

A STAGE OF THEIR OWN: HEGEMONIC PATRIARCHY IN THE  
ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC INDUSTRY

by

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A THESIS

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This thesis serves as a rebuttal to Jann Wenner’s interview with the New York Times in September 2023, in which he states women are inferior to men in the rock and roll music industry. Through a historical analysis of the gender dynamics in the industry, it becomes evident to the reader that hegemonic patriarchy has been at the forefront of industry control. Men have assumed positions of power in the rock music industry, both onstage and off. Women have been viewed as incompetent in the industry, thus placing them in subordinate positions. This text features statistical analysis from the 2023 USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative study: “Inclusion in the Recording Studio?” as well as interviews with five women in the industry. This text offers a holistic view into the female experience in the rock and roll industry and how gender-based discrimination directly affects the careers of women and queer people. There is systematic marginalization of women and queer people in the rock industry. Through the application of patriarchal hegemony and heteronormative structures, women have historically experienced limited opportunities and recognition. Finally, this thesis aims to recognize gender-based discrimination in the industry, as well as reclaim space for women and queer people in the rock and roll music industry.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project is special. My experience working in the music industry has been nothing short of unique. I have held the position of DJ Director at KWVA 88.1 FM, the University of Oregon's Campus Radio station, for the past couple years. In addition to this, I have been the Publicist at the WOW Hall, Eugene's historic concert venue. Finally, I have performance experience as a guitarist in GrrlBand, Eugene's all-female, all-queer rock outfit. I am grateful to have become so deeply ingrained in music; however, all my experiences have been tainted by gender discrimination. Repeated feelings of invalidation, unworthiness, and inferiority have enlightened me about the harsh reality many women experience in the industry. Selfishly, this thesis is intended to reclaim some space for myself, and for all women in the industry.

I would like to thank my bandmates, Codi Farmer, Claudia Santino, Camy Corcoran, and Louise Jones, for being the most powerful and passionate women in music that I know. This thesis is for them.

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*“Insofar as the women, just none of them were as articulate enough on this intellectual level.”*

*- Jann Wenner, Co-Founder of Rolling Stone Magazine, 2023*

## I. Introduction

Women, amongst other marginalized populations, lack the historical legacy of power that men have access to. The stronghold that the patriarchy has on American culture has directly affected the successes of women and others. The music industry bears no difference.

Rock and roll music revolutionized American life. Rock and roll represents an initial breakaway from American tradition while trailblazing a strong precedent for the modern music industry. The rise of rock and roll occurred in the zeitgeist of American rebellion and counterculture. The rock and roll scene has been dominated by the patriarchy as if it is a canvas for male creative expression. The hegemonic rule of patriarchy in rock and roll was established on arrival, and its persistence affects the experience of women in the industry today.

Wenner continues:

It's not that they're not creative geniuses. It's not that they're inarticulate, although, go have a deep conversation with Grace Slick or Janis Joplin. Please, be my guest. You know, Joni was not a philosopher of rock 'n' roll. She didn't, in my mind, meet that test. Not by her work, not by other interviews she did. The people I interviewed were the kind of philosophers of rock... Black artists — you know, Stevie Wonder, genius, right? I suppose when you use a word as broad as “masters,” the fault is using that word. Maybe Marvin Gaye, or Curtis Mayfield? I mean, they just didn't articulate at that level.

As a rebuttal to Wenner's 2023 interview with David Marchese at the New York Times, this text seeks as a form of justice for women and other marginalized identities. This will be accomplished first through a historical summary of the role of women in music. Moreover, how the role of women was defined by men throughout the development of rock music. This will give more context to why Wenner is making such claims. Secondly, this thesis features interviews from five women speaking about their experience working in varied areas of the rock industry; I wanted to let women speak for themselves, which is something Wenner failed to do. This text

hinges on Wenner's ideas, as it aims to give more context to the female experience in the rock industry.

In short, it is time to set the record straight. Wenner's interview is revealing of two things: he is negating the place of women in music, while also admitting fault to the lack of opportunities women are given. These two tenants are consistent forms of marginalization and discrimination against women in the music industry. *Rolling Stone Magazine* is America's top music publication, as well as maintaining the title of number one brand in music publishing for over 50 years. This is central to understanding this thesis: women are undermined in rock and roll based on their gender, and in turn, women are not granted equal opportunities for success in the industry. In particular, the rock music industry has been and continues to be, an overtly white-male dominated space. This patriarchal hegemony has directly correlated to the success of women because men continue to uphold positions of power in the modern music sphere.

Another thematic piece to the music industry is the legacy of male power. This results in a patriarchal hegemony, where the patriarchal precedent continues to reign supreme. The hegemonic patriarchal system that has been instilled in the music industry is strong; so strong that when a woman or queer musician is a threat, men oftentimes leverage their power to seize control. This is how women and queer people in the music industry are ultimately controlled by men under the guise of opportunity.

Through analyzing the history of rock music, paired with conversations with women in the modern music industry, this thesis examines the systemic marginalization of women in the rock industry, through patriarchal hegemony and heteronormative structures that have historically limited opportunities and recognition for women. This paper will also enlighten readers about the female experience in the rock industry, as well as their legacy on modern



music. As a genre, rock and roll is daunting. There is grit, criticism, and the male legacy; the bravery of women and queer people in rock needs to be realized, because for so long it has been overlooked.

## **II. Context to Rock and Roll Scholarship and the Patriarchy**

Rock and roll scholarship is relatively new - as of the turn of the 20th century. Gender and rock and roll have a tumultuous relationship. For this reason, it is important to analyze the genre holistically. Music as an art form leaves room for subjectivity. While outlining music history, one cannot properly analyze rock and roll based solely on the music; there is a culture that was created through rock and roll, much of which has been foundational for creating the modern music industry. Patriarchal standards have upheld the industry, systematically excluding women and non-cisgender men from opportunities. Music scholars Robert Frith and Angela McRobbie state:

“Any analysis of the sexuality of rock music must begin with the brute social fact that in terms of control and production, rock is a male form. The music business is male-run; popular musicians, writers, creators, technicians, engineers, and producers are mostly men...The problems facing a woman seeking to enter the rock world as a participant are clear. A girl is supposed to be an individual listener; she is not encouraged to develop the skills and knowledge to become a performer<sup>1</sup>.

Rock and roll maintains a unique historical trajectory. The rise of rock and roll was fast and electric. Understanding this historical backdrop is crucial for analyzing how patriarchal theories have shaped the genre's evolution and gender dynamics. Rock music still serves as the foundation of modern music culture, and evaluating the patriarchal foundation gives context to the gendered discrimination against women and queer people. A historical analysis of rock and

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<sup>1</sup> See Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing glam rock: Gender and theatricality in popular music*. University of Michigan Press, 195.

roll reveals that the modern music industry still perpetuates rock culture. This includes the role of the artist, music releases, business, and music production; all of which are affected by the patriarchy.

The patriarchal set of norms that the United States has adopted directly impacts the resources, opportunities, and expectations of women. Patriarchal hegemony refers to the longstanding dominance of men, whereas women are disenfranchised from opportunities, resources, and, in this case, creative outlets. Teresa L. Ebert explains: “Patriarchy is the organization and division of all practices and significations in culture in terms of gender and the privileging of one gender over the other, giving males control over female sexuality, fertility, and labor. While seemingly universal, the structure of patriarchy at any given moment is always historically determined since it is formed in conjunction with a specific social formation and its dominating mode of production.”<sup>2</sup> The rock and roll industry is a capitalist system, and capitalism in combination with social norms, places women in the subordinate position. Men gained control of the industry upon arrival, and its historical determination contributes to the modern implications. Men were assumed to be music producers, managers, sound engineers, and most poignantly, performers. Mary Kearney simplifies this in application to rock and roll: “Despite feminist arguments that rock culture is dominated by patriarchal ideology (the belief that males are superior to females and thus should have the most power), relatively few analyses of gender and rock have moved beyond women and femininity to interrogate patriarchy and its effects in rock culture,”<sup>3</sup>. This paper further attempts to interrupt the patriarchal narrative of rock and roll in exploring its lasting effects in rock culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Teresa L. Ebert, T. L. (1988). The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory. *Cultural Critique*, 10, 19–57.

<sup>3</sup> Kearney, M. C. (2017). *Gender and rock*. Oxford University Press, xix.

Hegemonic patriarchy hinges on the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony stems from Gramsci's *Prison Notebook*, centered around winning and maintaining power in social groups. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the subordination of women over men in social and cultural practice<sup>4</sup>, while also legitimizing the dominance of the patriarchy. This can be simplified to analyze cultural control. This term was coined by sociologist Raewyn Connell which has been applied in contemporary struggles of power and political leadership<sup>5</sup>. It is important to note that the power of hegemonic masculinity comes from practice. The patriarchy has gained, and maintained such power because it has been legitimized through perpetuation and repetition of female subordination to men. Hegemonic masculinity is an applied term in multiple fields, most prominently political and social practice. However, when analyzing the function of hegemonic masculinity, the personal becomes political.

Yuchen Yang argues that hegemonic masculinity is responsive to the conditions in the patriarchy, making it an ever-changing field<sup>6</sup>. This modern scope of hegemonic masculinity is affected by the onset of gender relationality. For this reason, the term hegemonic patriarchy will refer to the gender dynamics in the rock and roll industry, as the strength of the patriarchy stems from a static historical precedent.

With rock music, one cannot give an accurate representation of the genre without evaluating multiple factors, including those outside of music. The culture behind the music is equally as important. Most prominently, the culture surrounding rock and roll is what has left a legacy in modern music. Rock and roll is foundational to the modern music industry, and much

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<sup>4</sup> Scott, J., & Marshall, G. (2009). *A Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford University Press, USA.

<sup>5</sup> Connell, R.W. (2005[1995]) *Masculinities 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*

<sup>6</sup> Yuchen Yang. (n.d.). What's Hegemonic about Hegemonic Masculinity? Legitimation and Beyond. *Sociological Theory*, 38(4), 318-333.

of its legacy continues to reverberate throughout music. This includes the continued gender-based discrimination that occurs in the modern music scene.

### **III. American Rock Revolution Amidst the Counterculture (1960s - 1970s)**

In America, the beginning of rock aligned with the birth of American counterculture in the 1960s. The British Invasion brought rock music to America, encouraging the birth of a postwar rebellion. Understanding this historical backdrop is crucial for analyzing how patriarchal theories have shaped the genre's evolution and gender dynamics. Much of rock was inspired by Blues and R&B – which were predominantly Black genres. These large contributors remain under-recognized as white men, such as Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and others swiftly came to dominate the rock scene. From here, the white patriarchal ideal became the foundation for rock music, and its legacy remains the precedent for modern music.

Conservatism hinging at the end of the 1950s, the rise of the counterculture movement was a stark contrast to the previous cultural conformity that consumed America. Women were encouraged to fulfill the role of maintaining domestic peace, while men were responsible for working and generating income. The rise of the Baby Boomer generation curated the perfect audience for rock and roll to succeed. The combination of the Baby Boom with rock and roll created a rebellion against conservatism that was forced on American youth. In 1964, 40 percent of Americans were under the age of twenty<sup>7</sup>. Around the same time, The Beatles made it big, forging a path for musical stardom. The Beatles are largely credited for the spark that set rock and roll ablaze across the world. The development of rock and roll was effective because it came at an impressionable time for America. The effects of the Cold War, civil rights movement, and

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<sup>7</sup> Kearney, M. C. (2017). *Gender and rock*. Oxford University Press, 48.

distribution of psychedelic drugs formed a unique cocktail of culture. All while the second wave of feminism spread a women's equality rhetoric. Specifically, young, politically charged progressives raised on conservative family values were the optimal population for rock to develop. Such values include religious pressure, American tradition, nuclear families, and defined gender roles.

Music quickly became a vehicle for a casual cultural rebellion in the postwar era. Against this backdrop of cultural rebellion, the contributions of women and minorities to rock and roll present a complex narrative of both marginalization and resistance. "In particular, many white teens used black music, especially R&B and doo-wop, as a symbol of resistance and a mechanism for liberation from their parents' repressive lifestyles,"<sup>8</sup>. Young people were caught in the center of a major social divide, in which they could upheave the roots of conservatism that plagued their adolescence. Hippie culture was the gateway to rebellion. Music was an outlet for this passive rebellion, which is why rock and roll resonated with the Baby Boomer generation.

There is a common misconception when American counterculture is analyzed: the hippies, despite their alternative lifestyle, were not progressives. Despite its revolutionary veneer, the counterculture movement did not escape the pervasive influence of patriarchy, which continued to shape the music industry and societal norms alike. The patriarchy still maintained a firm grip on the reality of female livelihood. Paul Willis writes: "The attitude to women in the culture war was far from progressive. They had a place which was certainly different from, and usually inferior to, men...Generally, the hippies distrusted the women's movement, and

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<sup>8</sup> Kearney, M. C. (2017). *Gender and rock*. Oxford University Press, 49.

contrasted its ideals with their notions of the natural female and her organic role”<sup>9</sup>. This generalization extends an opposition to the women’s movement. There were lapses in a patriarchal counterculture movement, but generally, the culture war was preoccupied with other issues. The women’s movement just wasn’t a pressing matter.

The hippie appearance, however, was a vivid and apparent rebellion in American counterculture. Hippies broke away from the reliance on heteronormativity on an appearance basis. The alternative hippie look sparked the eventual rise of androgynous fashion. This free-flowing appearance did not aid the women’s movement. Robert McRuer explains: “...despite the abstract rhetoric of love and sexual freedom that dominated the movement, the privileging of masculinity through an emphasis on ‘groovy’ heterosexual performance meant that the counterculture was often homophobic as well as sexist,”<sup>10</sup>. Although there was young rebellion happening on the surface, androgynous appearance didn’t hinder the lasting effects of patriarchal expectation.

The ambivalence that hippie culture maintained towards women translated to the stage. Auslander writes: “During the 1960s, the number of prominent rock performers who were female or of color was observably very small, and no rock performer publicly claimed a homosexual identity,”<sup>11</sup>. The rise of rock music became so deeply removed from its roots in R&B, Blues, and Rockabilly, which, as aforementioned, were primarily black genres. Rather, music culture

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<sup>9</sup> Willis, Paul E. *Profane Culture*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978. See Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 30.

<sup>10</sup> McRuer, Robert. See Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press 30-31.

<sup>11</sup> Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing glam rock: Gender and theatricality in popular music*. University of Michigan Press 31

slipped into the hands of men seamlessly, because of the patriarchy. Music was accessible to men, and due to the reliance and comfort within the patriarchal values, the stage became a suitable outlet for white men.

In a 1977 Interview<sup>12</sup> with Lindsey Buckingham, Stevie Nicks, and Christine McVie, members of the seminal rock band Fleetwood Mac, the male interviewer questioned:

“It must’ve been one of the first bands to incorporate ladies and use them as such. Any problems as far as credibility of ladies in rock and roll when the band first hit the road with the girls?”

Christine McVie replies: “Uh, well I’d already been in the band for a good while, as a lady. And as a musician you know, like I’ve been primarily a musician rather than a backup singer in any case. And then when Stevie joined the band, she was also a frontline singer and writer. And I think in that way, we were the innovators of that kind of thing because more or less to my knowledge, prior to us, girls would be in rock bands but be sort of backup singers and...”

The interviewer cuts in: “...pretty faces?”

Stevie jumps in. “Well, I think it comes down to the fact that Fleetwood Mac would not go on without Chris and me...”

The rise of the counterculture and rock and roll birthed an interesting emphasis on masculinity and the masculine sex appeal. The emergence of “cock rock,” a subgenre of the rock scene, embellished the sex appeal of male performers. Sociologist Simon Frith writes:

“Cock-rock performers are aggressive, boastful, constantly drawing audience attention to their prowess and control. Their bodies are on display ... lyrics are

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<sup>12</sup> McVie, Christine, Nicks, Stevie, Buckingham, Lindsey (n.d.). *1977 Interview* [Video]. Interview. Reelin' In the Years Archive.

assertive and arrogant, but the exact words are less significant than the vocal styles involved, the shrill shouting and screaming,”<sup>13</sup>.

Not only was cock rock influential in cementing the man’s place onstage, but it also depicts women as a sexual accessory to male success. Yet, even as rock and roll championed countercultural values, it mirrored broader societal patterns of gender and racial exclusion. Within the counterculture revolution, the idea of the woman as an accessory became popularized in mainstream music culture. The term “groupie” became synonymous with women involved in the music scene, as they were often viewed as sexual objects. Groupies were women who were assumed to be promiscuous and oftentimes, they were. However, groupie culture was more about the presence of femininity in rock. *Rolling Stone Magazine* published a cover story in 1969 entitled “Groupies and Other Girls” by Jerry Hopkins, John Burks, and Paul Nelson. The article introduces two different types of groupies: the girls that are friendly, and the girls that hang around bands for a promiscuous venture. One groupie, Sally, is quoted in the article: “In plastic terms — in sensual terms — where can you get more sensations? You get to ball, smoke dope, dress weird, be groovy, be around nothing but groovy people — all at once,”<sup>14</sup>.

Groupie culture set a strong precedent for women associated with the music industry. They were quickly assumed to be sexual objects whose presence embellished and uplifted the male rock star. This is representative of the bigger sexual liberation movement that was occurring within the counterculture revolution. Sexual liberation for women was swiftly co-opted by men, and groupies exemplify how sexual liberation became female objectification. Groupie culture was not easily accepted by most people, as female sexuality was rejected through

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<sup>13</sup> Frith, Simon. (2007). *Taking Popular Music Seriously*. Routledge.

<sup>14</sup> Hopkins, Jerry, Burks, John, Nelson, Paul, P. (1969, February 15). *The Groupies and Other Girls*. Rolling Stone.



traditional conservatism. Women were assumed to be the keepers of domestic bliss, and that function transferred to the rock and roll scene, regardless of unconventional lifestyle, drugs, and fame. Groupies were powerful for women in the scene. They represent the insertion of femininity into a male-dominated rock space. Yet, they were deemed no more than accessories, which in turn uplifted patriarchal hegemony.

The creation of Girls Together Outrageously, GTOs, was important for female representation, and specifically rock groupies. However, in the mainstream they didn't gain much of a following. GTOs were a "groupie group" composed of Miss Pamela (Pamela Des Barres), Miss Sparky (Linda Sue Parker), Miss Lucy, Miss Christine (Christine Frka), Miss Sandra (Sandra Leano), Miss Mercy and Miss Cynderella. They were arranged by rock pioneer Frank Zappa. The group only produced one record, *Permanent Damage*, which was released in 1969. Yet, their lack of success is accredited to their appearance. They weren't artists, merely accessories.

While the counterculture movement in rock history set the foundation for popular music, women were not viewed as active contributors to music. Many of the themes that were established within the 1960s-1970s remained consistent throughout the tenure of rock and roll. And the presence of women in music was dominated by men, which has since carried over to result in multi-generational gender discrimination.

#### **IV. Glam Rock and the Birth of Androgyny in Rock (1970s - 1980s)**

The counterculture rock movement opened the door for the limits of creative expression to be tested. The Baby Boomers had already withstood a social upheaval of conservative values, leaving an opportunity for glam rock to push the bounds further. Glam rock emerged as a

groundbreaking force, challenging entrenched gender norms through its flamboyant aesthetics and musical innovation.

Glam rock, emphasizing appearance and aesthetics alongside glitzy music and high-production shows, marks a distinctive movement within the rock industry. As a pivotal element of the music industry's narrative on gender fluidity, glam rock blurred the lines between masculine and feminine, offering artists a platform for androgynous expression. Similar to the counterculture movement, androgyny within glam rock still upholds the patriarchy.

Contrary to counterculture rock, glam rock incorporates different elements to embellish a performance, but also the artist. The lighting, onstage ambiance, outlandish hair and makeup, were all elements that redefined rock. Musicians were now artists, giving the audience a performance experience. The glitz gives way to androgyny in a way that rock music was afraid to do previously. Peter Auslander explains: "Gender identity was another front on which glam challenged psychedelic rock and the hippie counterculture, not only because glam offered a new, implicitly queer, image of masculinity in rock but also because it disputed the ideology of authenticity by positing gendered identities as constructed rather than natural,"<sup>15</sup>. Although glam rock birthed androgyny in the rock and roll sphere, it had a complex relationship with heteronormativity. This stylistic revolution not only transformed the sound and look of rock music but also acted as a catalyst for questioning and redefining gender identities.

Rock and roll, as a genre, has extended over multiple generations, resulting in a lot of evolution. With evolution comes a lot of contradictions and cultural shifts. For example, Glam Rock hinged as a type of rebellion against the counterculture. Auslander continues: "Socially,

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<sup>15</sup> Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 40.

glam represented a rejection of countercultural values, particularly with respect to sexual identity; musically, glam rock rejected many of the tendencies found in countercultural rock music,”<sup>16</sup>. Major glam rockers include David Bowie, Marc Bolan, and Lou Reed, all of whom claimed heterosexuality or bisexuality.

The epicenter of glam rock was in London, the heart of the United Kingdom. Glam gained some traction in the United States but not nearly as much as in the UK. To start, many of the record producers, record labels, broadcasters, and glam rock musicians were based in London. In the United States, heteronormativity and the patriarchy still gripped the minds of most Americans. Glam rock blurred gender lines and this was more widely accepted in the UK compared to the US. “It is clear that the idea of a cross-dressing rocker created a kind of anxiety in the United States it did not create in the United Kingdom,”<sup>17</sup> . Whereas androgyny was ever-present in glam rock, women did not necessarily maintain that same level of power. Women were still few and far between in rock music.

Suzi Quatro, however, introduced a new era of female masculinity in rock and roll. Before Quatro, glam rock was still male dominated despite a growth in androgynous fashion. “For all of glam rock’s play with unconventional gender performances, virtually all glam rock performers and producers were male. In these respects, glam rock was entirely in line with the conventions of rock music as a traditionally male-dominated cultural form”<sup>18</sup> explains Auslander. Quatro’s insertion into the glam scene represented female infiltration, where she

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<sup>16</sup> Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 50.

<sup>17</sup> (Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 48.

<sup>18</sup> (Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press 195.

offered a stark contradiction to what glam rock fans were accustomed to. In the heart of the 1970s glam rock scene, Quatro was widely recognized for dressing and performing in a masculine gender role. Female masculinity, especially on the stage, was not as widely accepted as men assuming an androgynous or more feminine role. Auslander continues:

Quatro took advantage of the upheaval into which glam had thrown rock's gender norms to produce performances that destabilize those norms as effectively as Bowie's, albeit using somewhat different tactics. At the same time, the mere fact of Quatro's being a woman means that analysis of her work must be framed in somewhat different terms than that of male musicians...Rock was a male-dominated cultural form...and male glam rockers used their normative gender position to launch unconventional gender performances. As a female rocker, Quatro was an anomaly to begin with<sup>19</sup>.

Glam rock's presence throughout the late seventies into the early eighties helped create a foundation for rock and roll. Rock and roll as a genre was still relatively new, however glam rockers were quickly idolized in the history of rock and roll. Many of which proceeded to have long, successful careers following the birth of glam as a sub-genre.

Glam Rock, rising in the 1970s and trailing into the 1980s, was quickly replaced by other musical fads. Pop stars such as Tina Turner, Madonna, Michael Jackson and more quickly assumed their place in the spotlight. In New York, men dominated the punk scene, as bands like The Sex Pistols, New York Dolls, and The Clash ripped through rock music, regurgitating a whole new sound. This familiar sound spurred an air of rebellion, which was foundational to the penultimate form of female rebellion in music: The Riot Grrrl Movement.

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<sup>19</sup> Auslander, P. (2006). *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press 196 – 197.

## V. The Rise of the Riot Grrrl (1990s - 2000s)

In its November 22nd, 1992, issue, Newsweek introduced the Riot Grrrls through the article 'Revolution Girl Style,' describing them as a groundbreaking feminist force tackling social issues like incest, child abuse, and harassment, marking a new era for the video-age generation”<sup>20</sup>. The media recognition of the Riot Grrrl Movement helped garner validity; what the grrrls were fighting for were very real issues resulting from the patriarchal hegemony that plagued American society. The grrrls were taking a stand, most of which combined the fundamental elements of rock and roll, the new sound of punk, and the shrill scream from a female frontwoman. Rock music and gender revolution reached its peak with the Riot Grrrls, using music as an asset for rebellion.

The Riot Grrrl Movement encapsulated multiple mediums for rebellion. This initial spotlight on the Riot Grrrls set the stage for a deeper exploration of how they utilized music and activism to confront and dismantle entrenched gender norms. The Grrrls published zines, speaking out against sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination against women. Bikini Kill, composed of Kathleen Hanna, Billy Karren, Kathi Wilcox, and Tobi Vail epitomized female rebellion. The group used female marginalization to fuel their music. They contradicted the female music precedent set before them; they were raw, profane, gritty, and politically fed-up. Sara Marcus quoted Bikini Kill’s Tobi Vail in her novel *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*:

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<sup>20</sup> *Revolution, Girl Style*. (2010, March 13). Newsweek.

Before Bikini Kill's final song, Tobi Vail, the band's drummer and sometime singer, stands at the front of the stage in a red dress, fishnets, and sunglasses, and speaks into the mic. 'I just wanted to say something about abortion becoming illegal,' she begins. 'To me, it says that not – not only do we live in a totally fucked-up patriarchal society run by white men and who don't represent our interests at all, but we live in a – in a – country' she's panting, trying to catch her breath or maybe not to cry – 'where those people don't care whether we live or die. And that's pretty scary...so, we're gonna play a new song for you, and we don't know how it goes...but it might work'<sup>21</sup>.

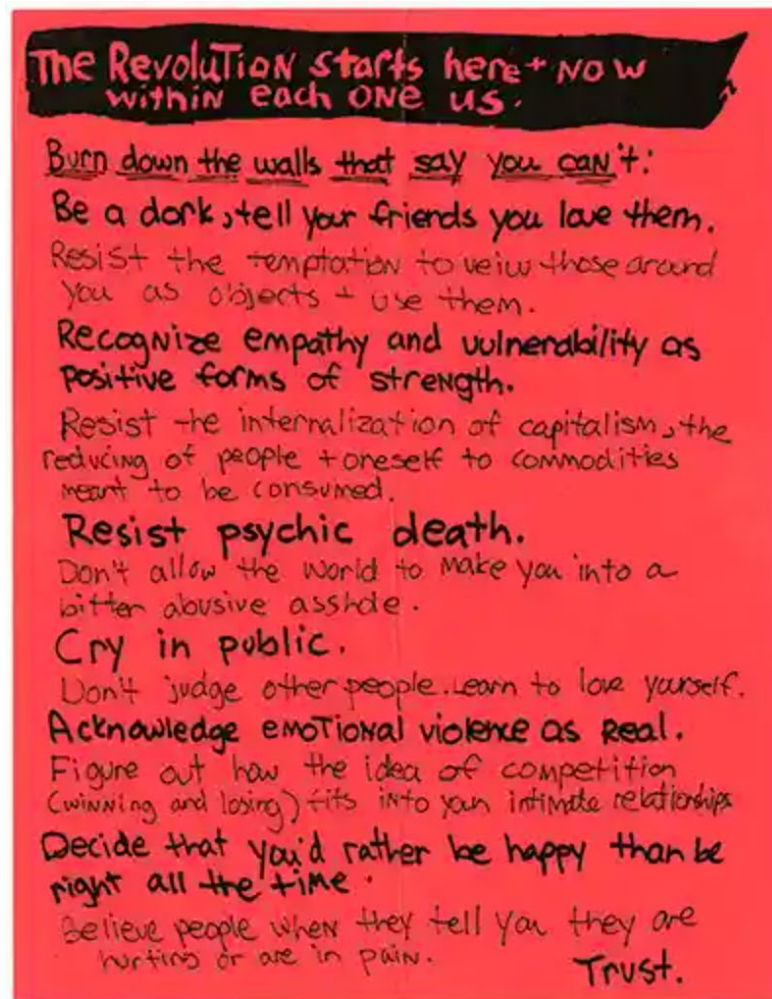


Figure 1: Flyer by Kathleen Hanna, the lead singer of Riot Grrrl band Bikini Kill to be distributed. Fales Library NYU / Feminist Press, New York, New York.

<sup>21</sup> Marcus, S. (2010). *Girls to the Front: The True story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*. HarperCollins. \_

For the Riot Grrrl Movement, Zines were a primary form of communication, a subcategory of magazines, which are often a self-published booklet that contains contents of varied subjects. Zines are largely a tool used for different subcultures and movements. The Riot Grrrl zines were used to confront sexism, aligning with the core of the movement. Zines are important because they gave women the opportunity to be creators within the revolution, not only through music but also through a greater rock creation. As seen in prior rock media, women were hardly represented, and when they were represented, it was inflammatory. Riot Grrrl Zines gave women the ability to control their representation.

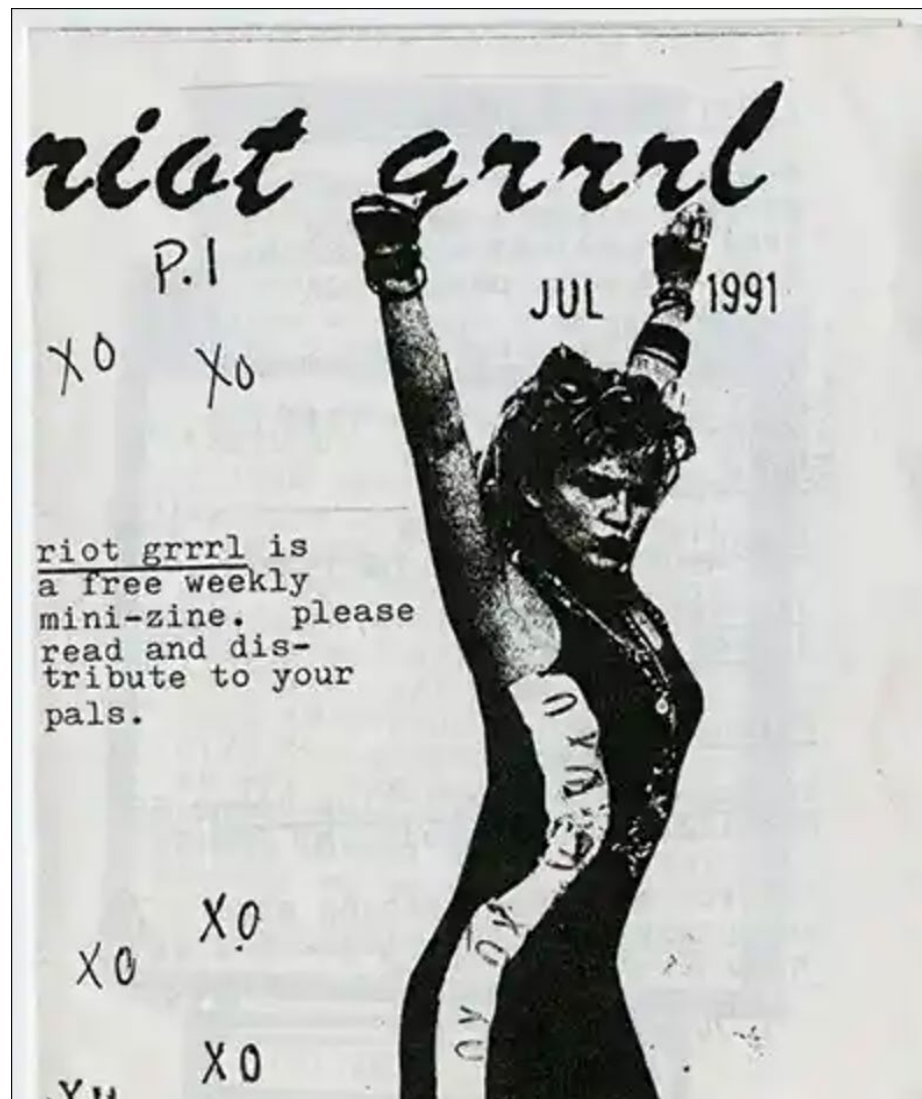


Figure 2: The first issue of Riot Grrrl, a zine created by Molly Neuman, and Allison Wolfe in July of 1991.

Central to its mission, the Riot Grrrl Movement radically transformed the portrayal of women in the music scene, challenging and expanding their roles beyond traditional stereotypes. The movement gestures to the previous objectification of women as motivation for charged music. Lyrically, the words of the woman shifted to be more demanding. The girls were demanding rights, equal opportunity, and a chance to replace men onstage. The instrumentation is hard, gritty, and out of character for female stereotypes. The revolution was designed to completely oppose any preconceived notion of the woman. The Riot Grrrl revolution birthed out of protest created a strong foundation for female performing artists to reclaim their space in the industry. A few years later in 1995, No Doubt, led by frontwoman Gwen Stefani, released their smash hit “Just a Girl”, symbolizing much more than female liberation. The song represented female liberation in mainstream popular music. Stefani quickly became a pop-rock icon, as her lyricism shocked the popular music precedent:

*Take this pink ribbon off my eyes  
I'm exposed and it's no big surprise  
Don't you think I know exactly where I stand?  
This world is forcing me to hold your hand  
'Cause I'm just a girl, oh, little old me  
Well, don't let me out of your sight  
Oh, I'm just a girl, all pretty and petite  
So don't let me have any rights  
Oh, I've had it up to here*

“Just A Girl” received a lot of critical acclaim from music critics regarding the prowess of Stefani’s vocals and lyricism. It surged in popularity, peaking at number 23 on the Billboard Hot 100 charts in 1995. More importantly, Stefani is perpetuating the same ideas of female struggle in the scope of patriarchal hegemony. The lyrics are evocative of feminine stereotypes



in terms of appearance and demeanor, and Stefani is starkly in protest. “Just A Girl,” amongst other tunes, represents the integration of female protest into mainstream music. Something which never hit the charts before “Just A Girl”. The Riot Grrrl Movement's mark on music and feminism paves the way for discussions about gender equality in the industry.

## **VI. The Modern Industry Woman (2000s - Present)**

In the modern music industry, women exist in an industry marked by both progress, and inequality. What has emerged from the tumultuous relationship between women and rock music has been an eerily familiar presentation of the modern women. The modern woman in music is conventionally attractive and embodies her femininity in a way that resembles girlhood and passivity.

The modern female success story in music is often leveraged by their image, style, and appearance. This results in the over-sexualization of women in the music industry. Wald continues: “...the recuperation of girlhood may not, in and of itself, be incompatible with the relentless eroticization of women’s bodies within corporate rock... in other words, that female rockers can play at being girls, and even mock the conventions of patriarchal girlhood, while remaining sexy and/or retaining the ‘charm of passivity’...”<sup>22</sup>. Girlhood and femininity are embellished by the music industry as a model for female success. Although this concept may seem like an opportunity for women to express themselves, it counters the pursuit for feminine equality. By putting women in music in a box and generating the same feminine image, no progress will be made.

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<sup>22</sup> Wald, Gayle. (1998). Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth. *Signs*, 23(3), 589.

In March 2022, results from a 10-year-long study conducted by Karla Hernandez, Dr. Stacy L, Smith & Dr. Katherine Pieper of USC Annenberg Initiative entitled “Inclusion in the Recording Studio?” showed that a woman’s place is still disproportionately represented in popular music.

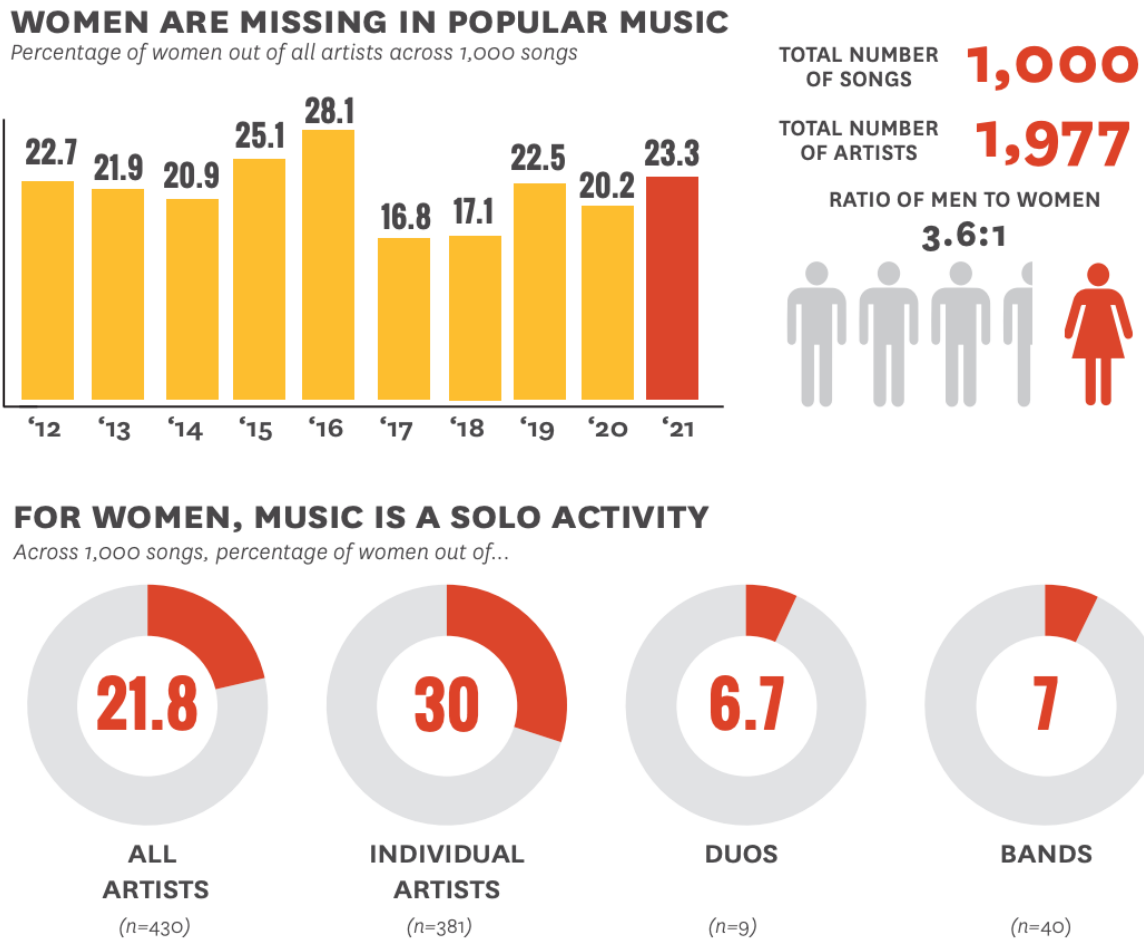


Figure 3: A breakdown of female representation in popular music from the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative study entitled *Inclusion in the Recording Studio: Gender and Race/Ethnicity of Artists, Songwriters, & Producers across 1,000 Popular Songs from 2012 – 2021* by Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Karla Hernandez, and Dr. Katherine Pieper.

Women remain outnumbered in the modern music industry, which is an indicator of the longevity of patriarchal hegemony. Across the ten-year period of evaluation (2012 - 2021),

78.2% of music artists were men, and only 21.8% were women. Further, only 10% of those artists were women from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups<sup>23</sup>.

Patriarchal hegemony thrives in capitalism. When business is booming, men maintain executive positions of power. In the rock industry, the dominance of men in business spaces has contributed to the lack of opportunities for women. “Capitalism - a profit- driven economic system - has worked alongside traditional gender politics to maintain men’s socio-economic dominance over women.”<sup>24</sup> As noted in the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative report, the ratio of women to men in executive business positions in the music industry is disproportionate. For music producers, the ratio is 38 men to one woman. That is only 2.6% of music producers. Kearney continues: “The rock business has a reputation for being both patriarchal and sexist, a kind of ‘boys club’ where women are often understood and treated as interlopers,”<sup>25</sup>. The unification of men at the top of capitalistic success in the industry further reinforced the marginalization of women. In terms of recognition, women are underrecognized for their efforts. From 2013 - 2021, 86.6% of Grammy Nominees were men, leaving 13.4% to be women. The lack of recognition women experience in the industry is accredited to two recurring ideas: women aren’t given opportunities, and when they are given opportunity, they are not recognized to the same extent as men.

Historically, when women have succeeded in gaining a spot in the rock equation, it is often met with male trepidation and a desire for control. Kearney writes: “Hence, there is a long

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<sup>23</sup> Smith, Dr. Stacy L., Hernandez, Karla, Pieper, Dr. Katherine. (2022). Inclusion in the Recording Studio: Gender and Race/Ethnicity of Artists, Songwriters, & Producers across 1,000 Popular Songs from 2012 - 2021. *USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative*.

<sup>24</sup> Kearney, M. C. (2017). *Gender and rock*. Oxford University Press 71.

<sup>25</sup> Kearney, M. C. (2017). *Gender and rock*. Oxford University Press 74.

history of male executives, producers, and managers attempting to exert control over women’s music, performance styles, and public images.<sup>26</sup>” Women and queer people have not had the opportunity to control their creative output, because there is often a man or patriarchal standard obscuring the power.

We Are Moving The Needle is a nonprofit organization founded by eight-time Grammy nominated mastering engineer Emily Lazar in response to the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative study on “Inclusion in the Recording Studio.” The organization featured a decorated list of women industry professionals, working to “create measurable change by empowering women in the recording and professional audio industry with the education, equipment and the mentorship needed to succeed at the highest levels.”<sup>27</sup> Their advisory board includes a decorated list of female industry professionals dedicated to providing opportunities for female growth in the industry. In 2024, We Are Moving The Needle hosted the inaugural Resonator Awards in Hollywood, California, to feature six trailblazing women in music: Alanis Morissette, Caroline Polacheck, Corinne Bailey Rae, Catherine Marks, Laura Sisk, and Jennifer Decilveo. During the ceremony, Polacheck gave a powerful speech regarding her experience as a woman in the industry:

When we finally got our first chance to be in the studio, that thing would happen. And it’s that thing that maybe some of the girls in the room have experienced. Where you ask for someone to turn something up, and the guy’s hand on the fader doesn’t do anything. Sooner enough I heard that music production wasn’t any easier than backseat driving,” said Polacheck. “This psychedelic thing happened where I learned I could be myself on set if the footage was going onto my computer. And not someone the label hired to not quite care enough. Because let’s be real: as an artist you care about the work in progress more than anyone is ever going to care because it doesn’t exist yet. And you’re also going to give it more time than any sane person would ever give it. So as much as that responsibility

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<sup>26</sup> Kearney, M. C. (2017). *Gender and rock*. Oxford University Press, 75.

<sup>27</sup> *About — We Are Moving the Needle*. (n.d.). We Are Moving The Needle.

sucks sometimes, it does come with a limitless potential to bring all these different components into one vision. And once you get a taste of that, your hand is not coming off that fader<sup>28</sup>.

The achievements of women in the music industry, while noteworthy, underscore the necessity to dismantle systemic barriers that persist, pointing toward a future where gender equality is not just aspirational but natural.

## VII. Let the Women Speak

*Claudia Santino - Frontwoman of GrrlBand, an all-female rock outfit based in Eugene Oregon*

As the vocalist of GrrlBand, an all-female, all-queer rock band from Eugene, Oregon, Claudia Santino navigates the challenges of a male-dominated rock scene. Although there is a lot more gender representation in modern music and creative industries, it is still an uphill battle for an all-female band to be taken seriously. “I am constantly having to balance the dichotomy of being taken seriously enough, and not taking myself too seriously, for fear of coming off too strong, too loud, any of those stereotypes given to women with voices,” said Santino. It’s difficult to balance a creative vision with a feminine identity in the music sphere. When Santino and her band experience success, it is often overshadowed by passive comments and negative energy originating from the male gaze. “Compliments that I receive, and that my band receives, are loaded and passive aggressive. A lot of times when I get compliments they are followed by the phrase ‘actually’. So, in the music scene, I have been approached by men that will say ‘That was actually really good!’”

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<sup>28</sup> Polachek, Caroline (2024, January 30). *Resonator Awards* [Video]. Interview.

Although the female experience in a male-dominated rock scene has not been easy for Santino and her bandmates, they continue to pursue music with the hope that they can make space for more women and nonbinary people to be prominent onstage. “We are girls doing music, and we are women that love doing music. That is what we care about, and we will push that into our environment to make other women and nonbinary people comfortable in male-dominated environments.”

### *Cara Merendino - Artist Manager*

With over a decade of experience in the rock music industry, Cara Merendino has carved out a significant role as an artist manager. Merendino has integrated herself into the music scene from a young age, and she accredits her passion to her tenure as a college radio DJ. USC’s Annenberg Inclusion Initiative concluded that the top executives at 70 leading music companies were 86% white men. Merendino spoke candidly about her experience as a woman in an executive position, working as a manager for Vector Management and managing artists such as Liz Cooper, The Nude Party, and many more. She currently is the primary manager for Liz Cooper, and she does daily management for Regina Spektor.

Merendino started as a receptionist at Vector Management, and from the beginning she was met with adversity on the basis of gender. Working as a receptionist is a dominantly female position, so this didn’t help her case. After five years of working with little momentum, Merendino became suspicious.

“I was told that I was still earning my keep at a place I had worked at for five years. I did not find that that was something that was told to my male colleagues. And then there was inherent pay discrimination,” said Merendino. Male ignorance was something that became a consistent issue and hindrance to Merendino’s daily life. She felt that she worked harder than her

male peers, yet she wasn't granted the same opportunities. "I feel like I have had to work three times as hard for half of the money and constantly try to prove myself in a way that my male peers don't have to do," she said. Rather, she was focused on her presentation. She couldn't look too feminine in fear that she would come across as weak, or inferior. Merendino worked multiple jobs to make ends meet.

With time, Merendino picked up clients to manage. She planned tours, managed digital marketing, and maintained the schedule. As a female manager, Merendino was not taken as seriously. She experienced gender-based discrimination from her clients and from other industry professionals working in the field. Common themes like emotions, appearance, and sexuality had to be tamed for Merendino, as she wanted to maintain professionalism. These traits are less heavily monitored for men. "My emotional concern and empathy has been a point of contention for companies I've worked for. I was told to not get emotional...a lot," said Merendino. "One time I asked for a raise, and they told me they needed to keep the lights on."

While out on tour, Merendino experienced external gender discrimination as the manager. What "Everyone would assume that I was the girlfriend, not the manager. People would ask me if I was the merch girl or the girlfriend, not the manager. It's like, there's no space for you, and then they're shocked."

Appearance was something that heavily affected Merendino's job performance. She constantly had to monitor her presentation to be taken seriously. "I had to dress down because I felt like people took me more seriously if I wore a black hoodie and looked like part of the crew," she explained. "Otherwise, people would think I was the girlfriend. I definitely noticed a difference in the way people talked to me if I dressed too feminine." Merendino rattled off countless gendered microaggressions, including appearance-based comments, sexual remarks,

and condescending language that belittled her status as a manager. Eventually, Merendino just became numb to gender discrimination.

However, one instance of harassment in the workplace eventually cost Merendino her job. After working with an emotionally abusive male peer, Merendino finally decided to report the abuse to her boss. Yet, despite her self-advocacy Merendino was fired under the guise of poor performance in the workplace. “When he fired me, he told me, ‘If you don’t want to be here, you should submit your resignation. And also, you should consider seeing somebody to talk to. Because for the last six months you’ve been here you’ve been a mess.’ That would never be said to a man.” Merendino, in shock, left the workplace and took her clients with her, costing the company a lot of assets. This was met with a lot of unnecessary ridicule, which, according to Merendino, wouldn’t have occurred with her male coworkers. “For the record, everything I’ve done is exactly what I’ve seen men do. I learned by watching. There was never any belief in me.”

The solution to the patriarchal hegemony in the industry is to allow women the chance to insert themselves. Whether it be in industry executive and operative positions, or onstage. “I think it’s important for women to support women in the music business because we are few and far between,” said Merendino.

Finally, in a response to Wenner’s statements, Merendino said, “I don’t think it is because women haven’t been articulate; I think women haven’t been given platforms to be articulate, nor have they been historically treated as subjects worth interviewing or being subjects for so long... I think Jann Wenner is a piece of shit for that, but it makes sense.” Merendino believes that opening opportunities for women to vocalize their intelligence in the music industry will create a more prosperous future.



*Elizabeth Bailey - Live Music Audio Engineer, Recording Technician, Producer, and Musician*

Elizabeth Bailey is a multi-talented woman who has immersed herself in the scene.

Bailey is a jack of all trades - aside from being the drummer of Bowl Peace, a dream pop band from Eugene, Oregon, she has devoted herself to audio production, an industry that is starkly male dominated. As of January 2024, 92% of audio engineers were men, leaving the remaining 7% to the girls.

“Obviously my gender and the way I’m perceived impacts everything that I’ve ever experienced,” said Bailey. Living in Eugene, Oregon and starting a career in a male-dominated space is a difficult task. “It’s hard to let go of the pressure of like *oh, I’m representing women right now*. When things go wrong, it’s a big deal.”

As with any male-dominated industry, there is a lot of groundwork that needs to be done. Bailey described hours of educating herself, so she is well-equipped to be an asset in the industry. “I’ve done a lot of work on my reputation,” said Bailey. “The secret is to literally act like a man. I’m very ready to be snarky.” Bailey is unique because of her self-assured assertion into the audio space. This has proven to be successful for her, as she has forged many connections to build the foundation of her career.

Much of the security that comes with the audio space Bailey occupies is within the people she works with. “I’ve been fortunate enough to be pretty picky with the people I work with and surround myself with,” said Bailey. Interestingly enough, her sexual orientation, and the way she presents herself, definitely has an influence on the way men treat her. “Also, I’m gay in a way where men don’t treat me in the way they treat other women to be honest. I’ve always just kind of been able to be ‘one of the guys’ in ways that have served me well in the male-dominated industries I’ve associated myself with.” Bailey describes a more passive blending into

the audio world that has been created. Much of this comes from learning the system, and consciously assimilating in a way that doesn't hinder Bailey's gender identity. "It's hard to put yourself in the position of being a sound engineer. It can be exhausting, because you have to go against the womanly training." For the future, Bailey preaches that equal opportunity for women to pursue an audio-oriented education is a way the music industry can become more feminized.

*Emma Caudill - Audio Engineer at the Rye Room in Portland, Oregon*

Emma Caudill is a recent graduate of the University of Oregon, studying Audio Engineering and Music Production. Throughout her educational career, and into her early professional career, Caudill has experienced gender-based discrimination in a few different environments. Most poignantly, throughout her education, she believed that misogyny was being perpetuated in music higher education.

Caudill received a lot of positive reinforcement from management working for the University of Oregon, which later allowed her to pursue her first professional job as a Recording Engineer in Portland, Oregon. However, what stood out most was the repeated microaggressions from men that inhibited her education. "The amount of horrid men in the music industry specifically is astronomical," said Caudill. This includes man-splaining, appearance-based comments, and condescending remarks about her knowledge, to name a few. Women are viewed as accessories in the industry, which is something Caudill has become aware of. "A lot of male producers and men say that you have to be sexual to get anywhere in the industry," she said.

"I have a pretty gender suggestive name, and I try to present as gender neutral on paper as I can, but I have definitely seen a difference in treatment because of that," said Caudill. Aside from experiencing patriarchal pressure in the industry, Caudill explained that her appearance directly affected the way people treated her. "I have half pink half blue hair. I do my makeup in a

certain way,” explained Emma. “People don’t assume that I am an engineer.” It’s easy for women and queer people to feel out of place, which is a serious issue.

“There needs to be something similar to Title IX for the music industry...women and queer people in the music industry need people to talk to,” said Caudill. Title IX is the landmark federal law banning discrimination on the basis of gender enacted within the Education Amendments of 1972. Many institutions, including the University of Oregon, use Title IX investigations to mitigate gender-based discrimination.

In addition to a Title IX figure in the industry, Caudill believes that making education a more equitable space for women and queer people is the key to a healthier music future. Gender-based discrimination in education calls upon the need for more accessibility for women and queer people.

## **VIII Conclusion**

Crucially, the expanding representation of women and marginalized communities in modern music signals a promising shift toward inclusivity and diversity. The 2024 Grammy Awards saw women win every competitive televised category, marking a historic moment for gender equality in music. Best Rock Album was awarded to Paramore, with Hayley Williams as frontwoman. The Best Alternative Album was given to boygenius, an all-queer, all-female rock outfit.

Wenner's outdated views on rock and roll mirror the broader industry's struggle with gender disparity, serving as a microcosm of the pervasive challenges women face. In the fallout of Wenner’s 2023 interview with the New York Times, he was removed from the board of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Foundation, an organization which he helped found. It is important to

note that only 7.7 percent of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame are women. From the stage to the office, women in the industry experience greater adversity to garner respect from patriarchal foundations.

“To see progress in one of these areas is encouraging, but there is much more to do to ensure that women behind the scenes in music have access and opportunity to the highest level of songwriting and producing,” explained Dr. Smith of the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. The solution to the gender problem is simple: there needs to be concerted effort from the industry, and from aspiring women in music, to pursue positions of power.

Women and queer people deserve the right to creative liberty, opportunity, performance, and the art that music encapsulates, without the persistence of patriarchal hegemony. There needs to be improvements in educating marginalized identities, allowing for more representation in the industry. Women and queer people deserve a space to contribute to an industry that they have been written out of. They deserve to be viewed as intellectuals, and their creativity needs to be embraced to offset the patriarchal precedent. For the future to improve, there needs to be conscious and deliberate interruption of the patriarchal precedent. I hope this is articulate enough.

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