

DID I WANT TO BE WITH THE BAND?  
*A Study of Feminism and Consent in the Time of  
Sex, Drugs and Rock n' Roll*

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Plan II Honors Program  
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May 7, 2019

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## **Abstract**

The nature of Groupies' reputation in the music industry caused many people to belittle their role in the narrative of rock music of the 60s and 70s despite the fact that they exerted substantial influence on both the music and women's rights. While the term 'Groupie' itself is primarily associated with women who sleep with rock stars, the reality of the time was that any woman who enjoyed rock music was categorized as a Groupie including journalists, musicians and fans. This classification of all women into a singular, derogatory group served the dual purpose of marginalizes women's voices in rock and implying that women's only contribution was to serve the interests of the male musicians. It also undermines the fact that the few women who transcended from these categories into being 'Groupies' in the traditional sense of the word directly influenced the culture of the time by serving more as muses and acting as a voice for the female sexual revolution. My intention with this project is to find the specific ways that 'Groupies' impacted the 60s and 70s and see how that impact aided modern feminist movements, while also considering the rock narrative as perpetuated by journalists and how it failed to adequately represent women.

## **Biography**

McKenzie Hartmann was born in Dallas, Texas on February 12, 1997, and lived there until moving to Austin, Texas for college. She enrolled in the Plan II Honors Program at the University of Texas at Austin while also pursuing a Marketing and Business Honors Degree through the McCombs School of Business. The summer before her Junior year of college she studied abroad at the University of Edinburgh with a focus in business law and international law. Ms. Hartmann graduated with honors in 2019 and plans to move to San Francisco where she will teach elementary school through Teach for America. After her two years in Teach for America she plans to enter law school and specialize in international law.

## *Acknowledgements*

I would like to thank the many people who contributed to this project and supported me along the way. Each of the individuals listed below had a significant influence on both my research and the woman that I have grown in to, and I want to stress how much I appreciate your encouragement.

To my supervising professor, Hannah. Lewis, I would like to say thank you for the countless hours of work you put into helping me develop my ideas and research this topic. This project would not have existed without your constant support and commitment to helping me achieve the best version of my writing and I cannot thank you enough.

I would also like to thank my second reader, Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, for her contributions to my research and the content recommendations she made along the way. Thank you for helping me explore new areas of scholarship and being a constructive voice.

Finally I would like to recognize the endless support that my friends and family have given throughout this project. To my parents, Clay and Michelle Hartmann, thank you for giving me a love of music and carrying me through my toughest moments. To my friends and siblings thank you for providing a much needed distraction, and listening to me complain for the last year. I promise you will never have to listen to me rant about my thesis again.

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## Introduction

Rock music likely invokes glamorized images of long haired musicians taking the stage before a screaming crowd, beautiful women waiting backstage mouthing the lyrics to every song, and the quintessential grouping of sex, drugs, and rock n' roll. Rock music is supposed to be an escape. A tool used to comment on political, social, and cultural events, and a way to unite people from all different backgrounds under a single harmony. Because of music's distinct ability to mingle with all aspects of culture, I have always been enamored with it, and classic rock holds a special place for me. While it is significant for personal reasons from my childhood to now, it also makes me nostalgic for a time I was never able to experience, and allows me to live vicariously through the sound. There is also something pure and exciting about the style of rock and many of the lyrics have a depth that is difficult to find today. Although, if I am being honest, Cameron Crowe's film *Almost Famous* caused me to look at rock music as a passion instead of a hobby.

While I was always interested in rock, I was also always acutely aware of the fact that most rock stars, with notable exceptions like Janis Joplin, had voices that were significantly different from my own. I did not dream of being Jimmy Page or Roger Waters when I was young, because I didn't look like them or identify with them. I thought that rock was meant for boys and I was just supposed to appreciate it from afar. *Almost Famous* changed that for me. I fell in love with the character of Penny Lane (a very proud moment for my parents), and wanted to copy her effortless style, refined taste, and unique ability to at once be independent and deeply vulnerable. She was someone who existed in the rock world that I could identify with and I was able to witness her subtle, yet profoundly moving impact on the music. My interest in real life

women like Penny Lane increased as I grew older, and I became fascinated with their stories.

Women like Pamela Des Barres, Lori Maddox, and Pattie Boyd, who were always on the fringes of the 60s and 70s rock scene, and are in many ways the unsung heroes of the musical world.

However, age also showed me the more problematic elements of their stories such as drug abuse, abandonment, and assault.

When I started thinking about my thesis I knew I wanted to focus on these women. They seemed like a good way for me to reconcile the part of me that loves rock music with the part of me that doesn't always identify with its creators or finds the content problematic. This was a fortuitous time for me to explore this research because initiatives like the #MeToo movement have brought past allegations to light and encouraged survivors to be more vocal about their experiences. The Rock world was especially susceptible to some of the more sordid stories, and my initial research showed that rock journalists throughout the 60s and 70s had little concern for the safety of women or the accusations of "groupies." I figured that would probably be the case considering the derogatory narrative that has surrounded groupies for so many years and their general reputation as the 'sluts' of the music industry. However, the further I delved into my research the more I noticed a troubling theme: all female fans were seen as groupies in the eyes of rock reporters. An entire segment of the rock population was being lumped into this singular category because of their gender and it was enabling a narrative that glorified men while belittling women.

This realization forced me to shift the scope of my project. While I still discuss the contributions that female fans made to the music industry, I wanted to look at rock journalism and the influence that narrative has had on the legacy of rock music. My research generally led

me to some unsettling conclusions but ultimately made me optimistic for the future of this industry. It also revealed the considerable power that journalists have within the music industry and the long term implications of the narratives they create. In this thesis I will argue that rock journalism in the 60s and 70s distorted the narrative around women in rock music which had lasting repercussions on the legacy of rock. Below I will briefly describe the structure of my paper and the events that led me to this conclusion.

In my first chapter I discuss female fandom and proliferation of the media constructed idea of the groupie. I look at specific examples where the term is applied, explore the narratives of women who openly and proudly admit to being ‘groupies’ and consider the implications of the word in a modern context.

My second chapter details the activities of professional women in the industry with an emphasis on their achievements and how their success was downplayed in rock journalism and the industry as a whole. I focus on prominent female artists like Linda Ronstadt, Janis Joplin, and Ann and Nancy Wilson of Heart, and consider the broader implications of their legacy and how it applies to women today. I also look at women who worked in journalism and recount the subtle ways they shifted the music industry from within by adding more representation and newer voices to rock journalism.

In my third chapter I delve into the issues with rock reporting and focus on the ways that rock journalists negatively impacted women in the industry. I discuss their history of favoritism towards male artists over female, their objectification of female fans and artists, and the ‘boys club’ mentality that was pervasive throughout rock criticism in the 60s and 70s. I also briefly

consider the ethical implications of rock reporting specifically looking at issues from the past that have now come to light in the #MeToo movement.

My fourth chapter looks at the activities of the musicians and how they interacted with women in the industry. This includes both problematic elements of these interactions (assault, druggings, relationships with underage girls), and the more positive interactions which include a history of advocating for female performers. I also discuss how musicians looked at their relationships with women by analysing their lyrics and looking at statements they have made when reflecting upon their youthful antics later in life.

Finally, I consider the implications of my research and apply it to the modern context of journalism and the music industry as a whole. I delve into the current state of the music industry and how it treats women and also make recommendations for how to construct a more inclusive, honest narrative moving forward. I also discuss the role that fans play in the modern music industry and the newfound responsibilities tied to being a music lover and media participant in the modern information age. The last part of my thesis concerns modern rock journalism and the broader implications of my research. While this project focused specifically on the music industry, my findings apply to journalism as a whole and highlight some of the inherent problems with how the media treats women and ways it can improve moving forward.

## **Chapter 1: The Myth of the Groupie**

*How narrative creates a legend from an idea*

The term 'Groupie' is thrown around a lot in popular culture and derives specific significance within the music community. It often carries a derogatory tone where it is sometimes used as a term of endearment or uttered jokingly between friends and is sometimes used as a synonym for words like whore or slut to refer to women who just want to 'sleep with the band' (Nolan, 1967). Whatever the circumstances in which 'groupie' is used it is important to note that the formal definition according to Merriam-Webster is "a fan of a rock group who usually follows the group around on concert tours" or "an admirer of a celebrity who attends as many of his or her public appearances as possible." Notice that while this definition is both asexual and makes no specific mention of a sexual relationship between fan and performer, the word has evolved into a blanket term to categorize women in and around the music industry. This pseudo definition is obviously a radical departure from the formal one, but its prolific acceptance begs the question of what exactly caused this distortion and how did the 'groupies' of the time respond to it?

The culturally created 'groupie' has long been immortalized through the glossy pages of *Rolling Stone*, metal backed songs about one night stands and even best selling memoirs from self proclaimed 'groupies' like Pamela Des Barres and Cleo Odzer who grant us a backstage pass into what it was really like to be with rock stars back then. And while all of these are credible sources who reported on true events, it's difficult to deny that these sources also create a biased narrative that not only distort what it means to be a groupie, but also focuses on the glamor of a select few cases and not the reality for most women. This in turn creates a faulty association between what some women did and what all women wanted. Yes, there were women who slept with bands, and yes, those same women also followed the groups around on tour (which fits into

the traditional definition), but these are two mutually exclusive activities and the problem with the rock narrative as it stands is that it made the assumption that if you were a woman and followed a band it was because you wanted to be with that band and not because you just liked the music.

This idea is explored in films like Cameron Crowe's iconic film *Almost Famous*, which is arguably the most influential modern film about the rock scene of the 1960s and 70s and groupies, but also serves as a case study into how people misunderstand the idea of the groupie. The film revolves around a lovable, seemingly carefree and deceptively deep 'groupie' named Penny Lane whose fictitious story mirrors the true experience of many famous or successful groupies like Pamela Des Barres. The film also parallels the flaws we see in traditional media because it perpetuates an illusion as opposed to reality. It plays into the idealized nostalgia from the time of sex, drugs and rock and roll that everyone remembers so fondly, and Penny is at the center of it with her misplaced 'groupiedom.'

Penny, no matter how charming or relatable she might be, is the epitome of the media constructed groupie. She blurs the lines between fan and lover, she hopelessly pursues a cruel partner because he's an artist and misunderstood, but worst of all she'll be remembered as the girl that a guitarist had a fling with, if she's remembered at all by the media. That is a deeply problematic narrative and although Crowe attempts to mitigate the problems with her story by focusing on her character and vulnerability, he also creates a world where she is the perfect 'groupie' on the outside and the perfect human when further examined. Her character is sort of like the idyllic "manic pixie dream girl," who populates movies and is beautiful, selfless and above all wants nothing but to serve her lover. And while it's great that Crowe tried to rectify

Penny's fate he overlooks the hundreds of women who weren't 'perfect' in the sense that Penny was and had similar fates. Although despite my critique of Crowe's work his construction of Penny highlights the crux of my argument: women like Penny, the ones who had relationships with musicians, shouldn't be called groupies because that's not what they were. Groupies in the formal sense of the word are there for the group, but groupies as modern culture has come to understand them are there for the musician and that's what Penny embodied. She, and the real women who mirror her tale, were more like partners to these musicians, and the media lumping all women together, those who slept with the band and those who didn't, fuels the misplaced idea that any woman who liked music secretly wanted to be there for the band and their fame, and not the music.

In this chapter I will look into the true stories of self proclaimed groupies and how they tie into the dramatized narratives bolstered by popular media, the effect media reporting had on individual 'groupies', and the culture between women in music, specifically the development of strong girl friendships that came out of mutual groupiedom. I argue that there is a misplaced theory surrounding who groupies were and what they wanted which in turn lowered the status of these women and created a narrative that mitigated their contributions in rock music.

## “I’m With the Band” and other Stories

Many women who were part of the rock scene in the 60s and 70s are very open about their past experiences. They lived in a time when sexual freedom was emerging, children were ready to break away from the comfortable confines of suburbia into the radical protests of rock and roll, and the world was still open to change. Pamela Des Barres, Pattie Boyd, Bebe Buell and Lori Maddox are just a few of the women who have come forward to give the history of rock in their own words. While their stories are by definition one sided, they offer important insight into the voices that were largely ignored by rock reporting at the time. They also shed light on the differences between how rock reporting saw groupiedom and how groupies actually were.

The fundamental misconception about groupies is that they were only interested in fame and sex; yet as the memoirs and countless opinion pieces written by women point out this assumption could not be further from the truth. The female fantasy is far more complex than a simple “quickie” or “one night stand” and revolves around a desire to be loved and accepted. In other words, women don’t want to be just another one to these musicians; rather, they want to be *the one*, and this seems to be a concept that male journalists struggled to understand (Twersky 1981). Pamela Des Barres talks about how her greatest dream was to be loved by the band and speaks of her devastation when she was cast aside by her lovers. Essays in *Bitch* magazine, the premiere magazine established so women could have a voice in Rock, speak to how women fell in love with the music first, and the musician after, and how their fantasies were more in line

with romantic comedies than pornos, opposed to what the *Creem* and *Rolling Stone* magazines of the time would have us believe (Cline, 1979). Aside from the interesting subjects and unadulterated accounts of these women living their lives to the fullest, these accounts also serve to humanize the groupie. Their stories are poignant, speak to their raw emotional state, and offer legitimate insight into the process of creating work and what it was like to be in the middle of one of the most exciting times in recent music history.

These stories also show the more comical side of these women and how profoundly they impacted the bands they were involved with. For example, Cynthia Albritton gained notoriety after she started an art project where she made a cast of the penis of every rock star she slept with, hence her appropriate nickname, the “plaster caster.” Pamela Des Barres used to make funky shirts and pressured her lovers into buying them and promoting them on stage which also served as something of a calling card, (Des Barres, 1987). But perhaps the greatest stories come from the adventures of the women separate from the men they were courting. Baby groupies Sable Star and Lori Maddox have recounted the often outrageous things they had to do to convince club owners they were of age including funky makeup ticks. Pamela Des Barres and her crew used to go to thrift shops and buy every ridiculous thing they saw, wear it all at once, then run up on stage during Frank Zappa’s sets. There are even harrowing accounts of women drunkenly climbing over fences and into hotel rooms and while these were often ill fated, drunken attempts the women often look back and laugh upon the antics of their youth and the craziness of the rock world.

However, the experiences of these women also raise an important question of consent in the post-#MeToo world. While many of the stories offer exciting accounts of consensual

experiences, some raise questions about the ethical implications of what these musicians were doing to these women, and begs the question of how they were getting away with it? For example, in Pamela Des Barres' memoir she writes about how she saw band members from Led Zeppelin essentially molesting a girl younger than 14 and Des Barres couldn't tell if the girl "loved it or was in a state of terror" (Des Barres, 1987). Then there was the onslaught of the so called 'baby groupies' who were all under the age of 16 and had intense affairs with men who were sometimes decades older than they were and who subjected them to humiliating acts. Lori Maddox, one of the most popular baby groupies, went on record saying movements like #MeToo helped her realize that what happened to her back then wasn't "okay" or "consensual." Among other things, these controversial events included losing her virginity to David Bowie at 15, being locked in a closet for two days by a violent and sexually aggressive Jimmy Page, and being 'kidnapped' by a tour manager at 14 (Vintage, 2018). Then, of course, there is the infamous 'mudshark incident' with Led Zeppelin in 1969, where the band put a mudshark in a woman's vagina while she was high (although it should be noted this incident has never been formally confirmed by either the woman or the band, just by people who claimed to be there), (Greene, 2012). The mental states of these women and the groupthink mentality of the rock world begs the question of whether consent can ever be given in these circumstance.

I would argue that legitimate consent cannot exist in these cases because drugs and alcohol invariably change your mental state and take away your inhibitions, (Nowatowski, 2018). And while some may argue that the musicians should not be too severely faulted as they too were often inebriated when they performed these actions (which I will delve further into in a later section), we also have to remember that these women were at a disadvantage from the

beginning. For one, there were different power dynamics that obviously placed the famous musician above the ‘unknown’ woman and put undue pressure on her to abide by his wishes. Additionally, many times these women were significantly younger than their partners and less experienced on the party scene, which makes them more susceptible to the influence of substances and further brings the legitimacy of their consent into question.

And while I concede that these were ‘different times’ and modern groups likely wouldn’t be able to get away with what they were doing back then today, many of these acts were still taboo by 60’s and 70’s standards, yet they were ignored by the press or the police or investigated with little fervor. For example, the FBI opened an investigation into Lori Maddox’s relationship with Jimmy Page but quickly dismissed it when they couldn’t get her to talk and didn’t attempt to go after her former lover David Bowie, (Greene, 2012). Sable Starr was 12 when she began relationships with significantly older stars and no one raised any concerns, as the general assumption was that she “sought it out.” Women didn’t come forward as victims, and many still don’t today, especially when the perpetrator is a rich, famous, older man; and rock reporters who knew about these musicians’ dark habits chose not to report on them. Instead they chose to preserve the image of the the rock star at the expense of countless girls. This problem stems from the idea that male artistry is valued more highly than female safety and is just another example of how this industry and the narrative that was built around it denied women their voices in the rock narrative.

## The Groupie Versus the Muse

Another fundamental problem with the rock narrative as told by rock journalists is the way it segregated women into two groups, the muse and the groupie, which stifled female comradery and reinforced an idea of a hierarchy for women in the music world. And while there are inherent stigmas that accompany both of these identities, the general feeling was that groupies were somehow dirty or temporary, while the muse was the pure idealized woman. This classification between the two groups has its roots in tropes like the virgin and the slut or the Madonna and the whore complex, which more than anything further drove a wedge between women at a time when women should have been sticking together (Twersky 1981). Throughout my research on this particular phenomenon I have come to some interesting conclusions that at once affirm my belief that music journalists were the primary culprit in creating this distorted narrative and cause me to question the values that we as a society celebrate, versus the ones that we admonish.

One of the primary differences I noted between women classified as groupies and those as muses in popular culture is that muses are often famous in their own right, while the groupies' primary vocation is being young and spontaneous. For example, Pattie Boyd is considered a muse and was a popular model and fashion influencer before she had any involvement with George Harrison; meanwhile Pamela Des Barres, one of the best-known groupies, consistently

spoke about being young, lost and unemployed when reminiscing about her time on the scene. And while I don't agree that this alone is enough to solidify one's labeling as either muse or groupie, nor should it justify labeling women at all, I will say that it makes sense why women who were considered muses were more likely to be reported on. After all, magazines report on what will sell and a famous model will sell more copies than an unemployed twenty year old even if both of them are dating famous musicians. I am also inclined to say that I actually appreciate this particular aspect of journalism, because it reinforced the fact that these women had lives and ambitions outside those of their musician boyfriends, which is a reality some writers and biographers forgot about when they were catering to the male-dominated rock scene. This also isn't an instance where women were intentionally pitted against each other and this observation was merely meant to demonstrate one of the differences between the 'muse' and the 'groupie.' Therefore, reports on women at all are good, but they were few and far between when compared to their male partner.

More differences came from general descriptions of how the women behaved, their interests and their overall demeanor. Muses were seen as independent and groupies clung to the band. Muses were delicate and unique, while groupies were expendable. In my research I found that many of the journalists from the time loved to make distinctions between these two types of women and, depending on the publication, advocated for one over the other. For example, In Tom Nolan's 1967 essay "Groupies: A Story of Our Times," Nolan tells a fictional cautionary tale about a young woman who sleeps with too many bands just to have the thrill of being around famous people. Nolan calls the heroine "worn for her age," and her story ends with her in a depressed state with no prospects and little to live for. Nolan then compares the groupie to the

woman her last musician boyfriend left her for, or his muse. The muse is elegant, independent, and made the band come to her exemplifying the idea of the infallible muse. By contrast, publications like *Rolling Stone* talk about the glamor of ‘groupiedom.’ They play into what appeals to the male perspective, which they believe is casual sex and little emotional attachment, which is more indicative of the culturally defined Groupie instead of the muse (Twersky, 1981).

While it may seem logical to appeal to the intended audience with whatever trope better fits the theme, the act of men writing about women and effectively segregating them pits their female audience against each other. It discourages the comradery that women could have had, because the publications at the time suggested that women should identify with one or the other and the two must be polar opposites. This conflict is seen when Jimmy Page left Pamela Des Barres for Charlotte Martin, or even in *Almost Famous* where Penny Lane confronts her lover’s girlfriend, Leslie, who is represented as the muse; instead of the women mutually agreeing that the man who cheated on each of them is to blame, they find fault in each other.

And the reality is that most of the time journalists sided with the muse, or Madonna, because it was easier to cast out the other woman in the role of the whore. But by classifying women under this umbrella, journalists condemned differences between women instead of celebrating them. Furthermore, they looked at concepts like purity under a superficial lens and rejected other instances of it. For example, while Pamela Des Barres was not pure in a sexual sense, she loved fully, openly and had an unadulterated passion for music, which seems to me like the epitome of purity, just in a different context. The underlying problem with the muse vs groupie controversy is that it created a divide where there didn’t need to be one. Journalists

exploited the traits of some women while celebrating those of others, and that inherently created a hierarchical, competitive atmosphere that was difficult to overcome.

### Girl Groups and Sisterhood

A positive result of ‘groupiedom’ that is rarely discussed by the media is the prevalence of ‘girl groups,’ or the friendships that groupies formed with each other while following bands on tour. Pamela Des Barres and her friends formed the GTO’s (Girls Together Outrageously) with the help of Frank Zappa, and the group even put out an album that was met with mixed reviews (Des Barres, 1987). Pattie Boyd talks about how she acquired a large international group of girl friends so that she wouldn’t be lonely on tour (Boyd, 2007). The Beatles had a band of followers called the Apple Scruffs who formed bonds with each other that transcended their love of the band. Even in *Almost Famous*, the groupies who follow the band on tour share rooms, maintain loyalty to each other and call themselves the Band Aides as a way to signify they are powerful, united and exist beyond the band.

The media liked to focus on the individual women or the qualities that they believed defined women as a whole, and in doing this they robbed the women in rock of their sense of solidarity. Rock in the 60s and 70s was an inherently male-dominated arena. Most of the musicians were men, most of the journalists were men and most of the rock commentary in

popular magazines was written for a male audience (Cline, 2004). That left few opportunities for women to have their own outlets or have groups they could relate to. In this absence of immediate validation, women turned to each other. They met at parties, noticed girls who went to the same shows or ‘dug’ the same bands and gradually created units who would go out together, and look out for each other on the scene (Twersky 1981).

These groups were fiercely loyal to each other (meaning girl code actively applied), and not only demonstrate the type of female solidarity that rock reporters rarely commented on, but they also show female empowerment. In banding together these women created a force larger than themselves which they could use to influence the rock world as they saw it. Critics frequently used the caveat you can tell how hot a band is by who all is there, and as the GTOs and baby groupies grew in prominence on the rock scene, they gradually became the people that others looked to when determining whether a band was ‘cool’ (Gleason, 1969). This kind of power emanates from unintentional groupings that women, ironically, didn’t care about. They came together because they had similar interests and stayed together because they enjoyed each other’s company. Opinions written by women of the time imply that while the men were fun and the music was good, they found their true loves in the women who carried them through the time period (Cline, 1989).

There is something so powerful in the bond that these women shared and I find it ironic that women in rock are often called groupies because of their association with bands, when maybe they should be called groupies because of their association with each other. The bands they followed came and went, but the groups they formed together defined their experiences on

the rock scene. In reality, those were the groups these 'groupies' truly sought out and found themselves with.

## **Chapter 2: We Didn't Need the Band**

*Women who break the mold of 'Groupiedom'*

While rock critics from the 60s and 70s liked to emphasize the glamor of the bands and their lifestyle (which often included the perpetuation of the misplaced ‘groupie’), this desire to curate a ‘cool’ image often hindered writers from showing the genuine makeup of the music scene at the time (George-Warren, 1995). The scene which included innovative female performers like Janis Joplin, Linda Ronstadt, and Ann and Nancy Wilson of Heart, as well as multitudes of dedicated female fans and professionals who were drawn to groups for the music they produced and the general vibrance of the rock and roll environment.

Furthermore, the major rock magazines tended to downplay the contributions of female musicians because they were catering to what they assumed to be a largely male audience that didn’t care to hear about the inner workings of female performers a part from who they had slept with and who they were sleeping with (Coates, 2007). This caused a disproportionate number of articles being written about men despite the fact that the women of the period not only equaled their male counterparts in ability, but at times even exceeded their musical popularity. Joan Baez, for example, was initially the name that drew college crowds while Bob Dylan was her companion (Gleason, 1969). Before forming the Eagles, Don Henley and Glenn Frey played backup to Linda Ronstadt on her tour. Even Patti Smith, one of the most influential voices in the Punk Rock movement, was and still to this day is largely ignored in favor of male groups like the Ramones and the Sex Pistols.

The failure to adequately report on women in the past had a ripple effect that has lasted into modern times. Today when we think of the most popular bands from the 60s and 70s we cite groups like the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Led Zeppelin and even the Doors, and although these groups were immensely popular in their own time, they were also among the biggest groups

reporters liked to write about. This in turn led to increased popularity and a legacy immortalized through the pages of magazines that future musicians could look up to. While it is difficult to gauge the implications this selective reporting has, it does make you wonder how many artists were marginalized or their impact forgotten because they weren't documented as thoroughly in print. When it comes to female performers this phenomenon specifically makes me wonder how many young female artists missed out on having immediately recognizable female role models or thought rock wasn't meant for them because it emphasized male contributions.

Another fundamental problem with rock reporting and its treatment of women lies in the demographics of reporters. Norma Coats noted in her 2003 article "Teeny Boppers, Groupies and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women and Rock Culture in the 1960s and Early 70s" that the majority of rock reporters for the most prestigious and established magazines in the 60s and 70s were white, college educated men who wrote articles intended for people like themselves. Because we know that rock fans did not solely consist of white men and rather included a diverse group of people we also know that the pool of reporters in these more established magazines (white men) were not representative of the overall fan base of rock and therefore were not always in touch with what these fan wanted to hear. While some of the biggest problems stemming from this lack of diversity in rock reporting are racially inclined, for the purposes of this paper I am going to specifically focus on the issues this phenomenon created from a gendered perspective. These include the marginalization of feminine voices, lack of opportunities for women to be recognized for their literary contributions and the basic treatment of female industry professionals versus their male counterparts.

In this chapter, I will examine the ways that female professionals in the music industry, whether they were artists or commentators, were treated and the overall impact this treatment had both on their legacy and the rock narrative. I will do this by comparing the experiences of these women to their male counterparts, analysing the tangible impact they had in the industry and considering the implications this had for future generations of musicians and rock fans.

### Female Musicians and their Impact

The 60s and 70s are often considered to be one of the greatest times in music history. Musicians were experimenting with new sounds, adding greater depth and feeling to their lyrics, and refusing to conform to standards established by previous generations,. Artists from this time are celebrated for their contributions to music with modern day ‘pop’ stars still citing these bands as the primary influence over their music. As I discussed earlier in this section, there is an unfortunate trend where despite the fact that there were many prominent female musicians from this time the male groups were given more attention and discussed as bigger influencers. Furthermore these male groups also received more recognition from official sources and female artists are still struggling to gain similar notoriety decades after their careers ended. For example, prior to the 2000s only 9 women had been inducted into the rock and roll hall of fame out of 107 total inductees. That is less than 10% and not only is it unrepresentative of the makeup of rock

performers on the in the industry, it also exhibits a clear bias towards male rock and blues artists. While I plan to further discuss some of the reasons why female stars were marginalized by the press in a later section, I want to spend this section focusing on the incredible things these women did and formally recognize their accomplishments where some popular media may have failed to.

To me the women who helped establish the modern legacy of rock music have more powerful stories than their male counterparts because they had to consistently excel when performing so they could compete in an industry that was already against them. These women included Memphis Minnie, who is cited as one of the greatest blues guitarists of all time and wrote Led Zeppelin's now infinitely popular "When the Levee Breaks," Joan Baez, a woman who entertained and inspired millions with her politically charged songs, Linda Ronstadt, who led a powerful career and introduced Don Henley and Glenn Frey of The Eagles, and countless others including Janis Joplin, Joni Mitchell, and Ann and Nancy Wilson of Heart (Edwards, 2018). These women are so interesting to me because in a lot of ways they had to be one of the boys. They had to know how to appeal to all audiences and put up with circumstances that were often unfair, but they remained active in the industry because they were passionate about their music and loved what they were doing. This shows incredible strength and resolve as well as talents that transcend societal expectations and allowed these women to thrive in an environment that initially seemed doomed to be a boys club. Below I will discuss several women who had a powerful impact on rock music, left a lasting impression on the industry, and specifically affected me as a fan and lover of music.

Janis Joplin is perhaps one of the greatest rock musicians, male or female, in the history of music. Her voice transcended reality and was described as chameleon like where she would at times belt her now notorious raspy, blues inspired tunes like “Piece of my Heart, and at other times sing with a sweet almost angelic quality that was reminiscent of Joan Baez (Echols, 2000). Joplin had the unique ability to rouse people and unite them through her songs. From her jarring performance at Woodstock to small, student led concerts in Austin during her time at The University of Texas Joplin always had a way of captivating her audience and making sure she was seen. Janis was raised in Texas but her frequent travels to Louisiana gave her music a country soul that truly separated her from other artists of her time. She credited this upbringing with giving her music its diverse quality, but this also helped Joplin secure her position as a popular and influential artist. Her music had something for everyone and her voice had an allure that brought people from all around to appreciate it. This quality not only hypnotized her fans but also other musicians. Jim Morrison was said to be obsessed with Janis and, much to her discomfort, would follow her around at parties loudly declaring his admiration of her (Chards 2018). Jimi Hendrix and Joplin were on the scene at the same time and he is described as having a fascination with her voice and an appreciation for her talent (Brecht, 2019). Countless other artists shared this interest in Joplin’s talent and her enchanting voice has captivated generations of fans and hopeful musicians alike.

But what also differentiated Janis Joplin from her peers was her wild antics and moving lyrics that inspired an entire generation. She is partially remembered for her free spirited “Hippie” attitude as well as her crippling drug addiction, but what moves people and makes her such an enigmatic character was her boisterous performance persona that masked a profoundly

vulnerable heart that she only showed through songs like “Do Sad to be Alone” (Echols, 2000). This duality of character has inspired writers, artists and fans, and begs the question of how well anyone really knew Janis. While Janis’ life was cut tragically short after an accidental overdose at 27 prompting her to join the infamous “27 Club,” her legacy lives on through recordings of her unparalleled voice and poignant stories from those who knew her, loved her, and appreciated the influence she had over rock music.

The next artist I want to focus on is Linda Ronstadt because she too had an undeniably powerful voice, achieved commercial as well as critical success in her career and had a lasting impact on the industry. Ronstadt is one of the best selling artists of all time having won 10 Grammys, an Emmy and a Lifetime Achievement Award. She has also been featured on over 120 albums, sold over 100 million records, collaborated with artists ranging from Don Henly to Dolly Parton to Johnny Cash, and was called the most successful female artist of the 1970s (Britannica, 2019). Ronstadt was also one of the most popular artists of her time and spoke out against the industry and the image it projects on its female artists. She was featured everywhere from *Rolling Stone* to *Time* magazine and frequently discussed the “red hot rocker chick” image and how she felt she diverged from it (Time, 1977).

Despite all these accolades and the general coolness of her character, Ronstadt is often overshadowed by the male artists of her time and even the very groups that she brought together. For example, Linda helped form The Eagles after she brought Don Henley and Glenn Frey on tour together and encouraged them to make their own music. She further helped the band by rerecording their now hit song “Desperado” with a new melody and feel that radically diverged from the band’s original, western creation and prompted the band to reconsider their initial

version, (Ellwood, 2013). However, despite Ronstadt's popularity and influence on other groups she still didn't really get the acknowledgement she deserved until recently, and the way she was recognized highlights the inequity between male and female performers. While Ronstadt was popular far before The Eagles and even helped the band get started, she was not added to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame until 2014, 16 years after The Eagles who were added in 1996. And the honor was ironically given to her by Glenn Frey, singer and guitarist of The Eagles. Ronstadt's career demonstrates some issues with the industry, but it is more important to remember her as the dynamic force she was and the changes she helped instigate in the industry. Linda Ronstadt's body of work still holds today and continues to influence many within the industry and inspire fans all over the world.

The final women I want to highlight in this section are Ann and Nancy Wilson of Heart because of the way they shifted the misogynist image of rock and left a legacy that still influences popular culture to this day. The Wilson sisters were the first women to front a hard rock band and they inspired young women interested in rock music while also changing the image of who a rock star could be. Furthermore their catchy yet lyrically complex songs carried feminist sentiments while also celebrating the more delicate aspects of femininity, and made statements about industry norms that the women were fundamentally opposed to. For example, their smash hit "Barracuda" is a rage fueled song about the Wilson Sisters' interactions with industry professionals and was specifically inspired by the time their former record label released a suggestive picture of them without their consent (Kielty, 2018). Then songs like "Even It Up" discuss the need for balance in romantic relationship and features a female protagonist condemning her lazy lover for his inability to prioritize her. But they also have a cannon of more

vulnerable tunes that shows their female listeners it is okay to have a softer side or find yourself questioning your own logic. The sisters' 1978 song "Dog & Butterfly" has some of these themes and also stands in stark contrast with the majority of their other work due to its soft melodies and almost folky feel.

The Wilson sisters also had an influence on rock music and popular culture that extended beyond their recorded work. For example Nancy Wilson wrote a considerable portion of the music for the fictional band Stillwater in Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous* and contributed to the scores of other film and television projects including *Elizabethtown* and *Jerry Maguire*. Ann has been outspoken about industry standards for women, specifically when it comes to body image and addiction. But both sisters have continued to leverage their power within the music industry to be activists for women and encourage changes internally. Both are still active on the scene and command a great amount of respect from industry officials and fellow artists alike. For example, the sisters' 2012 performance of Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" brought original singer and co songwriter Robert Plant to tears. Their co autobiography went on to be a best seller with fans coming out in droves to hear the untold story of Rock's greatest sister duo, and the women consistently rank within *Rolling Stone's* top 100 songs of all time and greatest rock groups of all time. These Wilson sisters not only changed how women were treated in the industry, but also shifted the image of what a rock star should look like by adding some femininity into their daring, metal heavy songs.

Fortunately many of these women are getting the recognition they deserve now. Janis Joplin has several biographies written about her and there is a cult fascination surrounding her career, life and death. In the past year Linda Ronstadt had a series of documentaries made about

her including one that premiered to rave reviews at the Tribeca film festival. Music critics and historians are recognizing the importance of feminine voices in a range of genres and giving them an equitable status to male artists. Even the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame has recognized its past oversight by gradually adding women like Ronstadt, The Wilson Sisters and more modern groups like Madonna, but the institution still has a long way to go. While many more women have been included since the early 2000s the catalog is still disproportionately favored towards men. This past year alone five male groups were inducted into the hall of fame with just one woman, prompting superstar Janet Jackson to say “Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2020, induct more women.” Fleetwood Mac singer Stevie Nicks and the only woman to ever be inducted into the Hall of Fame Twice (as compared to 22 men) reiterated this sentiment saying “open the door for other women,” (Guardian, 2019). Progress is coming slowly but surely and fortunately for modern female artists we live in an age where those that came before us are not afraid to call out the injustices of their time and fight for better representation within this industry.

### Women on the Scene: Female Reporters and Their Influence

Women’s impact on music was not limited to creating sound or being the muse for musicians, but also extended to a legacy of commentary and publication through a variety of mediums, including print and photography. These women were integral to establishing the

legacy of Rock and Roll because their presence not only fueled the popularity of influential artists, but also broadened the perspective of rock music and helped establish a new age of journalism. While women participated in many different sectors of the music industry, including production, choreography and documentation I am primarily going to focus on female contributions in journalism because it is most relevant to my discussion of the rock narrative in this paper.

Female rock journalists in the 60s and 70s had a lasting impact not only on music journalism, but also on the artists and the music industry as a whole. From the way that Marianne Partridge leveraged her admittedly limited power at *Rolling Stone* to create an all female team to the way that journalists like Lisa Robinson influenced John Michael Stripes, the lead singer of REM, through her rock criticism in the late 70s and early 80s women, had a massive influence over this period in rock music, (Powers, 1995). The changes these women instilled on the rock narrative manifested themselves through the way that artists were written about, women were talked about, and even broader expectations for how the industry should handle rock journalism.

Female rock journalists had a difficult time breaking into the industry. There was a common theme amongst the major companies that you needed to know the right people to get interviews and unfortunately for women the “right people” were men who had little interest in advocating for a woman. This was especially the case at magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* which, despite both being founded in the late 1960s, didn’t take on any female staff members until the early 70s, demonstrating the boys club mentality that was prevalent throughout many other sectors of the industry. However, there were some notable exceptions to this rule that I

would like to focus on because these women were pivotal in shifting the landscape of rock journalism and left a legacy that still influences the field today.

I would like to begin by discussing the women who changed *Rolling Stone* in the 1970s with a specific emphasis on the efforts of Marianne Partridge during her time at the magazine. Partridge joined *Rolling Stone* in 1973, about six years after its founding, with a master's degree and experience working for the *New York Times*. Partridge was hired on to the magazine with the task of establishing the copy editing department. After demonstrating her worth to executives at *Rolling Stone* and gaining their respect (specifically Jaan Wenner who would prove to be an ally to the women throughout this transition period), Partridge was told she could hire whoever she needed for her department with the caveat that she must hire from within the organization. Partridge, ever the feminist, decided to interview the women working at *Rolling Stone* before looking to the more senior males. When she began looking at the pool of candidates, who were all assistants as Partridge was the first woman with executive power, she was shocked to find that not only did many of them have journalism experience but also master's degrees. Sarah Lazin, for example, had been working as an assistant since 1971, despite having a master's in literature and years of experience as a writer and proofreader. Christine Doudna was hired on in 1973 as Joe Eszterhas's assistant despite her master's in Comparative Literature and French. Partridge immediately hired Lazin, Doudna and several other women to join her department and they began a chain of events that would forever change rock journalism and the culture of *Rolling Stone* (Hopper, 2018).

Prior to Partridge's arrival the magazine operated chaotically. There was no fact checking department, formal proofreading, translating, photocopying, or even a sectioned editing

department. Lazin describes the scene as reporters submitting their stories and them getting immediately published, while the culture was not a female friendly environment further enforced by a sign that used to hang over the door reading “Boy’s Club” (Green, 2018). That all changed when Partridge and her team began regulating internal operations, but the shift came with considerable pushback from the men at the magazine. Proofreader Barbara Landau is quoted saying “It was very much “us against them.” You’re fighting for your legitimacy. You really have to fight about cuts and word changes. The guys on the staff didn’t like the authority that we felt we had” (Hopper, 2018).

The women have also discussed the expectations that the content they produced needed to be perfect because they were aware that their work would be severely scrutinized. Partridge recounted a time when she had to cut 40 lines from a Ben Fong Torres piece and how he flew into a rage until he read it and admitted her changes were constructive. The women also remember having to sleep at the office before deadlines so they would be prepared for any and all notes that came through to them. Partridge and her team had to actively fight for every privilege they were given and their efforts not only changed the culture of *Rolling Stone* but also shifted the expectations for rock journalism. Stories now had to be verifiable and critics had to provide more depth to their analysis, which made the magazine a more legitimate source for cultural news. Additionally, Partridge and her team pushed the writers to expand their subject base to also include women’s issues (Hopper, 2018). For example, in 1975 Partridge felt the magazine wasn’t discussing enough real issues and pitched an article to talk about rape culture, written by Ellen Willis. While many executives laughed off the suggestion, co founder Jann

Wenner promised to provide the resources necessary to complete the trip. This wound up being an extremely smart decision, as Willis' article later became an award winning publication.

*Rolling Stone* also had important developments aside from its editorial endeavors that centered around their female writers. For example, Robin Green began working as a reporter in 1971, just four years after the magazine was founded, and worked on multiple high profile stories during her tenure there. Ellen Willis, an outspoken feminist and civil rights activist, worked as a freelance writer for the magazine for several years while balancing commitments at the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*.

There were several other women who were prominent in rock journalism, the most notable being Jaan Uhelszki from *Creem Magazine*, but they were few and far between, and those on the scene had to constantly fight for respect. For example, in Robin Green's memoir she recounted a time when she had to interview an inebriated Dennis Hopper and had to maintain her composure while he hurled patronizing and aggressively suggestive remarks at her (Green, 2018). Ellen Willis has been very open about the 'boy's club' mentality of the journalism world, saying that women had to make it themselves because, besides Joan Didion and Gloria Steinem, there was no model for women to look to, especially when it came to rock. These women have also suggested that the environment of rock journalism often put them in uncomfortable or compromising situations with powerful, aggressive men.

Despite the difficulties female reporters had to endure, they managed to thrive in the industry and leave a lasting legacy on rock journalism. Writers like Green, Willis and Uhelszki brought gendered issues into rock and gave a new perspective to the music that not only made the genre more inclusive but also added more dimension to the critique, which other journalists

took notice of. For example, Lisa Robinson, who was prominent in rock journalism throughout the 70s and 80s and even served as a press liaison to the Rolling Stones in 1975, differentiated herself by discussing a band's overall vibe in connection to their music. She did this by focusing on their costumes, stage presence and subtle ways that the audience responded to the group. Furthermore, Ellen Willis added an element of advocacy to rock journalism that was severely lacking especially from a feminist perspective. But in general these women helped the progression of rock journalism by making it more about the artistry of the work and less about the overtly sexualized image of Rock n' Roll. While they also acknowledged the more problematic aspects of the industry and discussed things like sex, they did so because it was a vital part of the rock experience and wrote about it with a nuanced perspective that made the act more of a side attraction or symptom of the music. They also contributed to a narrative where artists were evaluated objectively on their talent as opposed to superficial factors that male journalists could be susceptible to especially when critiquing female artists.

The women in rock journalism, both from the administrative and journalistic perspectives, had a massive impact on the rock industry. While they faced considerable pushback from within, their perseverance led to a new era in reporting that emphasized critical, thought-provoking content and effective, professional communication. They were also able to expand the narrative of rock by adding a feminine perspective, which helped the industry grow and inspired future generations of artists and industry professionals alike.

## Chapter 3: Don't Talk to Him, He's the Enemy

*Rock Reporting and Its Problematic Narrative*

Rock musicians, both male and female, have gradually gained a reputation for being in conflict with the media. Where the creation of music is seen as a pure and worthwhile endeavor, reporting is seen as a commercial enterprise that undermines the integrity of artists' work (Zemler, 2013). While part of the tension between musicians and music reporters is to be expected (after all part of a writer's job is to be critical in their analysis of music, which can result in trashing or misunderstanding the intentions of artists), there also seems to be an underlying animosity between the two groups that transcends the lines of professional disagreement or criticism. These tensions often occur when critics target a particular artist because of factors unrelated to their music and use their platform as cultural influencers to stunt the careers of said musicians by either trashing their musical creation or personal character, or by ignoring their contributions until the artist fades into oblivion.

This phenomenon is less of a problem in modern times because the internet, social media and television stations that are entirely dedicated to music and celebrity gossip give artists the opportunity to self promote or call out unfair journalism. But in the 60s and 70s music critics had a great deal of power in determining what music would be popular, what groups would be seen as 'cool' and how rock would be defined for generations to come (Coates, 2007). Given the type of influence these journalists had, their subjective reporting created a skewed narrative that has continued to influence generations of musicians both in terms of musical style and image. And while this is not always negative because journalists generally did promote good music, which influenced modern artists in great ways, it also created a problem because these journalists perpetuated a certain type of male dominated image which narrowed the general public's

exposure to the diverse facets of rock (Davies, 2002). However, this inherently biased narrative was likely not an intentional action that the journalists took. While the rock reporters clearly exhibited what we would now consider racist and sexist behavior by ignoring some segments of the population in favor others, which in turn shifted and redefined the image of rock, these outcomes were symptoms of a much larger problem in rock journalism: lack of representation.

The popular and most widely circulated music magazines of the time were primarily staffed with white, young, college educated men who listened to music that they related to: namely music that was written by white, young, educated men. These writers then wrote articles about the music they listened to, because it appealed to them and was easy to write about. It also logically follows that these reporters wanted to write to an audience they believed would identify with their tastes and the music they were promoting which was once again white, young, (sometimes) educated men (Brooks, 2008). What they failed to see was the widespread appeal of the music they were reporting on and the forgotten fan bases who read the magazines for the sheer fact that they were some of the few sources reporting on this type of music. While these forgotten fan bases span many demographics outside of the ‘young male’ group I outlined above, I am once again only going to focus on the forgotten female fan base because it most directly pertains to the content of this thesis.

A strange irony in rock reporting is that women inadvertently fueled the persistence of male dominated stories, because they contributed to magazine sales (although in their defense there were limited options so they were probably just acting on interest and availability). In purchasing these male run journals, these women sent an unintentional signal to the executives of magazines that their formula was working and therefore they did not need to shift the scope of

the writing or bring in more diverse voices (Brooks, 2008). This caused magazines to ignore issues and artists that would have specifically appealed to women, because there weren't enough reporters interested in them, while those who were there were generally unaware that such a large demographic of readership existed.

And while women eventually came onto the scene in great numbers by establishing their own publications and joining established magazines to add the feminine perspective, the initial response by male publications severely stunted the voice of women and had lasting implications on the narrative of rock music (Davies, 2002). These implications have both fueled and justified the often negative response that musicians have towards journalists and raise legitimate questions on the value of the content they created versus the ethical considerations behind the content they ignored. In this chapter I will analyse the motivations behind the musician/reporter conflict (both those that are warranted and those that are not), detail the specific ways in which popular magazines distorted female contributions in rock, and finally address concerns on the ethical implications of the content these writers reported on versus the content they overlooked.

### The Enemy

From the way Cameron Crowe immortalized musicians' disdain for journalists in his film *Almost Famous* by making the film's musicians refer to the innocent protagonist as 'The

Enemy,' to the way that modern musicians like Taylor Swift and Kanye West have written songs that voice their animosity towards reporters and their published content, there is a well-known public narrative that suggests that musicians hate the media. This shared hostility between musicians that seems to transcend gender, genre and even time begs the question of what exactly these reporters are doing to upset the artists and is their criticism warranted?

Creating music is a vulnerable process, especially when the content is entirely self produced (e.g. written, composed and sung by the same individual or group). Therefore it is understandable that musicians could take issue with rock reporters because of the simple fact that part of their job is to criticize the outcome of this delicate process. For example John Mendelsohn wrote in a 1969 issue of *Rolling Stone* that Led Zeppelin's guitarist Jimmy Page was a "limited producer and a writer of weak, unimaginable songs..." an opinion that caused the band to hold a grudge against the popular music rag for decades (Mendelsohn, 1969). Lester Bangs, one of the most prominent names in rock journalism, published a scathing review of Black Sabbath's new album in 1970 calling them "unskilled laborers" and "not that bad, but that's all the credit you can give them." Even the Rolling Stones were not immune to the criticisms of the age, with Lenny Kaye calling their album *Exile on Main Street* something that the Stones used to "deal with their problems" while "once again missing the mark" (Greene, 2016).

Of course today all these albums and groups are praised as being at the forefront of the rock scene and a defining piece of culture from the time period, while the critic's remarks are long forgotten. I would therefore argue that these are cases of legitimate criticism, which actually demonstrate the value of rock reporting as an objective source of cultural opinion. But it should

be noted that the groups I mentioned shared certain traits in common both when the reports were initially published and even now decades later. They are all male, all white, and all successful with loyal fan bases. This means that these groups had everything going for them in terms of race, gender and popularity (especially when considering the time period), yet they still harbored a resentment towards the individuals reporting on them.

But there are also instances where this resentment was genuinely warranted. These are the cases where race, gender or circumstance prompted a critic to unfairly review a musician's contributions and intentionally stunt their musical career. While there are countless cases of race based discrimination in rock journalism, I want to specifically focus on gender discrimination for the purposes of this paper. These are cases where women's albums were disregarded because of their looks or the sheer fact that they were women trying to make it what writers considered a male industry. For example, Janis Joplin was often called talented, but her music wasn't given priority or magazine space because it was "too hard" for a woman and she wasn't attractive enough (Echols, 2000). Heart only began to gain notoriety after their record label spread a rumor that the Wilson sisters were engaged in a sexual relationship, but before that their contributions were largely ignored (Kielty, 2018). But what is really sad is that these are just the instances of biased reporting, or lack thereof, that we are aware of in modern times. This means that countless talented women's careers were likely stunted or faded away due to the simple fact that magazines didn't feel the need to report on them. While it is difficult to gauge the full scope of this issue it undoubtedly highlights a legitimate critique for rock journalists, which was their failure to report on women.

## Distorting Female Contributions

Another major issue was not only the fact that reporters for major publications failed to adequately report on female musicians, but it also lay in the way that they reported on them when they did. When you look at reports from magazines in the 60s and 70s that vary in topics from an analysis of groupie culture, to an all access pass to what really goes down backstage at your favorite rocker's concerts, to an intimate one on one interview with a credible musician, there is one common detail that appears: the objectification of women.

For example, reporters described Janis Joplin in terms of her sex appeal and shifted their perspective of her music based on whether or not they wanted to sleep with her (Echols, 2000). Joan Baez is constantly described in the shadow of Bob Dylan. When Sandy Denny won female vocalist of the year, many reporters claimed her victory had more to do with Led Zeppelin putting her on the track "Battle of Evermore" than with her own accomplishments, despite the fact she had many popular songs and was independently rising up the charts with her solo music (Smith, 2017). Marianne Partridge discussed all the times she was forced to edit comments from *Rolling Stone* writers on female musicians because they were either offensive or completely off topic (Hopper, 2018). Even Yoko Ono, who was an artist in her own right, was and likely always will be chiefly remembered as the 'groupie' who broke up The Beatles despite the fact that tensions between Lennon and McCartney had been mounting for over a decade and the two had

to be placed on separate vacations by Brian Epstein from the beginning of their career (Boyd, 2007). All these instances highlight occasions where rock reporters either forced women in the shadow of their male counterparts or based their reporting on superficial characteristics that had nothing to do with the artistic ability of the musician.

Of course that is not to say the magazines didn't make an effort. For example, *Rolling Stone* published an entire issue solely dedicated to women entitled "Groupies and Other Electric Ladies." *Creem* wrote about the power behind Janis Joplin's voice and the enduring legacy of folk stars like Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell. But where these publications failed was how they did it and who they chose to report on.

A prime example is the *Rolling Stone* Groupie issue. Because while they did report on women and it was a nice gesture to showcase the 'women of rock,' the article only included groupies in the traditional sense of the word. They created an issue that emphasized the sexual appeal and superficial styles of women in rock and in doing so they perpetuated a very problematic narrative, one that put women on the periphery of rock instead of at the forefront. The article is rife with pictures of beautiful, waify and fashionable women who, apart from a select few, lacked any true musical ability. And while it is true they gave the women some depth by discussing their endeavors outside of going to concerts, such as the clothing businesses they had or their attempts to break into acting, the issue failed to highlight any up and coming female rockers.

If the magazine truly wanted to celebrate women in rock they should have dedicated an issue to female rockers. This could have included an article on remembering Memphis Minnie, the woman who wrote Led Zeppelin's now iconic "When the Levee Breaks" (Smith, 2017). Or

talked about 60s girl groups like the Shirelles who had a massive influence on rock. Or a conversation with Jefferson Airplane about their trippy content with the same interest that was extended to Pink Floyd. They should have given powerful female voices an opportunity to be on the cover, and not just the pretty ones. And this issue still holds in modern times, though I will admit the situation has improved. The reality is that of the more than 1200 issues of *Rolling Stone* published to date, only about 300 covers have featured women, and many of those are from the past two decades, not the 60s and 70s. And of the women who were featured they had to be both talented and classically beautiful--people like Linda Ronstadt and June Cash--or they had to be on the cover with their male partners, like Yoko Ono. But the different, powerful looking women were denied this honor. Janis Joplin, one of the most powerful and popular vocalists of the late 60s didn't grace the cover until 6 years after her death (not even her death initially qualified her for the honor, though she was given a feature early in the magazine's history), and it was because one of the few female writers at the magazine pushed a cover story for her (Echols, 2000).

Furthermore, as I previously touched upon, there were inherent issues with the way reporters talked about women, which at times robbed them of their artistry and at others robbed them of their femininity. For example, women like Linda Ronstadt and Joan Baez were celebrated for their beauty but at times were robbed of their depth (Coates, 2007). Memphis Minnie was described as a great blues guitarist, but instead of discussing her technique reporters chose to say she "played like a man" (Smith, 2017). The obvious implication in this statement is that 'rock' can only be good when it is carried out in a manly way and there is no room for

femininity. These observations and descriptions distort the way that women and their music is viewed and further pushes the male dominated narrative that consumed rock history.

These instances demonstrate a clear penchant for rock reporters to favor female beauty over musical contributions and makes me wonder why? Why did reporters think it was better to highlight groupies than discuss the way groups like Heart or Jefferson Airplane were shifting the landscape of music? Several academics have posed theories explaining this phenomenon. One is that it was easier to sell beautiful women. Another was that writers thought their supposedly male audience wouldn't respond to strong women or didn't see the value in female generated content. But of all the theories the most interesting to me is the idea that male reporters wanted to subjugate women in their writing as a means of elevating themselves. As I discussed in the previous section many musicians have a distaste for rock journalists playfully calling them 'the enemy.' In a lot of ways this put these reporters at the bottom of a hierarchy where rock gods ruled, 'groupies' were given access to their Eden and male fans and reporters were kept out. This could have inspired some jealousy within the reporters who felt they had more to offer than these women who they believed were only interested in the band because they were famous and not because they enjoyed the music (Coates, 2007). Whatever the true reason is, there is clear evidence of rock journalism extending a clear bias against women, both musicians and fans, which further pushed the male dominated image of rock.

## Can They do That??

Reporters loved to play upon the glamorized image of musicians living lives consumed by sex, drugs and rock 'n roll. Their motivations in doing this are obvious, as sex sells and people enjoy hearing about the fantasy of success and would prefer to see their idols as gods as opposed to the flawed humans they are. (That being said, if these idols do fall fans want it to be an intense event doused with drama and a potential rehab stint.) I won't deny that I too fall victim to this desire to glamorize the rich and famous and seek a story that defies the mundane, but this desire and the willingness of rock journalists to play upon it often caused them to make content decisions that had questionable ethics. For example, sometimes journalists would ignore unacceptable and illegal behavior by rock stars because reporting on it would tarnish their reputation. They would also over report on the antics of these stars, glamorizing the behavior and setting a bad example for future generations. These scenarios both present obvious ethical problems because they shift the way that society views an integral part of culture. People follow the people they admire and musicians make up a large portion of this group. So when people have fundamental misconceptions about the people they admire it causes them to misunderstand the world and come to believe certain behaviors are acceptable when they aren't. This section will consider the implications of these misconceptions and the ethical dilemmas they present.

As mentioned above, one of the more glaringly obvious problems with rock reporting comes from the fact that reporters often failed to report on serious issues to preserve the image of

rock stars. While these issues varied from drug abuse to inappropriate conduct, to assaults, the one I am primarily concerned with was their failure to expose musicians when they took advantage of women sexually or participated in ‘consensual’ relationships with minors. For example, Lori Maddox engaged in several relationships with rock stars including David Bowie and Jimmy Page all before the age of 15. Some of her relationships even became violent, with multiple witnesses claiming Robert Plant locked Maddox in a closet for hours to emotionally manipulate her (Greene, 2012). Despite this obvious instance of abuse which was well known in rock circles and told to journalists, reporters seemed more concerned with merely taking pictures of Maddox and calling her a ‘babe’ and turning Page into a hero for his ability to score her. And while we don’t have concrete proof that journalists knew everything was going on in these circumstances the photographic record that shows journalists interacting with the stars in their hotel rooms, backstage and even on nights out would suggest that they were at least peripherally aware of what was going on.

While many rock stars engaged in relationships with minors and there are certainly ethical problems in reporters’ failure to report on these relationships, other problems arose from writers’ failure to discuss consent or reprimand bands who actively bypassed it. For example, in the Motley Crue semi autobiography *The Dirt*, ghostwriter Neil Strauss describes a time when Nikki Sixx had sex with an unconscious woman who was asleep in a cupboard then sent band fellow band member Tommy Lee in to have intercourse with her. The book cites this example as evidence of the band’s wild antics but neglects to acknowledge the fact that these men just committed rape. Furthermore the book says the men did this at a gathering with industry executives, reporters and partiers all around. In other words this gang rape was no secret, yet

even modern reporters ignore their moral responsibility to call out this heinous behavior and force the musicians to take responsibility for their actions.

More examples include speculation on the now infamous ‘mudshark incident’ with Led Zeppelin in a Seattle hotel. Or reports about Jimmy Page’s sadistic sexual behavior towards young girls described in Pamela Des Barres’ book as well as in speculative articles (Des Barres 1987). Or the accounts of David Bowie and Black Sabbath pursuing ‘baby groupies’ and knowingly engaging in sexual relationships with underage women. But what is truly terrifying is these are only the events we know about. And while the cases that I cited as examples are reprehensible in their own distinct ways, they also beg the question of how many rapes and assaults were never and will never be reported upon? How many other women were penetrated while they were unconscious, or were underage and pressured into sex with older, powerful men, or were slipped drugs to make them more liberal with their bodies? And how many reporters knew all this was going on and chose not to report on it?

But there are also instances of rock journalists over reporting on false information, which can ruin the reputation of the musician. For example, Conor Oberst was accused of rape in 2013, which sent the media into a frenzy, but the allegations were later proven false. While oberst has been exonerated his career never fully recovered, nor did his mental state after going through the traumatic ordeal (Cirisano, 2017). Writing about unsubstantiated claims is also inherently problematic for the obvious fact that it perpetuates a myth. This behavior is also dangerous because it mitigates the impact of true stories. In other words, when journalists describe events and those accusations turn out to be false it causes people to question true stories. This not only has a detrimental impact on the musicians who are victims of bad reporting, but also severely

deters survivors from coming forward because they see the negative backlash associated with these stories and don't want to incur the same kind of scrutiny or have the validity of their trauma be questioned.

Reporters have a responsibility to report on the world they have chosen to enter: the good and the bad. Yet as we delve further into the past of rock and roll we are finding more and more skeletons and more individuals who were were complicit in covering them up. While this is objectively wrong from a moral standpoint it is also an example of poor reporting that further contributes to the distorted narrative of rock music. Therefore, rock reporters need to take it upon themselves to craft objective pieces on the artistic value of the work and explore artists that may not initially appeal to them. They also have a duty to humanize the artist so that rock journalism does not continue to fall into the same traps of enablement it always has. Perhaps then these writers will become an ally to fans and cease to be an enemy to the musicians.

## **Chapter 4: Let's Hear it for the Boys?**

*Reparations, Muses and Professional Advocacy*

Throughout this paper I have discussed female contributions to 1960s and 70s rock music in great depth, looking specifically at how women directly and indirectly influenced the music and scene of the time. And while the crux of this thesis rests upon how these women impacted music as well as the varying degrees with which these contributions were ignored by the music industry at large, I want to acknowledge that many male musicians of the time paved the way for rock music and created a legacy that still exists today. This legacy includes a history of sound and style experimentation, the propagation of the lifestyle of sex, drugs and rock and roll, and making social and political commentary through pointed and often controversial lyrics (Lewis, 2002). These musicians did incredible things for rock music and the social climate of the time, and it would be wrong to not acknowledge these contributions, especially when they benefited women.

This includes a history of standing up for social goods, championing female artists in an industry that was skewed against them, and empowering women through songs that celebrated the important women in their lives. These contributions were not only important because they helped specific women, but also because they helped instigate larger societal changes. These men had such a far reaching influence that even a small amount of advocacy or a simple lyric that promoted a cause had long reaching implications for the generations who grew up on these popular tunes. These actions, of course, don't discount the history of exploitation that I have discussed in previous chapters, but they do demonstrate that these musicians had depth and an acute awareness of certain feminine struggles and characteristics. They also show that the bands were aware of female fan bases and that awareness gave way to certain actions that may not have

been immediately apparent within their lyrical body of work or some of the more controversial actions they are remembered for.

At the same time, I do think the only way to accurately represent these contributions is to acknowledge that there was also a lot of bad that went with the good. This bad includes rock and roll antics that had detrimental effects on those close to the stars. And while many stars have come out and condemned their past behavior, we still need to discuss the fact that it happened and what it means for future generations of musicians. In this chapter I will consider the different ways that male musicians interacted with women by looking specifically at how they responded to past infractions, their portrayal of women within their music and the different ways they advocated for women in professional settings.

### Blame it on the Alcohol...and Drugs

Rock stars seem to have lives that revolve around sex and drugs. They write songs about blackouts and weave clever metaphors about getting high into their lyrics that both steal our imaginations and the ‘last dance with Mary Jane.’ And in a lot of ways, we love that rock stars are so crazy. We love that they give us excitement and fill our ears with catchy melodies that rescue us from everyday life and allow us to vicariously experience the glamor of having it all. But because we want rock stars to lead these dramatic lives and be these glamorous people we

often forgive them for even the worst of their mistakes and encourage a system that allows these stars to believe they are above the law. And while I don't think this is necessarily an issue in all cases, because some of the most well-received albums of all time were written with help from creative lubricants like marijuana and acid, I do think this mentality poses a serious problem when the behavior has a detrimental effect on others and engenders serious harm. The primary problem with granting people the implied permission to be above the law is that it also gives them permission to assume that they are above all laws, not just the ones you thought they should be. And in a way this process works a lot like appeasement where the infractions you forgive them for start small and gradually build to extremely problematic events.

For rock stars this may include the media and police ignoring the powdery residue of coke or needles that seem to follow them around. Then maybe it's these same agents giving them a warning when they are pulled over for drinking and driving and escorting them home instead of arresting them. Next it's bystanders and fans it's turning a blind eye to the underage girls that are wandering into bars and clubs with these singers. Until it culminates in these same girls disappearing into the rock star's hotel rooms and emerging the next day disheveled and confused, or car wrecks with dazed stars behind the wheel and passengers who will never drive again. And while I acknowledge that a lot of this behavior was motivated by the drunken exploits of people who are getting used to newfound fame and power, I think it is important in the context of this paper to acknowledge that the behavior happened and discuss how rock stars responded to accusations later in life from a more sober point of view.

Not surprisingly, many of these rock stars condemn their past behavior when questioned about it and blame their actions on the trials of youth, and desire for excitement and new

experiences. In hindsight, drinking and driving, engaging in affairs with underage girls and nursing harmful addictions isn't something anyone would actually want to own up to, but what really shocks me is the different degrees with which people respond to these admissions of guilt. For example, when Mick Jagger acknowledged the problematic language and themes he used in many songs including the immensely popular "Brown Sugar", which was a racially insensitive tune that oversexualized Jagger's then lover Claudia Linnear, people responded by either ignoring his admission so they could continue to enjoy the song, applauded him for the fact that he recognized his past insensitivity or vilified him writing these lyrics in the first place (Mastropolo, 2016).

People can't really seem to have a generalized consensus on how to respond to rock legends who have to own up to the horrors of their past. While some want to point out the blatant hypocrisy of these musicians because they still profit on songs about their debauchorous youth without actually taking any blame or rectifying any past deeds, others are content to refuse to acknowledge these past infractions at all. Still some claim that these men are only admitting fault now because enough time has passed that they can get away with it, and modern times reflect a need to be more open to faults and politically correct behavior (Coates, 2007). And finally there are those that claim that these acts were merely a product of a different time and the result of substance abuse and the ignorance of youth blaming the circumstances as opposed to the perpetrators.

While I think each of these reactions is valid in its own way and different actions demand different responses, I think the most important thing we can take away from this discussion is the fact that we are talking about it at all. In the past many of these events were overlooked and,

while they still don't get as much coverage as they should, the fact that they are getting more exposure and people are speaking out reflects a shift in how we as a society deal with our idols. While we still probably forgive too much (especially within the music industry and with former rock idols), we question why we forgive a lot more and we question past justifications.

For example, the book *The Dirt* tells the unadulterated story of Motley Crue and includes passages where the band raped unconscious women. The band didn't receive any type of official legal punishment for this act, but they were met with harsh social criticisms that still influence how people see the band today (Zimmerman, 2019). Reports on David Bowie after his death not only discussed his musical contributions to society, but alluded to his past allegations of statutory rape. Once again while he never actually served time for his crimes, the media is no longer ignoring them, instead ensuring that a comprehensive image of the man emerges as opposed to the icon some people would choose to remember him as (De Gallier, 2018). The industry is slowly but surely shifting towards becoming more conducive for female artists and fans. People are no longer content to accept a 'boys will be boys' mentality, and it makes a difference not only with how women are being treated in the industry, but also in how women see themselves and the extent to which they believe their voices are being heard.

## Portrayal of Women in Songs

As I have said time and time again in this thesis, a large portion of rock revolves around sex. It's in fierce songs about passionate flings, tender ballads about partnership and bitter laments about love lost. And the fact that rock music talks so much about sex isn't necessarily a bad thing. Sex and love are a fundamental part of the human experience and music that explores this realm of the human experience not only help people understand and appreciate it, but also provides a platform to unite people across the spectrum on the issue. Furthermore, sex has been the subject of music, art and literature for centuries so rock music is hardly revolutionary in its exploration of the provocative subject. In fact the only place I find sex questionable in music is when it is used in a context that actively objectifies or degrades one gender or promotes non consensual and abusive sexual acts. Fortunately, few classic rock songs fit into the latter category, but we should acknowledge the influence male rockers had in skewing the narrative of sex.

For better or worse, teenagers, especially young men, looked to rock music to learn about sex, and this musical exploration helped shape their initial perceptions of it. Interest in sex is natural and should not be condemned, but we have to recognize that rock and roll music has an impact on how people understand sexual relationships. This means that how the participants are described and the perspective that the act is being described from is vital to shaping listeners' perceptions. In the case of rock music, the dominant voice was male because the most popular

singers and songwriters were men (Cooper, 1999). This unequal viewpoint distorted how listeners viewed sex because they were really only experiencing it from one side (assuming heterosexual couples) and the content lacked a female voice. Therefore the way that women are described and the way the sex itself is described influenced both how the men listening to the music thought of their partners and what to expect from them, and how the women listening to the music thought they should be treated (Kennealy-Morrison, 1995).

Fortunately a lot of rock songs are generally pretty sex positive. They don't condemn women who want sex, they encourage exploration and even empower women in certain contexts where they relinquish control to a partner out of love, respect or most often lust. There are countless examples of this including Led Zeppelin's "Hey Hey What Can I Do?" where the male protagonist discusses his lover's unfaithfulness but his inability to leave because she is so captivating, as exemplified by the line "let me tell you bout the girl I love...she's the only one that I've been thinking of maybe on day she will be all mine...she won't be true, no she won't be true." Or Queen's "Fat Bottomed Girls" ( a song which I think is one of the earliest examples of modern ideals on body positivity) by describing fuller figured women and saying they "make the rockin world go round." To the Velvet Underground's "Femme Fatale" which is a poetic ballad describing the ways that a man's partner will outsmart him through lines like "little boy she's from the street, before you start you're already beat...she's going to break your heart in two, it's true." These anthems celebrate their female subjects and place them in a position of power where they own their sexuality and independence, which truly celebrates the certain freedoms and powers that women have.

Furthermore, songs written about these musicians' lovers and long term partners are often poetic in the way they describe their subjects. These descriptions go beyond looks and speak to the depth of emotion these writers felt for their lovers making these women seem divine in comparison to these humble musicians. For example, George Harrison's "Something" speaks to the intangible quality that his then wife Pattie Boyd had that at once left him satisfied, challenged and utterly in love. The Eagles have countless songs that not only describe the ways women attracted them, but also distinct ways that women outmatched men in relationships and in the world. Even hard rock groups like Led Zeppelin had a softer side where they had sweet melodies about the women who stole their hearts, which was the case with their mellow, heartfelt "Thank You," which Robert Plant wrote about then wife Maureen, or the Rolling Stones with songs like "Angie" and "Wild Horses," which wound up being some of their biggest hits. These songs, while not the norm for these heavy rock bands, were so important because while they showed the emotional side of these groups and portrayed women as complex characters who were equal to these men that so many malleable young people considered to be rock gods. They also empowered the young women listening, because hearing these songs likely evoked a sense of desire within those women to be like the ones they heard about. To be the complicated, different girl, or the one who challenges not only herself but also her partner, is a really powerful message as young women enter relationships (Lewis, 1995).

Although despite all the aforementioned positivity surrounding some lyrics, we should acknowledge the obvious cases where women weren't represented well. This largely revolves around the language male musicians used when describing the women and their intentions with them. One of the bigger but not widely recognized problems I've seen when analyzing lyrics is

the use of the word 'girl' and even 'little girl' in sexual situations. While, when used alone or even in the context of a pet name, this can be endearing, hearing the romantic history many of these musicians had with underage girls calls the use of the word into question. I recognize that its prevalence in rock music could come from the fact that it could be more catchy or fit better within the song than saying 'woman', its use also it also promotes pursuing younger women and at times normalizes the idea of having relationships with underage girls. Kiss' "Christine Sixteen" is a good example of this, along with the Rolling Stones' "Stray Cat Blues" (a song that outright discusses statutory rape) and Stevie Ray Vaughan's "Look at Little Sister", "China Girl" by David Bowie (made even creepier by the fact that he had a long and sordid history of affairs with young women), and so on and so forth. These songs, and more like them, demonstrate how women's appeal could be likened with youth and how rock stars perpetuated problematic relationship tropes.

Another potential problem we should consider is how often looks play a role in these songs. While songs have to be descriptive, and describing a person's features is an easy way to talk about your attraction and help your listener visualize your muse, these descriptions had repercussions for young female listeners who were already susceptible to body image issues and insecurity. They generally implied that if you were an attractive woman then you had potential or were worthy, and if you weren't then you were irrelevant. This is not an example of lyrics actively degrading women, because people write about things that inspire them and beauty is a big motivator for creation, but it is important to point out that exploiting and objectifying women based on their looks is a common theme in rock music, which had potentially detrimental effects on the men and women who listened to the tracks (Cooper, 1999).

The final problem with language in the music is the aggression that some songs take against women in sexual circumstances. This is a lot more common in ‘cock’ rock or harder metal songs and generally involves descriptions of rough contact and men ‘giving it hard’ to their partners. We see this in songs like Led Zeppelin’s “Whole Lotta Love”, “Under my Thumb” by the Rolling Stones, and “In the Summertime” by Mungo Jerry, where each song describes the narrator taking sexual control over his partner. And while these songs do not actively promote rape culture or explicitly say their partners are not consenting, each has an aggressive tone that generally promotes the subjugation of women in sexual situations. For example, “Under my Thumb” describes the narrator's partner as “a squirmin’ dog who’s just had her day” and celebrates how “she does just what she’s told.” Other songs speak to how they calm their unruly partners through sex and imply a type of coercion in the act. And once again while these songs never explicitly call for violence against women, they plant the seed that it is okay to overpower your partner if she ‘enjoys’ it in the end.

While there are varied ways that women are represented in music, some good and some bad, each songs has the potential to play a pivotal role in how listeners develop worldviews and their expectations for relationships. It is therefore extremely important that we consider what a song is saying and how it can be interpreted when we access its relevance or potential within pop culture.

## They're not all bad...Even the Worst of Them

Despite the decidedly critical view I have shown of male musicians throughout this thesis in terms of how they exploited women and acted socially inappropriately, I want to acknowledge that many of these same musicians actually championed women in professional settings and aided their careers. For example, The Eagles leveraged their influence and pushed to get Linda Ronstadt into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame because they felt it was wrong that her voice and impact hadn't been recognized. Bob Dylan spoke to Joan Baez's talent when it seemed that she was being overlooked by producers (before he ultimately broke her heart and severed ties with her). Janis Joplin was continuously praised by her fellow male musicians for her unique talent and was offered collaborative partnerships or offers to sing lead on certain tracks (Echols, 2000). But there are also more subtle examples of male musicians promoting female contributions to work either by giving song credits, inviting relative unknowns to sing on now legendary tracks, or introducing women contributors/musicians at concerts to help them gain a greater following within the industry.

One surprising example of professional female empowerment came from the band that epitomized 'cock' rock: Led Zeppelin. While this band is notorious for backstage antics that often left many feeling unsettled, they were actually very reasonable when it came to professional courtesy. For example their hugely successful track "When the Levee Breaks" gives songwriting credits to Memphis Minnie (real name Lizzie Douglas). While this may not initially

seem like such a great feat considering she wrote the song and deserved the credit to begin with, the reason her inclusion is significant is because her own record label didn't initially credit her songwriting, (they instead said her husband wrote it), and the band had to find and include her contribution on their own. They easily could have ignored Minnie (just as her record label had done), and doing so frankly would have been expected in a time and industry where women were overlooked and mistreated, yet they went out of their way to include her (Smith, 2017).

My initial reaction upon learning this information was to ask why, and the answer is more complicated than may be initially apparent. Band members Plant and Page had always been drawn to the 1928 song and had wanted to remake it in their own way. So when the group was working on their fourth album it seemed like the perfect time to redo the song. This was also right around the time that Minnie was having health problems, was near death and had gained a considerable cult following, especially among women (Moore, 2017). Therefore, some claim that Zeppelin only included Minnie because of this newfound popularity. And while this interpretation may be true, we also have to recognize that the primary people concerned and advocating for Minnie in this case were female fans. The male fans may have acknowledged the unfairness of the circumstances but the female fans would have been actively angry and demanded the band take action. So the fact that the band researched and promoted Minnie more so than her own label at the time of the song's publication either means they were concerned with the integrity of the music, no matter what the gender of the song's creator was, or they were cognizant of the ideas of their female fans and actively wanted to promote their causes, (Smith, 2017). And whether you look at this situation cynically or believe the best in the band's intentions, these circumstances do show female advocacy on the part of Led Zeppelin.

But promoting women was not just limited to songwriting. Other professional courtesies came from collaborations, introductions and actively promoting female musicians. For example, the Eagles actively promoted Linda Ronstadt after they achieved massive fame, volunteering to play back up to her, and to this day still participate in tributed to the star. Led Zeppelin famously only had one collaboration and it was with singer Sandy Denny on the mystical track “The Battle of Evermore.” The song itself is significant for many reasons, like its lyricism and Tolkien themes, but is also important because the vocals are shared evenly between Plant and Denny. One does not overpower the other and there is a mutual respect through the distribution of the lyrics and story that made waves with female fans of the time. The band even went so far as to include a symbol for Denny on the album sleeve to recognize her contributions, and spoke about her talent as a musician. Many think that their activism on her behalf helped her win female vocalist of the year at the British Music awards that same year (Smith, 2017).

These are just several examples from groups encouraging female artistry and recognizing women’s contributions to rock. This kind of awareness is extremely important because it demonstrates that these musicians were aware of the troubles their female counterparts experienced and wanted to champion them in the right circumstances. And while this isn’t always the legacy we remember from popular male musicians, we should celebrate these actions because doing so encourages others to follow suit and the industry to take notice.

That being said, we should not allow the instances of good overshadow the history of bad. While male musicians did things for women and shifted the industry in positive ways we also have to acknowledge that they did some very problematic things along the way. These spanned from drunken sexual encounters where consent could not be given, to wild antics that

endangered innocent bystanders, to immortalizing offensive ideas through their lyrics. Prominent rock stars have significant power over both the industry and their fans. When they leverage that power to promote positive changes amazing things can happen that have a lasting impact for generations to come. But when they commit destructive acts they fuel a narrative where it is okay to be problematic so long as you can get away with it.

## **Chapter 5: Moving Forward**

*Lessons Learned and History to Avoid*

This thesis has highlighted many of the problematic themes in 1960s and 70s rock history. From the male dominated narrative perpetuated by rock journalists, to the offensive lyrics present in popular songs, to the many instances of musicians abusing their power and making inappropriate advances towards women, there have been countless examples of the unsettling trends that were pervasive in rock throughout the 60s and 70s. I want to emphasize that my intention in writing this thesis was not to condemn all of rock's past, but rather to recognize the issues present in the past so we do not repeat them in the future. I am also not arguing that we have to abandon all rock culture that is problematic. For example, the Rolling Stones song "Under my Thumb" discusses a man manipulating his partner until she fits his idea of the ideal woman. While this is clearly a song about female subjugation I have to admit that I still listen to it even though I disagree with the song's message. I still listen to David Bowie's music despite the fact that he was a sex offender and carried on affairs with underage girls. And Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones and The Beatles and on and on and on.

It has been difficult to reconcile these two halves of myself. I want to be the ideal feminist and reject any content that subjugates women, but I also recognize the musical significance of these songs and am drawn to them as a listener. For example, while I have already discussed the ways that "Under My Thumb" is problematic I can also recognize that it has a catchy, almost hypnotic beat and the song helped advance the Rolling Stones' career. "Letter to Hermione" by David Bowie is still one of my all time favorite songs and while I can condemn the singer for his actions, I can't deny that this song speaks to me in a profound way

and I can't give it up. So now comes the most difficult question of this thesis: can we still listen to these problematic songs and musicians knowing what we know?

I think the answer is yes to a certain extent. While some songs like "China Girl" and "Run for your Life" probably need to fade into oblivion because they have crossed the threshold of being too problematic, demonstrated by "China Girl's" racial and pedophilic undertones and "Run for your Life's" message that actively encourages violence against women, others are still fine to listen to as long as we don't try to hide the ways in which they are problematic. So listening to David Bowie and recognizing his value as an artist is okay, but fans should also recognize that he was a controversial figure who was aggressive towards women. There are even more nuanced ways that songs can still be used in pop culture that both allow the song to be appreciated for its creativity and artistry while still recognizing that the content is dubious. For example, in Edgar Wright's 2010 cult film "Scott Pilgrim vs the World" Wright plays the song "Under my Thumb" in a pivotal scene where the heroine reignites her relationship with a controlling ex boyfriend. The song choice is meant to reflect her current circumstances by highlighting the power this ex has over her, but it also foreshadows a future reveal that the heroine is being controlled by external forces. It also adds a critical edge to the song by drawing a parallel between the obviously problematic scene in the film and the problematic undertones in the song that both recognizes the issues inherent in both and visually shows the issues with the lyrics. Furthermore, some songs that are considered beyond the point of saving because of their content can be saved by maintaining the melody and giving them new lyric "upgrades." One fairly recent example is when countless musicians wrote new lyrics to Frank Loesser's "Baby it's Cold Outside" that discuss consent, a radical departure from the song's original message.

While songs are salvageable there are some troubling patterns in the music industry that still ring true today. These primarily include the industry's inclination to indulge their performers' wild behavior, journalists' tendency to favor male contributions over female and celebrate male artistry, and the general disregard for women both in terms of their talent and their voices as survivors (VE, 2018). The music industry is a slow moving machine and it responds to fastest to things that sell or acts that get the most streams. In a way this puts the burden on fans to be more vocal about what they want and what they will not accept (Hogan, 2018). Furthermore, fans have a similar obligation when it comes to journalism, as our modern era gives immediate feedback to journals about the success of different topics because of click through rates and interaction with the comments section. Therefore, significantly more power has been transferred to the fans and in a way is up to them to decide what the future of the music industry will be.

This decision does not have to involve massive protests or active participation in the industry, it merely means that fans need to be more cognizant of their newfound power and express it in ways that promote positive changes. The industry is shifting in response to its listeners and artists and we have an obligation to fuel the good changes that have already happened while standing up to the negative ones that we can still change. This chapter will consider the growth the music industry has experienced in recent decades, with a particular focus on how relevant players treat women, analyse the issues still prevalent in rock journalism, and conclude by discussing the broader implications of this project and why it is relevant to modern society.

## Growing Pains

Despite the fact that there are still a lot of inherent problems in the music industry it is getting better. Survivors are more willing to call out their perpetrators, male musicians are more vocal about women's issues and assault prevention, and the industry is quicker to intervene and take allegations seriously. And while the industry as a whole still has a lot of growing to do, it has made massive strides in terms of representation and having more educated musicians (Hogan, 2018).

One of the bigger changes the industry has seen are male stars directly advocating for their female counterparts and calling out their own industry. For example, Liam Payne called out news outlets in October of 2018 because they insisted on linking him to his female colleagues; he claimed it undermined their credibility as professionals. He addressed the press in a tweet which stated: "My team is full of talented, smart professional women. I find it wrong that they are reduced to being linked to me romantically in the press just for simply standing next to me. Isn't it time we treat women with a bit more respect?" Payne's willingness to stand up for his female colleagues demonstrates extreme growth, especially when compared to the early days of rock when female professionals were asked to 'entertain' the band and were expected to endure a certain amount of harassment (Delegado, 2018). There have also been changes in how stars treat their fans. While groups like Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones were content to call their female fans groupies and disregard their male fans, current stars actively defend their audiences.

For example, Harry Styles, who ironically cites Mick Jagger and David Bowie as his major musical influences, has been incredibly outspoken when it comes to defending his young female fan base to reporters who question their ability to understand and appreciate his more complex music. When explicitly asked if he thought his younger fans would even understand it Styles said “How can you say young girls don't get it? They're our future. Our future doctors, lawyers, mothers, presidents, they kind of keep the world going” (Tom, 2017).

There have also been more instances of rock stars standing up to other stars while simultaneously calling out the industry for covering up assaults. This was the case when John Legend spoke out against R. Kelly, and when Kesha called out her assailant Dr. Luke she saw many stars rallying around her. Both the case with Kesha and Legend also highlight the problems that still exist in the industry, because Legend was one of the few stars who actively spoke out against R. Kelly even though many were aware of the assaults, and Kesha received massive backlash once she revealed her survivor status. But despite the barriers that still exist, these examples highlight that there has been a massive shift in the industry and there is now more of a conversation around assaults and the general treatment of women.

This shift is further demonstrated by fans and fellow artists alike protesting groups who have been accused of sexual assault or committing a social injustice. For example, punk band PWR BTTM was notoriously forced to drop out of music festivals after other bands refused to play in the same lineup when they were accused of sexual harassment. Recently Ryan Adams was forced to cancel his latest tour because of accusations that he was inappropriate with an underage girl. Even industry producers, historically the group that enables the greatest amount of sexual misconduct from its musicians with a reputation for being horribly sexist, apparently now

tell bands to ‘not do anything stupid.’ While that isn’t the ideal mentality to have, especially for people who have so much power in the industry, it is a start. We are seeing the climate shift for women in music and while this industry moves slower than others, recognizing the times we enable stars and overlook bad behavior, both past and present, is the only way to instigate long term, sustainable changes (Yahr, 2017).

Perhaps the most positive shift in the industry has come from the increased prevalence and value of women musicians. We are in an era where female rock stars are dominating the music industry. Beyoncé is one of the most globally recognized people (including politicians and actors), Taylor Swift has almost four times the net worth of comparable male singer Harry Styles, Selena Gomez was the most followed person on Instagram, and Ariana Grande was one of the most Googled names of 2018. These women have graced the covers of countless magazines, accumulated massive fortunes and have influence that extends far beyond the stage into politics and social changes. For example, Halsey’s speeches on homelessness have inspired many people to look into the cause and lend their support. Lady Gaga’s music video for her song about the aftermath of sexual assault “Till It Happens To You” has over 46 million views on YouTube and has received praise from media outlets, industry professionals and fellow musicians. Female musicians carry significantly more power than they ever have before and many are leveraging that power to enact positive social changes that not only promote women’s rights but also point out systemic issues in the industry that need to be dealt with.

There are also significantly more women in industry and media roles. Magazines like *Bitch* and *Rockgirl* were exclusively developed throughout the 80s and 90s by women for a female audience and comment upon everything from rock music to popular culture. Furthermore,

women have been rising up the ranks in well established companies that have been historically male-dominated. For example, Julie Greenwald is the chairperson and CEO of Atlantic Records. Michelle Anthony is a senior board member of Universal Music Group. Caroline Bienstock is the President and CEO of Carlin America (Billboard, 2017). These women and the powerful roles that they have acquired represent a radical departure from how the music industry used to be and gives a hopeful outlook for the potential of the future. Women are no longer seen as just fans or relegated to the shadow of their male counterparts and these shifts make me optimistic that a better future for women in music is on the horizon.

### Why you Gotta Be so Mean?

While the industry as a whole has made significant progress compared to the 60s and 70s, there are still major problems that need to be addressed. These issues primarily stem from the fact that rock journalism still has a clear penchant for favoring male artists over female in terms of their musical ability and creative prowess. And while female musicians across all genres of music fall victim to this type of discrimination, I am going to specifically focus on artists in pop music because these performers endure the greatest media scrutiny and are most comparable to the rock stars of the 60s and 70s due to their similar fan bases and influence over the greater music scene.

One of the biggest issues with modern rock journalism is that men are often assessed based on their creative output and their personal lives come second to their music, while women find themselves fending off dating rumors and battling personal attacks about body image, alleged celebrity feuds and criticisms about their failure to be a 'role model.' For example, both Britney Spears and Miley Cyrus were slammed by the media after they chose to break away from their 'good girl Disney' image and pursue a more mature sound with a more mature look. Artists like Nikki Minaj and Cardi B are consistently pitted against each other with reports focusing on their personal interactions as opposed to the music they produce. Kelly Clarkson was called fat and dismissed as irrelevant after gaining weight despite the fact that she had just produced the chart topping song "Stronger." And while some could argue that all these reports are simply the cost of fame, the reality is that male artists objectively do not face this type of scrutiny and women consistently do.

Where male artists are simply expected to make music and are even encouraged to participate in wild antics, as doing so promotes their image as the "rock star," thus boosting their credibility, female artists are expected to not only make good music but also be pretty, young, funny, and socially appropriate in all circumstances. In other words, men can be celebrated for their flaws and vulnerability while female artists are still expected to fit the image of the manic pixie dream girl (De Gallier, 2018). While I am glad that changes have been made which allow male musicians to be more vulnerable and express themselves, because that is an important shift for music, these systemic changes fundamentally have not transferred to women and that makes it difficult for these women to fully express themselves as artists.

Some arguments can be made for the fact that these artists actually encourage media scrutiny because it gives them more attention and generates more excitement for their music, but even if that were the case it doesn't mean that these reports aren't part of a larger problem. For example, when Cardi B and Nikki Manaj have public fights and the media reports on them, it might help their record sales but it also pushes an image that successful women can't be friends and generally creates an us versus them mentality that hurts women. Or when Katy Perry gets ridiculed for a new haircut it might generate interest around her, but it also promotes negative beauty standards that influence how young girls see themselves. So even though an argument can be made that female artists benefit from this scrutiny, I think what is really happening is that these women are forced to deal with it whether they like it or not and so they use it to their advantage. So when music journalists report on Demi Lovato's sobriety or love life over the intrinsic value of her new music, it puts her in a problematic position, but it also presents an opportunity for her to increase her profits by writing about these topics which was the case with her song "Sober." And when Miley Cyrus was chased by reporters who had been criticising her since her teens she took this as an opportunity to be crazy and fully sever herself from her former good girl image. These examples of female artists reaping some benefit from their negative media attention might show that sometime female artists enjoy this negative attention, but that does not mean they wanted it or encouraged it. Therefore, even if female artists welcome media attention there is still something fundamentally wrong in how these reporters are giving it to them, and shifting these problematic practices could lead to long term changes in how the public sees female performers and how the artists see themselves.

The contemporary star who embodies most of the problems with the way rock journalists report on women is Taylor Swift. While Swift has been one of the most prolific lyricists of this generation and has led an incredibly successful, career achieving both critical and commercial acclaim, she still faces constant backlash over the men she dates and the way she conducts herself in public. From the way that journalists seem more concerned with who Swift writes her songs about as opposed to the artistic process of writing them, to the way that she is constantly scrutinized for her appearance and antics, Swift's music can't seem to exist beyond her persona as a celebrity (Grady, 2018). For example, Swift's 2013 song "All Too Well" marked a major transition for her as a lyricist and performer and revealed her ability to write complex, poetic lyrics, which was a radical departure from her former girly, country-pop reputation. Despite this massive artistic shift which marked Swift's growth as an artist, the majority of popular magazines chose to write about the fact that the song was about her high profile relationship with Jake Gyllenhaal when referencing the song (Spanos, 2016). Furthermore while Swift's record breaking album *1989* was met with acclaim from music critics it was also met with mass speculation about song subjects, and Swift was criticised for having too many romantic partners, which is especially ironic considering men are celebrated for having more romantic conquests.

Looking at Swift's music through the scope of her romantic partners undermines her position as an artist and takes away from her music which is a reality male artists rarely have to deal with. Swift herself commented on the inherent sexism of this commentary, saying that many of her exes have written songs about her but the media never plays the guessing game in those circumstances, choosing instead to analyze the music from a purely critical perspective. For example, when Taylor's ex Harry Styles, who is almost equally popular in his own right,

released his first solo album, he included a song called “Two Ghosts” that not only mirrors the structure and lyrics of Swift’s song “Style” but also makes direct references to her appearance that imply the song is about her. Instead of digging into this detail or picking apart the other romantic songs on his album, fans were content to celebrate his romantic side while critics discussed his musical shift towards his classic rock influences and discussed his potential as an artist. The inclination of fans and critics to look for the romantic subject of Swift’s songs when listening to them also implies that the man behind the music is just as important as the woman creating it. This is an obvious problem that many male musicians are not subjected to and has the effect of taking the narrative away from the very woman who wrote it.

Swift also embodies problems with how the media deals with sexual assault, especially when other celebrities are involved. In 2016 Taylor Swift became a victim of assault after a famous DJ, David Mueller, grabbed her inappropriately at a press event. While Swift tried to handle the situation privately, her assailant chose to publicly humiliate Swift in a series of tweets that vilify her, and he even went so far as to sue her for defamation of character. The media initially favored Mueller despite the fact that Swift was the victim, and claimed that she was being too severe on the perpetrator because her influence effectively ruined his career. Swift (ever the activist and likely horrified that her assailant would actually try to play the victim in his position), took this as an opportunity to show the problems with how modern society treats its victims. She countersued her assailant for one dollar and was forced to publicly recount the details of her assault in which she plainly said what happened when the DJ had “a handful of (her) ass.”

Later when Swift reflected on the incident she wrote, “I had already been in court all week and had to watch this man’s attorney bully, badger and harass my team, including my mother, over inane details and ridiculous minutiae, accusing them, and me, of lying. I was angry. In that moment, I decided to forgo any courtroom formalities and just answer the questions the way it happened. This man hadn’t considered any formalities when he assaulted me” (Yahr, 2017). Swift’s strength in the face of this incident swayed the media and was cited as a win for survivors of harassment everywhere. At the same time, the initial hesitancy of the media to believe Swift and accusations that she was ‘dramatic’ showcase the larger issue in how the media deals with victims. It is getting better in the wake of the #MeToo movement, but if high profile and established artists like Taylor Swift have such severe backlash, it makes you wonder what the industry is like to less prominent survivors and how their claims are dealt with.

The final way that Swift serves as a case study for why modern rock journalism still fails women is the reports surrounding her feuds with other women. For example, the media still talks about Swift’s now infamous feud with Katy Perry that began in 2013, encouraging fans to “pick a team” and rehashing old wounds. This behavior is not only problematic because it puts personal issues above the music which in turn reduces each woman’s standing as an artist, but it also pushes the narrative that successful women don’t support each other and fans are expected to be loyal to one. Why can’t fans appreciate both women as artists? Why does there have to be a “Team Katy” versus “Team Taylor,” especially when both women are participating in an industry that has historically been more difficult for women? While there is an obvious incentive for publications to play up this drama because it interests people and sells, these journalists should also have an obligation to report fairly and discuss the music as well as personal dramas.

Furthermore, they should create a narrative that allows both women to exist as artists separate from their personal spats so that fans do not feel the need to alter their listening habits or think they owe partisanship to one over musician over the other. It may sell magazines in the long run, but it also stunts the careers of the artists and perpetuates a bad narrative.

Part of the reason I wanted to use Taylor Swift as the example for why rock journalism continues to miss the mark is because she is one of the artists who is changing the landscape of the music industry, especially with in its treatment of women. As I previously discussed, Swift sued her assailant and only sought a “symbolic” one dollar in damages to draw attention to how victims are treated. She has also started talking back to reporters who make sexist comments about her in interviews by refusing to answer their questions or commenting upon their misguided remarks. She has also made powerful statements about how artists in general are treated by removing then replacing her music on streaming services like Spotify and penning statements to her fans about the different ways that the industry takes advantage of their artists and the little things they can do to combat them. Perhaps the most dramatic and meaningful move Swift has made against her critics and the industry was the release of her record breaking album *Reputation* in 2017. This project was centered around Swift reclaiming her identity and denouncing the image that had been cast upon her by critics and the media. Songs played into rumors circulating in the media and Swift’s clever lyrics at once suggested a “don’t care attitude” and gave the world her unadulterated perspective on issues she was formerly silent on (Grady, 2018). Swift’s album was a powerful stance against many of the issues both in the media and in rock reporting and her commentary as well as her fans’ reactions imply that big changes are on the horizon for this industry.

While music journalism may continue to fall into the traps that it always has, and in some ways it is worse because there are significantly more publications now, many of them less credible, there are also more people willing to condemn poor behavior. Female artists are growing more comfortable with demanding the treatment they deserve and are more willing to speak out against discriminatory or threatening systems. Women are still forced to endure a lot, but when people like Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, Miley Cyrus and countless others use their platform to discuss these issues fans take notice and the industry is forced to respond.

### Time to Face the Music

This thesis has explored the inherent problems with the ways that women are treated in the music industry, and the general conclusion is that while conditions have improved from the 60s and 70s there are ongoing issues that still need to be resolved. Perhaps the most glaring problem in modern times is the way that the media treats female stars and the discrepancies between how men and women are represented in the news. And while this paper exclusively focused on problematic examples in the music industry, these narratives reflect a broader problem with reporting in general.

My findings throughout this research apply more generally to women in all sectors of culture and highlight larger problems with the way that society treats women. There are

countless examples of women being discounted by the media in everything from sports to film to politics, which happens when journalists hold their female subjects to higher standards than their males or selectively report on events that limits female exposure. This unsettling reporting style not only hinders the careers of women but also has broader implications for how women reading the articles see themselves and understand their position in the world. And while movements like #MeToo and diversity initiatives have shifted the landscape in the industry, women still endure many disadvantages that have massive implications both for the individual and society.

One of the most severe examples of biased reporting against women happens in politics and is especially detrimental to larger society, because this sector influences how we are governed and how the world sees the United States. For example, the 2016 Presidential Election, which featured Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, was rife with media errors that not only aided Trump's position while reducing Hillary's, but also confused the public, which shifted voter turnout and expectations. There were also blatant issues with the way that each candidate was written about. Despite Clinton's long and respectable career in politics she was beaten down over her looks and condemned for long standing issues such as her email scandal that she had already resolved, both officially and in the media, months prior. By contrast Trump, a sex offender and businessman with limited political experience, was written about because of his antics and his policies, with a special focus on those that aided his wealthy supporters. Furthermore, the attacks against Clinton by major news sources were especially critical and even aggressively hostile, whereas with Trump they were more comical and looked at him as a character and not a candidate. And while arguably this difference came from partisan sentiments and the "perfect storm" of coverage, the reality is that no Presidential candidate in history had to deal with what

Clinton dealt with, and it is no coincidence that she was also the first female candidate from a major political party.

After the election and Trump's victory, media professionals came out and admitted fault for their problematic reporting styles. Major news sources facilitated the election becoming a circus and their failure to promote the right issues, as well as the public's refusal to demand them, led to a questionable election, and many confused and disappointed citizens. And while I would like to say that the political media learned its lesson, it still has a long way to go. The most recent example comes from Democratic candidates announcing their bid for President. Despite the fact that more experienced and credible women have expressed interest in running than at any other time in history the popular media is still almost exclusively lending its support to a man: Beto (Koreki, 2019). While Beto is popular, especially among younger generations, and is therefore appealing to write about, he is no more qualified than any other candidate running. In fact, he is significantly less qualified given the fact that he has never served in quintessential US political bodies such as the Senate and has limited political experience. This is not to say that Beto isn't a likable person who should not have media attention, but I don't think his policies should be given more weight than his female challengers like Senators Harris and Warren who not only have more experience but also have more developed platforms. This selective reporting by the media is stunting the potential for these women while promoting a man and is repeating the history of the 2016 election.

But as I said earlier, this phenomenon extends into all sectors of culture and society. It is in reporters celebrating the US Men's soccer team making it to the World Cup and giving limited press to the US Women's team, despite the fact that they have won three World Cup titles and

four gold medals. Or in the way that male actors are asked about their craft and the complex dimensions of their character while women are asked what diet they used to get in shape for the role. And once again these problems are getting better because the media itself is becoming more diverse and there are growing conversations around these issues but these conversations have to continue for anything to really change. Therefore, just as fans in rock music need to be more vocal with their expectations for musicians and the industry, the broader public needs to be more critical of all media sources and express concerns when they are valid.

Change is possible, and if the music industry is any indication, it can happen rapidly. It comes from important players fighting against common traps and shifting perspectives, such as the case with contemporary musicians offering new narratives that reject the old ones. It comes from recognizing past errors so that we are not doomed to repeat them like acknowledging that some of the people we admire for art are problematic as people. And it comes from fans demanding changes so that the industry has no choice but to respond. The music industry is changing and it makes me optimistic that other industries can change as well. While journalism should still be critical, it should be critical about work, philosophy and creation, not superficial details that enable gossip. We need new perspectives and a media that facilitates the production of narratives that empower people and celebrate positive shifts in society.

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