this is a private narration which is made public in order to enable the real readers/listeners to turn it into a message of their own. In accordance with Lanser's theory, the real reader's/listener's knowledge of Aguilera's private message and her public message makes it possible for the real reader/listener to form a third message of his or her own, which fits into the context of his or her life experiences.

Conclusion:
Keep on Singing My Song

In the very last lyrics of the album *Stripped* the following lines can be read:

> Everytime I tried to be what they wanted from me
> It never came naturally, so I ended up in misery
> Was unable to see all the good around me, wasting so much energy on
> What they thought of me than simply just rememberin' to breathe, I've learned
> I'm humanly unable to please everyone at the same time
> So now I find my peace of mind living one day at a time
>
> In the end I answer to one God, comes down to one love till I get to heaven above
> I have made the decision never to give in till the day I die no matter what
> I'm gonna carry on, I'mma keep singin' my song

These lines are from "Keep on Singing My Song," and as I am about to show they reveal an aspect of Christina Aguilera which is very important for the final message that this album brings us.

First of all, it can be argued that these lines show that Aguilera is determined to continue conveying the feminist message that I have suggested is a part of the lyrics on the album *Stripped.* She will go on singing songs which contain lyrics that shed light upon patriarchal society's oppression and objectification of women at the same time as they criticize this treatment. In other words, her future albums will most likely also contain lyrics which attack sexual double standards that place harsher demands on women's sexuality, lyrics that take on the way society tries to silence the female voice and lyrics which question how men still subordinate women both in public and privately. In addition to this, it seems highly probable that these future lyrics will continue to hold a voice which empowers women to rise against this unjust treatment, both as a group and individually, and exhorts them to be proud of themselves just the way they are.

However, these lines also suggest that Aguilera is aware of the fact that her message will not suit everyone. She states that "I'm humanly unable to please everyone at the same time," which can be said to illustrate what Holly Kruse points out in her article in *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture.* "If lyrics are to be analyzed in relation to gender, then, it must be understood that they can have different meanings to different audiences in different contexts. No single meaning can be pinned down, though certain

readings may be more obvious than others" (89). This means, for example, that there will always be those who criticise Aguilera in ways like the ones I depicted in my introduction. It would also suggest that someone might argue that the apologies in "Stripped Intro" and "Stripped Pt. 2" should be taken literally, and not be read as a cunning way to criticize patriarchal society or that the whole album could be read within a sexual discourse since the title *Stripped*, together with the booklet's pictures of a more or less undressed Aguliera, charges it with sexual connotations and thus makes it possible to claim that it yields to patriarchal society's urge to turn women into sex objects. Moreover, someone might even argue that this album cannot possibly voice a feminist message since it works within the discourse of pop music, and that Aguilera thus should be viewed as one of the "[f]emale musicians who . . . are tied to [pop music's] commercial manipulation, excluded from the ideology of authenticity, and viewed as speaking for no one" (Lewis 61).

This last suggestion can actually be argued to be the reason why Aguilera is so determined to keep on singing her song. She knows that she works within an industry whose goal is to make money out of its artists, and therefore she has to keep repeating like a mantra to herself and to others that she, and her music, is not just a product of this industry. As Kruse puts it, "[p]opular music is a part of a multibillion dollar, multinational media industry. While economics may not solely determine what sort of lyrics, sounds, and images are made available, musical experience is formed and marketed in an environment shaped by the music industry. Its influence cannot be ignored" (93). Hence, Aguilera will indefinitely be under the influence of this business, and for her to be able to persuade others that her music brings a message which can make a difference in society she first has to convince herself that it will. She has to keep on singing her song to herself.

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Stripped Part 1

[Sounds of media clippings:]

Paparazzi…

That was the clip of all year…

I did it all for Christina, man…

They had to kick Christina out…

Scandal, gossip…

What you talkin' about…

Forced to look at yourself.

Britney!

We'll let Christina tell her side of the story…

[Talk:]
Waited a long time for this, feels right now
Allow me to introduce myself, want you to come a little closer
I'd like you to get to know me a little bit better, meet the real me

Sorry you can't define me, sorry I break the mold
Sorry that I speak my mind, sorry, don't do what I'm told
Sorry if I don't fake it, sorry I come too real
I will never hide what I really feel, no way oh

[Talk:]
So here it is, no hype, no glass, no pretense
Just me
Stripped

Can't Hold Us Down feat. Lil' Kim

Christina Aguilera/Matthew Morris/Scott Storch

So- What, am I not supposed to have an opinion
Should I keep quiet just because I'm a woman
Call me a bitch cause I speak what's on my mind
Guess it's easier for you to swallow if I sat and smiled

When a female fires back
Suddenly big talker don't know how to act
So he does what every little boy would do
Makin' up a few false rumors or two
That for sure is not a man to me, slanderin' names for popularity
It's sad you only get your fame through controversy
But now it's time for me to come and give you more to say

[Chorus:]
This is for my girls all around the world (around the world)
Who have come across a man that don't respect your worth
Thinkin' all women should be seen not heard
So what do we do girls, shout out loud
Lettin 'em know we're gonna stand our ground
So lift your hands higher and wave 'em proud
Take a deep breath and say it loud
Never can, never will
Can't hold us down

Nobody can hold us down
Nobody can hold us down
Nobody can hold us down
Never can, never will...

So- What, am I not supposed to say what I'm saying
Are you offended with the message I'm bringin'
Call me whatever 'cause your words don't mean a thing
Guess you ain't even a man enough to handle what I sing
If you look back in history it's a common double standard of society
The guy gets all the glory the more he can score
While the girl can do the same and yet you call her a whore
I don't understand why it's OK,
The guy can get away with it, the girl gets named
All my ladies come together and make a change
And start a new beginning for us, everybody sing

[Chorus:]

[Lil' Kim:]
Now here's something I just can't understand

If the guy has three girls then he's the man
He can even give her some head, or sex her off
But if a girl does the same, she's a whore

But the tables about to turn
I bet my fame on it
Cats take my ideas, and put their name on it
It's aint though, you can't hold me down
I got to keep on moving

To my girls to their man who be trying to mac
Do it right back to him and let that be that
You need to let him know that his game is whack
And Lil' Kim and Christina Aguilera got yo back [/]

You're just a little boy
Think you're so cute, so coy
You must talk so big to make up for smaller things
You're just a little boy
All you do is annoy
You must talk so big to make up for smaller things

[Chorus x 2]

Uh Oh, Uh Oh
Uh, can't hold us down
Lil Kim:
Yeah, we here, we back again, yeah,
Lil Kim and Christina Aguilera

Can't hold us down

Walk Away
Christina Aguilera/Matthew Morris/Scott Storch

[Whispering]:
What do you do
When you know something's bad for you
And you still can't let go?

I was naïve, your love was like candy
Artificially sweet, I was deceived by the wrapping
Got caught in your web and I learned how to bleed
I was prey in your bed and devoured completely

[Chorus:]
And it hurts my soul 'cause I can't let go all these walls are caving in
I can't stop my suffering
I hate to show that I've lost control cause I,
I keep going right back to the one thing that I need
to walk away from

I need to get away from ya, need to walk away from ya
Get away, walk away, walk away

I should have known that I was used for amusement
Couldn't see through the smoke, it was all an illusion
Now I've been licking my wounds, but the venom seeps deeper
We both can seduce but darling you hold me prisoner

[Chorus 2:]
Oh, I'm about to break, I can't stop this ache
I'm addicted to your allure, and I'm fiendin' for a cure
Every step I take leads to one mistake,
I keep going right back to the one thing that I need
I'm about to break and I can't stop this ache, getting nothing in return
What did I do to deserve the pain of this slow burn
And everywhere I turn I keep goin' back to the one thing that I need
To walk away from

I need to get away from ya, need to walk away from ya
Get away, walk away, walk away

Every time I try to grasp for air, I am smothered in despair it's never over, over
Seems I'll never wake from this nightmare, I let out a silent pray
Let it be over, over

Inside I'm screaming, begging pleading no more

Now what to do, my heart has been bruised, so sad but it's true
Each beat remind me of you

[Out Chorus:]
It hurts my soul ‘cause I can’t let go, all these walls are cavin’ in
I can’t stop my sufferin’
I hate to show that I lost control
Cause I keep on goin’ right back to the one thing that I need, Oh
I’m about to break, I can’t stop this ache
I’m addicted to your allure and I’m fiending for a cure
Every step I take leads to one mistake,
I keep going right back to the one thing I need , oh
I can’t mend, this torn state I’m in
Getting nothing in return what did I do to deserve
The pain of this slow burn
And everywhere I turn I keep going right back
To the one thing that I need to walk away from

[Chorus x4]

I said...
I need to get away from ya
I need to walk away from ya
Get away, walk away, walk away

Only thing I need to do
Is walk away from you

Hey, Whoa, whoa, walk away
Oh

Fighter

Christina Aguilera /Scott Storch

[Talk:]
After all you put me through
You'd think I'd despise you
But in the end I wanna thank you
'Cause you made that much stronger

Well I thought I knew you, thinking that you were true
Guess I, I couldn't trust called your bluff, time is up
'cause I've Had enough
You were there by my side, always down for the ride
But your joy ride just came down in flames cause your greed sold me out in shame, mhm

After all of the stealing and cheating you probably think that
I hold resentment for you
But uh uh, oh no, you're wrong
'Cause if it wasn't for all that you tried to do, I wouldn't know
Just how capable I am to pull through
So I wanna say thank you
'cause it

[Chorus:]
Makes me that much stronger
Makes me work a little bit harder
Makes me that much wiser
So thanks for making me a fighter
Made me learn a little bit faster
Made my skin a little bit thicker
Makes me that much smarter
So thanks for making me a fighter

Oh oh oh, ooh yeah yeah yeah, uh uh

Never saw it coming, all of your backstabbing
Just so, you could cash in on a good thing before I'd realize your game
I heard you're going round, playin' the victim now
But don't even begin feeling I'm the one to blame
'Cause you dug your own grave, mhm
After all of the fights and the lies cause you're wanting to haunt me
But that won't work anymore, no more, uh uh
It's over
'Cause if it wasn't for all of your torture
I wouldn't know how to be this way now and never back down
So I wanna say thank you
'cause it

[Chorus:]
How could this man I thought I knew
Turn out to be unjust so cruel
Could only see the good in you
Pretended not to know the truth
You tried to hide your lies, disguise yourself
Through living in denial
But in the end you'll see
YOU- WON'T- STOP- ME

I am a fighter and I
I ain't gonna stop
There is no turning back
I'VE HAD ENOUGH

[Chorus x2]

Primer Amor Interlude

[Talk:]
Yo te contaré, una historia
De como un puertorriqueño me robó el corazón
Nunca más he vuelto a amar de esa manera
Quizás, jamás lo haré
Es la historia de mi primer amor
Era buenmozo
Con grandes y profundos ojos marrones
Un bailarín
Juntos, nos perdimos en el ritmo del amor
Así es como comenzó

[Translation:]
I'm gonna tell you a story
About how a Puerto Rican stole my heart
I've never loved anyone this way again
Maybe I never will
It's the story of my first love
He was handsome, with deep brown eyes
A dancer
Together, we lost ourselves in the rhythm of love
This is how it began

Infatuation

Christina Aguilera/Matthew Morris/Scott Storch

He comes from a foreign place, an island far away
Intrigues me with every move till I'm breathless, I'm helpless
Can't keep my cool
Steals my heart when he takes my hand
And we dance, to the rhythm of the band
Feel fingertips grip my hips and I slip as we dip into a state of bliss
Mama used to warn me to beware of those Latin lovers
She said I gave my heart too soon and that's how I became your mother
I said, ay mama, you seem to forget I'm not in love yet
Sweet talk don't win me over
But I realized big brown eyes can hypnotize, when he says

[Chorus:]
I am full blood Boricua, reads the tattoo on his arm
He tells me, mami I need ya and my heart beat pumps so strong
Getting lost in el ritmo he whispers te quiero, te quiero
I begin to give in with no hesitation, can't help my infatuation

It's pure infatuation

Skin the color of cinnamon, his eyes light up and I melt within
Feels so good it must be a sin
I can't stop what I started I'm giving in
He brings life to my fantasies, sparks a passion inside of me
Finds the words when I cannot speak
In the silence his heartbeat is music to me
Mama used to warn me not to rush love with another
She said I'm not trying to lecture I just care about my daughter

I said- Ay mama, you seem to forget I never will let a man
control my emotions
But when he smiles I feel like a little child, and when he says

[Chorus]

Caught between my mama's words and what I feel inside
I'm wanting to explore his world but part of me wants to hide
Should I risk it, can't resist it, it has caught me by surprise
Should I let him take me to Puerto Rico
I can't hold back no more let's go tonight

Papi hold me, say that you adore me
Never let go never leave me lonely
Papi hold me, say that you adore me
Never let go never leave me lonely

[Chorus]

Loves Embrace Interlude

Ooo you make me want to fly
Crying sky on a mountain
I'm so so afraid
Afraid of love's embrace

Loving Me 4 Me

Christina Aguilera/Matthew Morris/Scott Storch

People ask if I'm in love with you
Cause I'm sitting here with your picture and smilin' to myself (I smile)
I'm kinda lost in my own thoughts of you
My heart speaks before my mind thinks through, and I blush as I say yes

What a feeling of vulnerability comin' over me
And I'm feeling weak and I can't speak (speak)
I can't think
Never thought I'd give in so willingly to a human being
With abilities to set me free (free), let me be me
Makes me wanna say

[Chorus:]
Your lips, your eyes, your smile, your kiss
I must admit it's a part of me
You please me, complete me, filling me
Like a melody
Your soul, your flow, your youth, your truth is simply proof
We were meant to be
But the best quality that's hookin' me
is that you're lovin' me 4 me
Is that you're lovin' me 4 me

Now people ask why I'm in love with you
Well, let me start by sayin' you got my heart by just bein' who you are
And what we got is between me and you
It doesn't matter 'bout the money I make or what I do, or that I'm a star

Unconditionally you're there for me
Undeniably you inspire me, spiritually, so sweet
This is meaningful, it's incredible, pleasurable, unforgettable
The way I feel, so sweet, makes me wanna say

[Chorus]

It's so amazing how something so sweet has come and rearranged my life
I've been kissed by destiny, oh heaven came and saved me
An angel was placed at my feet, this isn't ordinary
He's loving me 4 me

[Poem:]
Stripped of all make-up
No need for fancy clothes
No cover ups, push ups,
With him, I don't have to put on a show
He loves every freckle, every curve,
Every inch of my skin
Fullfilling me entirely
Taking all of me in
He's real
He's honest
He's loving me 4 me
Yeah

Impossible

Alicia Keys

[Talk:]
[Christina:]
Play something for me Alicia.
[Alicia:]
There you go Chris. What's up?
[Christina:]
I got something on my mind.
[Alicia:]
Well, speak on it girl.

It's impossible
It's impossible to love you
If you don't let me know what you're feeling
It's impossible for me to give you what you need
If you're always hiding from me
I don't know what hurt you, I just
Wanna make it right, 'cause boy I'm sick tired
of trying to read your mind

[Chorus:]
'Cause it's impossible
Oh baby it's impossible for me to love you, this way
It's impossible
Oh baby it's impossible
If you makin' it this way

Impossible to make it easy
If you're always tryin' to make it so damn hard

How can I, how can I give you all my love baby
If you're always, always puttin' up your guard
This is not a circus, so don't you play me for a clown
How long can emotions keep on goin' up and down oh

[Chorus x2]

Underappreciated

Christina Aguilera/Matthew Morris/Scott Storch

I remember when it all first began, we were tight right from the start
It wasn't long before you came on strong, trying hard to win my heart
I played hard to get but I couldn't help but give up my heart in the end
You were thoughtful, careful not to hurt the relationship

What happened to those days when you used to be compassionate
Caring what I thought and said, so attentive, a gentleman
Now it's hard to turn your head away from the TV set
Taking me for granted lately and frankly, it's gotta quit

[Chorus:]
Ooh I feel underappreciated
Now girls help me out if you know what I'm talking about
I said, I'm feeling underappreciated for all the time and effort
I have put in this commitment

Let's take it back again to the very beginning
when our love was something new
Back when romance was important not just another thing to do
I was feeling high loves delight, thought I'd never come back down
Now it seems that you and me have lost our solid ground

After time I realized I seem to give more than I get
Funny how things seem to change after a few years commitment
Used to talk for hours on end of our dreams while we lay in bed
I miss those days when you stayed awake,
now you roll over and snore instead

[Chorus]

I miss the nice massages
The long phone calls and the
Way you talked how it'd turn me on
Miss the bubble baths, had the sweetest laughs
I'm needin' those days back

[Chorus x2]

Beautiful

Linda Perry

[Whisper:]
Don't look at me
Mm, mm,
Yeah, oh, ooh,

Everyday is so wonderful, then suddenly, it's hard to breathe
Now and then, I get insecure, from all the pain,
I'm so ashamed

I am beautiful no matter what they say
Words can't bring me down
I am beautiful in every single way
Yes, words can't bring me down,
So don't you bring me down today

To all your friends you're delirious
So consumed in all your doom
Trying hard to fill the emptiness, the pieces gone,
Left the puzzle undone, is that the way it is

You are beautiful no matter what they say
Words can't bring you down,
Cause you are beautiful in every single way
Yes words can't bring you down, oh, no
So don't you bring me down today

No matter what we do
No matter what we say
We're the song inside the tune, full of beautiful mistakes
And everywhere we go, the sun will always shine
And tomorrow we might awake on the other side

'Cause we are beautiful no matter what they say
Yes, words won't bring us down, no
We are beautiful in every single way
Yes words can't bring us down, oh no
So don't you bring me down today

Don't you bring me down today
Yeah, yeah, ooh,
So don't you bring me down, mmm, today

Make Over

Christina Aguilera/Linda Perry

I can't believe what you did to me
Down on my knees and I need to break free
All these years you violated me
(violated me)
I don't know why I can't feel inside
I try to hide can't make it alright, it's overkill
Now I'm ready to fight
(ready to fight)
I don't need nobody tryin' to make me over
I just wanna live simple and free

I just want to get away
Savin' all your bullshit for another day

Feeling confined like I'm bein' force fed
My visions blurry and I'm lost in regrets
It's overload and I'm outta control
(outta control)
So sick and tired of bein' misused
(so misused)
You're taking me down with all your mental abuse
And I said, I gotta get you outta my head
Everybody's always trying to look me over
I just wanna live simple and free

[Chorus:]
I just wanna get away
Saving all your bullshit for another day
I'm the only one that can rescue me from me

Leaving the house around quarter to five
Zipped up my boots and I'm ready to ride
And I feel so high, I feel so alive
Let down my hair feel the wind on my skin
Crossin' the border where my new life begins
And I close my eyes and take it all in
I don't need nobody tryin' to make me over
(Don't make me over)
I just want to live simple and free

[Chorus x2]

You wanna break me down
You wanna break me down
You wanna break me down

Cruz

Christina Aguilera/Linda Perry

[Chorus (a cappella):]
I'm leaving today
Livin' it, leaving it to change

Slowly drifting into a peaceful breeze
Tongue tied and twisted are all my memories
Celebrating a fantasy come true
Packing all my bags, finally on the move

[Chorus]

As I'm driving I'm captured by the view
So much beauty the road becomes my muse
The heat is rising and my hand surfs through the wind
Cool, calm, collected is the child that lies within, see

[Chorus x2]

But somehow I miss it, I think I'll really miss it one day
I turn on the radio and I'm feeling like I've never felt before
Turn down the memories of yesteryears and broken dreams I bring
Finally free

Slowly drifting into a peaceful breeze

[Chorus x3]

But somehow I miss it, I think I'll really miss it
One day

Soar

Christina Aguilera/Rob Hoffman/Heather Holley

When they push, when they pull, tell me, can you hold on
When they say you should change can you lift your head high
and stay strong
Will you give up, give in, when your heart's crying out
that it's wrong
Will you love you for you at the end of it all

In life, there's gonna be times when you're feeling low
And in your mind insecurity seems to take control
We start to look outside ourselves for acceptance and approval
We keep forgettin' that the one thing we should know is..

[Chorus:]
Don't be scared to fly alone, find a path that is your own
Love will open every door it's in your hands, the world is yours
Don't hold back and always know, all the answers will unfold
What are you waiting for, spread your wings and soar

The boy who wonders is he good enough for them
Keeps tryin' to please ‘em all but he just never seems to fit in
Then there's the girl who thinks she'll never ever be good enough for him
Keeps tryin' to change and that's a game she'll never win

Now in life there's gonna be times when you're feeling low
And in your mind insecurity seems to take control
We start to look outside ourselves for acceptance and approval
We keep forgetting that the one thing we should know is

[Chorus]

In the mirror is where she comes face to face with her fears
Her own reflection, now foreign to her after all these years
All of her life she has tried to be something besides herself
Now time has passed and she's ended up someone else with regret

What is it in us that makes us feel the need to keep pretending
Gotta let ourselves be

[Chorus x2]

Don't wait, No, no
Spread your wings and soar
Find your own, oh, yeah
Don't hold back and always know
You'll find your way home, Oh, whoa

Spread your wings and soar,
Don't wait no more
Ohh, yeah, yeah
You better soar
Spread your wings and soar
Don't wait no more,
You can soar

[Talk:]
So what you waitin' for?
Go ahead (Woo)
Don't wait, don't wait
Soar
Oh, yeah

Get Mine, Get Yours

Christina Aguilera/Steve Morales/Balewa Muhammad/David Siegel

Baby you pretend that things ain't what they seem
All this tension on titling just exactly what we should be
Baby I don't mind us being some kinda casual thing
Listen, all I wanna do for now is have you come and take all of me, can you

Put your hands on my waistline
Want your skin up against mine
Move my hips to the baseline
Let me get mine, you get yours
Hang a please don't disturb sign
Put my back into a slow grind
Runnin' chills up and down my spine
Let me get mine, you get yours

If you see me with a man understand that you can't question me
The feelings that you caught, ain't my fault can't help your jealousy
If you can handle the fact that what we have has got to be commitment free
Then we can keep this undercover lovin' comin' hidden underneath the sheets
Can you

[Chorus:]
Put your hands on my waistline
Want your skin up against mine
Move my hips to the baseline
Let me get mine, you get yours
(But don't fall in love)
Hang a please don't disturb sign
Put my back into a slow grind
Runnin' chills up and down my spine
Let me get mine, you get yours

So, come on and freak my body we can get nasty, naughty
All night a private party
Gotta hit that spot just right
Work me like a 9 to 5

It ain't about the kissin' and huggin' cause this is a physical lovin'
Straight sweatin' our bodies are rubbin'
Gotta hit that spot just right work me like a 9 to 5

[Talk:]
We have a physical thing
We'll make love, but don't fall in love
We spend time
Just enough so you get yours and I get mine
No strings attached

I want your body
Not your heart

Can you put your hands on my waistline
(Put your hands on my waistline)
Want your skin up against mine
Move my hips to the baseline
Let me get mine, you'll get yours
(But don't fall in love)
Hang a please don't disturb sign
Put my back into a slow grind
Runnin' chills up and down my spine
Let me get mine, you'll get yours

Put your hands on my waistline
Want your skin up against mine
Move my hips to the baseline
Let me get mine, you get yours
(But don't fall in love)
Hang a please don't disturb sign
Put my back into a slow grind
Runnin' chills up and down my spine
Let me get mine, you'll get yours

[Whisper:]
Come here
Don't be shy
I won't bite

[Song again:]
(Let me get mine, you'll get yours)

Dirrty feat. Redman

Christina Aguilera/Steve Morales/Balewa Muhammad/David Siegel

[Talk:]
[Redman:]
Ah, dirrty (dirrty)
Filthy (filthy)
Nasty Christina, you nasty
[Christina:]
yeah
[Redman:]
Too dirrty to clean my act up

If you ain't dirty, you ain't here to party
Ladies (move), Gentlemen (move)
Somebody ring the alarm, a fire on the room
Ring the alarm…and I'm throwin' elbows [7x]

Uh- let me loose
Ooooh, I'm overdue, gimme some room, comin' through
Paid my dues, I'm in the mood, me and my girls come to shake the room
DJ's spinning, show your hands
Let's get dirty, that's my jam
I need that, uh to get me off, sweatin' till my clothes come off

It's explosive, speakers are thumpin'
Still jumping, six in the mornin'
Table dancin', glasses are crashin'
No question time for some action

Temperature's up (can you feel it)
'bout to erupt
Gonna get my girls, get your boys, gonna make some noise

[Chorus:]
Gonna get rowdy, gonna get a little unruly
Get it fired up in a hurry
Wanna get dirty, it's about time that I came to start the
Party, sweat drippin' over my body
Dancin', getting' just a little naughty
Wanna get dirty, it's about time for my arrival

Ah, heat is up, ladies, fellas drop your cups
Bodies packed, front to back, move your ass, I like that
Tight hip huggers, low for ho
Shake a little somethin' on the floor
I need that, uh to get me off, sweatin' till my clothes come off

Let's get open, cause a commotion

Still goin', eight in the morning
There's no stoppin' we keep it popping
Hard rockin, everyone's talkin'

Give all you got (give it to me), just hit the spot
Gonna get my girls, get your boys, gonna make some noise

[Chorus]

Here it comes it's the one you've been waitin' on
Get up, get it rough, yup, that's what's up
Givin' just what you love to the maximum
Uh oh, here we go
What to do when the music starts to drop
That's when we take it to the parking lot and I bet you somebody's gonna call the cops
Uh oh, here we go

Ohh ooh ohh, yeah yeah...

[Redman rap:]
Yo, hot damn, Doc a jam like a summer show
I keep my car looking like a crash dummy drove
My gear look like the bank got my money froze
For dead presidents I pimp like Huddy roll
Doc the one that excite ya divas (ow!)
If the media shine
I'm shining with both of the sleeves up
Yo Christina, better hop in here
My block live and in color, like Rodman hair (yeah)
The club is packed, the bar is filled
I'm waiting for sister to act, like Lauryn Hill
Frankly, it's a rap, no bargain deals
I drive a four wheel ride with foreign wheels
Throw it up
Baby it's brick city, you heard of that
We blessed, and hung low, like Bernie Mac
Dogs, let 'em out, women, let 'em in
It's like I'm ODB, the way I'm freaking

[Chorus x3]

Uh, what

Stripped Part 2

Sorry if I ain't perfect sorry I don't give a -what-
Sorry I ain't no diva sorry just know what I want
Sorry I'm not a virgin sorry I'm not a slut
I won't let you break me think what you want

To all my dreamers out there, I'm with you
All my underdogs, I feel you
Lift your head high and stay strong keep pushin' on

The Voice Within

Christina Aguilera/Glen Ballard

Young girl don't cry
I'll be right here when your world starts to fall
Young girl it's alright
Your tears will dry, you'll soon be free to fly

When you're safe inside your room you tend to dream
Of a place where nothing's harder than it seems
No one ever wants or bothers to explain
Of the heartache life can bring and what it means

[Chorus:]
When there's no one else, look inside yourself
Like your oldest friend just trust the voice within
Then you'll find the strength that will guide your way
You'll learn to begin to trust the voice within

Young girl don't hide
You'll never change if you just run away
Young girl just hold tight
Soon you're gonna see your brighter day

Now in a world where innocence is quickly claimed
It's so hard to stand your ground when you're so afraid
No one reaches out a hand for you to hold
When you're look outside, look inside to your soul

[Chorus]

Ohh yeah, ooh, yeah ohh

Life is a journey
It can take you anywhere you choose to go
As long as you're learning
You'll find all you'll need to know
You'll break it
(Hold on)
You'll make it
(Be strong)
Just don't forsake it because
No one can tell you what you can't do
No one can stop you, you know that I'm talking to you

[Chorus]

Young girl don't cry

I'll be right here when your world starts to fall, ohh
Listen, listen, listen…

I'm OK

Christina Aguilera/Linda Perry

Once upon a time there was a girl
In her early years she had to learn
How to grow up living in a war that she called home
Never knew just where to turn for shelter from the storm
It hurt me to see the pain cross my mother's face
Every time my father's fists would put her in her place
Hearing all the yelling I would cry up in my room
Hoping it would be over soon

[Chorus:]
Bruises fade father but the pain remains the same
And I still remember how you kept me so afraid
Strength is my mother for all the love she gave
And every morning that I wake I look back in yesterday
And I'm OK

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

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

It's not so easy to forget, all the marks you left along her neck
When I was thrown against cold stairs
And everyday afraid to come home in fear of what I might see, next

[Chorus]

I'm OK

Keep On Singing My Song

Christina Aguilera/Linda Perry

I woke up this morning with a smile on my face
And nobody's gonna bring me down today
Been feeling like nothings been going my way lately
But I decided right here, right now, that my outlook's gonna change
That's why I'm gonna
Say goodbye to all the tears I've cried every time somebody hurt my pride
Feeling like they won't let me live life, and take the time to look at what is mine

I see every blessing so clearly , and I thank God for what I got from above

[Chorus:]
I believe they can take anything from me
But they can't succeed in taking my inner peace from me
They can say all they wanna say about me, but I'm
I'm gonna carry on (carry on)
I'mma keep on (keep on) singing my song

(la,la, la etc)

I never wanna dwell on the pain again, there's no use in relivin' how I hurt back then
Rememberin' too well the hell I felt when I was runnin' out of faith
Every step I'm 'bout to take well it's towards a better day
'Cause I'm about to
Say farewell to every single lie and all the fears I've held too long inside
Every time I felt I couldn't try, all the negativity and strife

Cause too long, I've been strugglin', couldn't go on
But now I've found I'm feeling strong and I'm moving on

[Chorus]

Every time I tried to be what they wanted from me
It never came naturally, so I ended up in misery
Was unable to see all the good around me, wasting so much energy on
What they thought of me than simply just rememberin' to breathe, I've learned
I'm humanly unable to please everyone at the same time
So now I find my peace of mind living one day at a time

In the end I answer to one God, comes down to one love till I get to heaven above
I have made the decision never to give in till the day I die no matter what
I'm gonna carry, I'mma keep singin' my song

[Chorus x2]

[Laughter from Christina]