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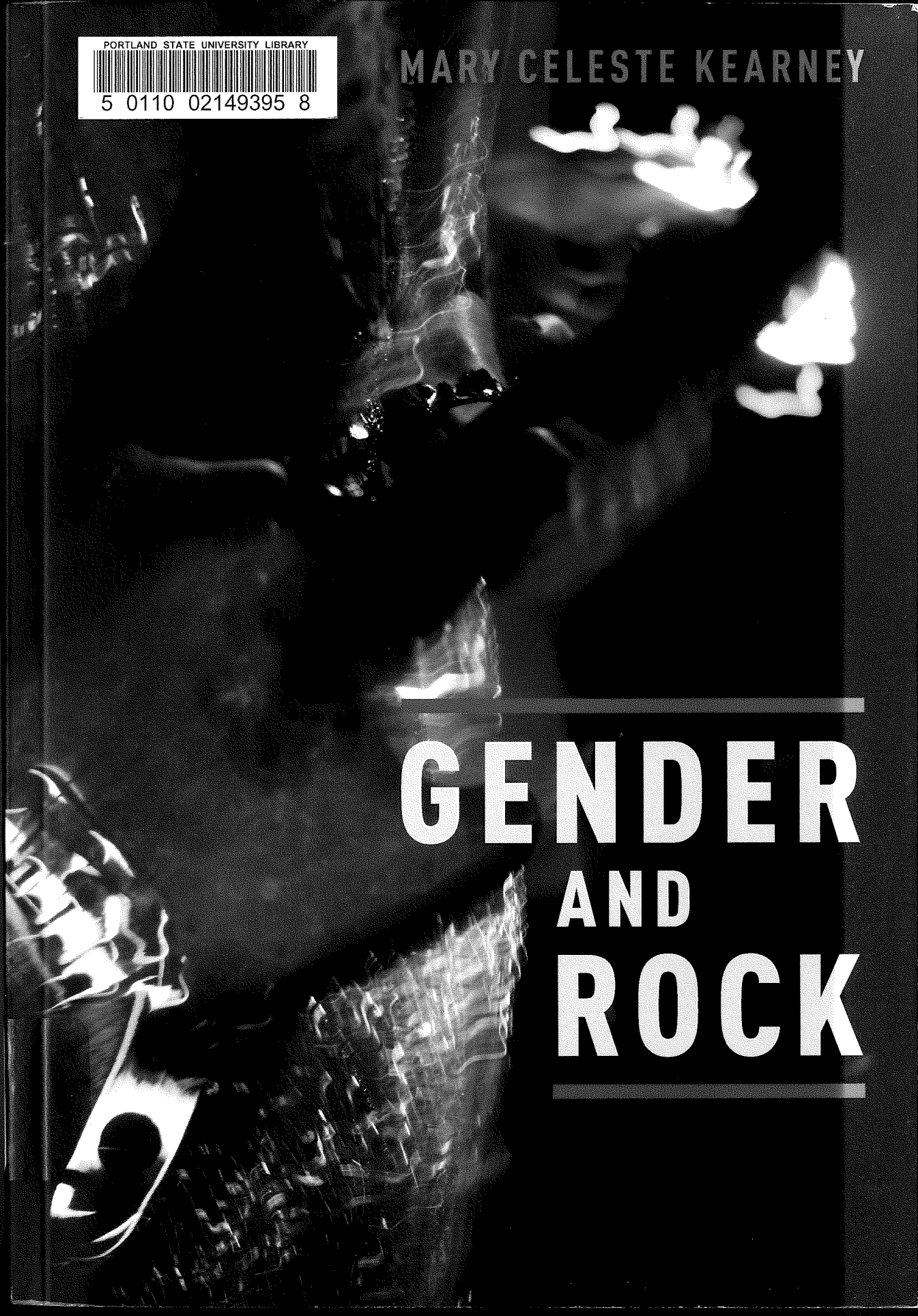

GENDER AND ROCK

to expose the processes of ideological hegemony at work in written texts so that they can be overturned. Feminist scholars using this approach have been interested in determining how particular words communicate and reproduce patriarchal values. Feminists use the term **phallocentric** to describe a perspective that is patriarchal (focused on the phallus/power) and thus dismissive of women's issues and interests. **Phallogocentrism** is an author's privileging of a male-centered perspective in writing via choice of words, themes, and structure.

To reclaim and value femininity in literature, some feminist scholars have focused on literary works that privilege a woman-centered outlook, what Hélène Cixous calls ***écriture féminine***. According to Cixous, *écriture féminine* works to disrupt phallogocentric writing by privileging not only women and femininity but also nonlinear, cyclical discourse. Yet, like cultural feminism, this approach has been critiqued by some for its gender essentialism, denial of women's diversity, and reliance on binary thinking.

For queer scholars, demonstrating the heterocentric ideology of authors and the written works they produce has been an important intervention in the larger process of eliminating homophobia. In turn, such researchers have analyzed writing that privileges a queer perspective to better understand how such an identity is communicated, particularly in the face of homophobic oppression. Similar processes of examining dominant ideology and reclaiming marginal perspectives in literary works have happened among scholars of color, non-Western scholars, poor scholars, and disabled scholars.

Discourse Analysis

Another approach commonly used in literary studies is **discourse analysis**. **Discourses** are the conceptual frameworks that human beings use to organize experience and to construct meanings. The term discourse is commonly used with regard to spoken or written language. However, in discourse analysis, scholars also study other communicative forms, such as images and sounds. Michel Foucault linked discourse to systems of power and knowledge developed in particular social institutions. Therefore, scholars who use discourse analysis are concerned with the assumptions behind the particular construction and uses of discourse, as well as how those assumptions contribute to people's meaning-making processes, understandings of reality, and thus engagement with other people.

Many contemporary feminist literary scholars see discourse analysis as a useful way to uncover how particular concepts related to gender have developed and been circulated in written works, such as song lyrics. Some of these researchers have explored the way discourses of gender can reproduce social inequality and disenfranchisement and have given considerable attention to those discourses influenced by patriarchy, such as the sex/gender system. Their findings reveal that the discursive construction of men in popular culture has consistently suggested their physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional superiority.

In contrast, patriarchal discourses have historically constructed women and femininity as inferior. In attempting to subvert the negative effects of patriarchal discourses, cultural feminists have put a positive spin on such feminine traits as relationality and nurturance.

More recently, feminist and queer researchers have been interested in the fluidity of gender discourse and thus the instability of patriarchy as an ideological institution. Judith Butler's work has been quite significant in this regard since, by highlighting the discursive construction of both gender and sex, she has pointed to ways the sex/gender system can be deconstructed. Butler's theories have been readily taken up by popular music scholars interested in how gender is represented in rock lyrics.

Studying Gender in Rock Lyrics

Although some rock lyrics do not deal with gendered themes, many reveal considerable engagement with discourses of gender, particularly in their representations of men and women. The following sections explore some of the ways rock songwriters have formulated gendered discourse, and how such language affirms, complicates, or challenges dominant gender politics. It is important to remember, however, that the meaning of lyrics is never established by the songwriter alone. Listeners always bring their own interpretations to songs and decode them according to their own experiences and values.

Phallogocentric Lyrics

Men and masculinity figure strongly in many rock lyrics for the simple reason that many writers of rock songs self-identify as men and write from their own perspective or that of other male figures, often with a male audience in mind. Yet not all rock lyrics by men and about men contain the same representation of manhood. Because of rock culture's rebellious spirit and cultural lineage, rock lyrics have long presented portrayals of male subjectivity that do not adhere to the middle-class ideal of the responsible, career-minded, family-loving father. Nevertheless, many rock lyrics construct alternate versions of masculinity that are problematic in their affirmations of heterosexuality and power, particularly in relation to women, and thus are in alignment with both patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. (Feminist songwriters have written about such constructions of masculinity also, but primarily from a woman's perspective.)

Some feminist scholars have theorized that the prevalence of patriarchal machismo in rock lyrics is the result of male songwriters' expression of their personal experiences as well as the dominance of patriarchal ideology. Yet other scholars have argued that phallogocentric lyrics are less expressions of men's actual experiences than forms of gender performance. Robert Walser, for example, encourages us to think of such lyrics as negotiating manhood in

a patriarchal heterocentric society that offers little room for alternative masculinities. Moreover, he argues that we might see phallogocentric lyrics as a form of a male writer's self-defense against a threatened masculinity. In other words, by writing (and singing) about men's power, male rockers can perform control and superiority that they (and their fans) may not actually experience in everyday life. Such feelings of masculinity in crisis are interesting to consider in relation to the broader sociocultural context, where feminist ideologies have become increasingly popular and women have become more publicly visible and achieved more power than previously.

Interestingly, paternity—a dominant method for constructing male power in everyday life as well as creative texts—is strikingly absent from most male-authored rock lyrics, likely because many male rock musicians are young and reject domesticity and the roles associated with it. Indeed, plenty of rock lyrics written by men, including Nirvana's "Breed" (1992), have suggested an anti-paternalist stance by rebelling against the romantic notion of love as well as middle-class adulthood.

Men's Sexual Power

One of the primary ways in which male songwriters construct men's superiority in rock lyrics is through references to men's sexual power, especially over women. (In contrast, women lyricists have more often constructed men's subjectivity via romance.) The history of rock is filled with assertions of men's sexual virility, particularly those referencing phallic power. This musical trend has roots in the blues, a form of popular music historically used to express sexual feelings and fantasies, particularly through connotation and metaphor. Bo Diddley's "I'm a Man" (1955), an R&B precursor to this lyrical trend in rock, explicitly associates the male narrator's manhood and power with his sexual organ: "Now when I was a little boy / At the age of five / I had something in my pocket / Keep a lot of folks alive / Now I'm a man / Made twenty-one / You know baby/ We can have a lot of fun." As Jason Lee Oakes notes, this song's essentialized, authentic construction of heterosexual masculinity is linked to blackness, a trope that can be found across many rock styles, particularly those that privilege a blues sound.

One of the first male-authored rock songs to receive critical attention for its construction of men's power as sexual is Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love" (1969), which is based on Willie Dixon's "You Need Love" (1962). In the Zeppelin version, the line "I'm gonna give ya every inch of my love" denotatively signifies the length of the narrator's penis while also connotatively suggesting his sexual virility. Moreover, through the rhetorical strategy of **metonymy**, wherein a part comes to stand for the whole, the narrator's "whole lotta love" is meant to suggest his power in general.

Men's Technical Power

Another prevalent way in which men's power has been constructed in male-authored rock lyrics is through the metaphoric connection of men with technology. In such lyrics technology is rendered masculine and thus helps to construct the men in the song's narrative as manly. For example, in Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run" (1975)—an homage to downtrodden, working-class youth—young men are represented as empowered through their connection with automobiles: "Sprung from cages out on Highway 9 / Chrome-wheeled, fuel-injected and stepping out over the line." The lines "just wrap your legs round these velvet rims / and strap your hands cross my engines," which the narrator addresses to his girlfriend, take the metaphoric connection of men's power and machine power one step further through sexual innuendo.

Springsteen's technology-laden lyrical themes borrow much from Steppenwolf's heavy metal anthem "Born to be Wild" (1968): "Get your motor runnin' / Head out on the highway / Lookin' for adventure / And whatever comes our way." By associating men's technological power with mobility, such lyrics also project an antidomestic perspective that is in keeping with rock's privileged ideologies. Much like AC/DC's "Heatseeker" (1988), the Jesus and Mary Chain's "The Living End" (1985) heightens the narcissism of this technomobile masculinity: "I get ahead on my motorbike / I feel so quick in my leather boots / My mood is black when my jacket's on / And I'm in love with myself."

Men's Opposition to Women

Many feminist critics have drawn attention to male rock songwriters' negative portrayals of women as a means of affirming men's superiority. Such lyrics are in keeping with patriarchal ideology's dualistic perspective, since they present the two genders via opposition, with femininity subordinate to masculinity. While songs of this type reaffirm hegemonic masculinity, of particular concern to feminists have been male-authored lyrics that are **misogynist**, revealing a hatred of women through their representation as dangerous, objectified, or abused.

The one rock song to have received the greatest amount of attention from feminists as a result of its misogyny is the Rolling Stones' "Under My Thumb" (1966). Here the narrator comments on his new-found control over his girlfriend, who has strayed and hurt him. The lyrics repeatedly note his control ("it's down to me / . . . she's under my thumb") and her passive objectification as a result ("the way she does what she's told / . . . she's the sweetest pet in the world"). Other rock performers and bands of the 1960s, including John's Children, the Trees, and the Litter, similarly presented women as passive, dumb objects to be used, and abused, by men. Such themes became prevalent in hard rock during

the 1970s, as women musicians and fans were pushed further to the margins of rock culture.

The trend of misogynist rock lyrics continued well past the 1970s, however. For example, in Lisa Sloat's analysis of male-authored lyrics for heavy metal bands of the 1980s and early 1990s, she noted three dominant ways women are portrayed, all of which suggest men's power through women's subordination: (1) women are represented as sex toys to be used for male sexual pleasure (e.g., Jackyl's "She Love My Cock" [1992]); (2) women are constructed as dangerous and in need of men's control (e.g., Black 'n Blue's "Wicked Witch" (1984)]); and (3) women are portrayed as victims of men's abuse (e.g., Faster Pussycat's "Where There's a Whip, There's a Way" [1989]). Although many early male punk bands excluded any mention of women from their lyrics as a result of punk's antiromantic ideology, several wrote songs with misogynist lyrics, including the Stranglers' "Ugly" (1977), which involves the strangling of a female lover because she has acne.

Sloat and other feminist scholars have attributed women's negative representation in male-centered rock lyrics to male songwriters' negative experiences with women, the dominance of patriarchal ideology, and the prevalence of misogyny. However, Walser encourages us to consider also how these themes may be indicative of men's compromised power, particularly after the rebirth of feminism in the 1960s. Moreover, while whiteness, patriarchy, and heterosexuality continue to be the dominant ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality in Western societies, many poor young straight men have nonetheless felt disenfranchised as a result of their marginalized class and generational status. Indeed, as a result of the achievements of people of color, women, and members of the LGBTQI community over the past few decades, rock has become a primary cultural site for young white straight men's negotiation of their frustration with the loss of power experienced by their specific demographic group.

Men have not been alone in constructing demeaning lyrical representations of women in rock songs, however. Several women songwriters have done this also. For example, "He Hit Me (and It Felt Like a Kiss" (1962), cowritten by Carole King, has received considerable criticism for suggesting partner abuse as an expression of love. A decade and a half later, Fleetwood Mac's "Gold Dust Woman" (1977), penned by Stevie Nicks, tells the tale of a heartless, drug-addicted woman who preys on a man's affections only to leave him broken and disheartened. Thus, just as we should be mindful that some male lyricists have written both misogynist and women-affirming lyrics, we should be careful not to assume that all female songwriters are necessarily celebratory of women.

Male Aggression and Violence

In hard rock styles, such as punk and heavy metal, aggression and violence are common themes that male songwriters have used to assert, or at least

fantasize about, men's control and power. As noted, many feminists have decried male-authored rock lyrics' representation of women as victims of male abuse in such songs as "Where There's a Whip, There's a Way." Yet numerous rock songs construct men also as victims of male aggression. For example, in Mötley Crüe's "Bastard" (1983), the narrator fantasizes about killing "the king of sleaze" with both a knife and a rope. Often such themes of aggression in rock lyrics are connected to a working-class male subjectivity, as in Thin Lizzy's "The Boys Are Back in Town" (1976): "Guess who just got back today? / Those wild-eyed boys that had been away / Friday night they'll be dressed to kill / . . . If the boys want to fight, you'd better let them."

Given its interests in rebellion, danger, horror, and the occult, heavy metal is the rock style that has most employed themes of male aggression and violence. Black Sabbath's "Iron Man" (1971), a classic heavy metal anthem, was one of the first rock songs to explore the theme of men's power through vengeance: "Now the time is here / For iron man to spread fear / Vengeance from the grave / Kills the people he once saved." Male punk bands have written their fair share of aggression-filled rock lyrics as well. The Sex Pistols' classic punk song "Anarchy in the UK" (1976) ends with the command "Get pissed / Destroy!" Similar to both "Iron Man" and the Stooges' "Search and Destroy" (1973), Big Black's "Kerosene" (1986) makes use of the theme of technologized masculinity to tell a tale of a desperate, isolated young man who seeks out destruction as a means for feeling empowered.

As "Iron Man" exemplifies, the themes of aggression and violence often take on a supernatural or otherworldly perspective in hard rock lyrics. Typically at the center of such lyrics is a male ruler-like figure, a dark lord perhaps first personified by Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones for "Sympathy for the Devil" (1968). As Reynolds and Press demonstrate, this persona has been referenced repeatedly in male-authored hard rock lyrics, including "Anarchy in the UK," which positions the narrator as the Antichrist. Less otherworldly but still dangerous is the sociopathic serial killer who populates such songs as Therapy's "Dancing with Manson" (1991): "The one thing I've looked for all my life / Is killing everything I ever want." Such aggressive and violent lyric themes likely have roots in rock's rebellious ethos. Yet, as Walser suggests, they also suggest songwriters' minimal opportunities for power in real life and thus their desire to construct such agency via fantasy.

Gynocentric Lyrics

Historically, **gynocentric** or women-centered lyrics have been marginalized in rock culture as a result of men's dominance of songwriting, particularly after the mid-1960s. In contrast, Charlotte Greig has noted the prevalence of women's issues in folk music, which has been more open than rock to women's perspectives. Nevertheless, numerous female lyricists have written rock lyrics, particularly during those eras when women musicians' presence has been

substantial. Such lyrics commonly construct a woman-centered perspective and often take a feminist perspective on gender relations, particularly since the 1980s.

Emphasized Femininity

The women lyricists writing during the "girl group" era of the early 1960s typically constructed girlhood in relation to patriarchal heteronormativity, thus situating young women as dependent on males for love and affirmation while reproducing notions of men's superiority. For example, Carole King's "One Fine Day" (1963) portrays its female narrator as desperately seeking a male's attention: "Though I know you're the / Kind of boy / Who only wants to run around / I'll keep waiting." Such lyrical constructions align with Connell's definition of emphasized femininity, which is always subordinate to and helps to reaffirm hegemonic masculinity.

Marriage has traditionally been avoided in rock lyrics due to rock culture's prevalent antidomestic ideology. However, some women songwriters have focused on this theme, particularly during the prefeminist girl group period. For example, "Chapel of Love" (1964), cowritten by Ellie Greenwich, presents marriage as a fairytale with birds singing, bells ringing, and loneliness abated. Yet the song does not construct the bride as dependent on her soon-to-be husband. Rather it presents them both as mutually dependent: "I'll be his and he'll be mine / We'll love until the end of time." Such lyrics suggest a desire for equality in heterosexual marriage that perhaps resulted from Greenwich's own desires as a career woman, not to mention feminist discourse's reemergence at that time.

Écriture Féminine and Gender Solidarity

Despite the presence of gynocentric lyrics in other popular music styles, such as folk, it was several decades after the women's liberation movement before female rock lyricists began to write more frequently about women's experiences that did not necessarily affirm patriarchal heterosexuality. Theodore Gracyk refers to this musical approach as **gender solidarity**, wherein women bond over a shared, essential gender identity to disrupt heteronormative patriarchy. This practice is closely aligned with *écriture feminine* and the ideology of cultural feminism. We might also think here of the **Bechdel Test**, developed by artist Alison Bechdel, which requires that a work of fiction involve at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man.

With the rise of more female and feminist rockers since the 1990s, consumers have been exposed to a variety of women's issues that had long been ignored in rock culture. For example, several female rock performers have authored songs about pregnancy and motherhood, including Chrissie Hynde, who

wrote "I'm a Mother" (1994) for the Pretenders. Both Toni Childs and Sinead O'Connor created concept albums devoted to the theme of motherhood—*The Woman's Boat* (1994) and *Universal Mother* (1994), respectively. Meanwhile, some women lyricists have raised the issue of abortion in their songs, as Ani DiFranco does in "Tiptoe" (1995). Yet the best-known rock song about abortion is likely the Sex Pistols' "Bodies" (1977), whose male-authored lyrics have been widely debated because of their confusing representations of abortion.

Since the 1990s female rock lyricists have also been writing more assertively and explicitly about women's sexuality. The Yeastie Girlz "You Suck" (1988) was one of the first songs to do this. The woman narrator refutes her male lover's many reasons for avoiding cunnilingus and demands: "Now you suck, suck it hard / Go down baby / You suck, suck it hard / And move your tongue around." Similarly, Liz Phair's hit "Flower" (1993) is quite explicit in its representation of a woman's sexual pleasures: "Every time I see your face / I get all wet between my legs." Nevertheless, as often happens when a woman asserts her desire publicly, Phair's lyrics—especially "I want to be your blowjob queen"—were misunderstood by many people as simply whorish and in the service of straight men.

Given the prevalence of male-on-female abuse in patriarchal societies, it is not surprising that this theme has been raised in women's rock lyrics also, although quite differently from how it appears in male-authored songs. Recent lyrics in this vein focus attention on the victims of such abuse, revealing the emotional and physical consequences for such women. L7's "Can I Run?" (1994), for example, deals with the general fear women face living in a society where male violence against females is often tolerated: "Is he under the bed; is he in the back street? / Can I run?" Tori Amos's a cappella song "Me and a Gun" (1992) also channels such fears while expressing her first-hand experience of being raped. 7 Year Bitch's "Icy Blue" (1994) challenges women everywhere to stand up to partner abuse: "Are you gonna let him, let him love you to death? / Are you gonna let him?" Bikini Kill's "Suck My Left One" (1991) similarly argues for fighting back against male abuse, yet this time the focus is on girls victimized by incestual rape: "My sister pulls the covers down / She reaches over, flicks on the light / She says to him / Suck my left one." Bikini Kill's song also addresses mothers' common complicity in incestual abuse, thus revealing the complicated gender dynamics of such experiences.

Few male bands have explored women's sexual objectification and harassment by men from a woman's perspective. However, Fugazi's "Suggestion" (1988) received considerable attention as a result of a male musician assuming the position of a victimized woman in the song: "Why can't I walk down a street free of suggestion? / Is my body the only trait in the eyes of men?" While some feminists have objected to MacKaye's writing and performance of "Suggestion,"

ultimately the narrator's point of view moves from first to third person, implicating everyone for the perpetuation of our rape culture: "He touches her 'cause he wants to feel it / We blame her for being there / But, we are all guilty." MacKaye's willingness to focus on this social issue was likely due to his own progressive values, as well as his friendships with and influence by young feminists in the punk and Riot Grrrl scenes.

Troubling Gender

While gynocentric lyricists have certainly undermined the phallogocentrism associated historically with rock, the practices of *écriture féminine* and gender solidarity have done little to upset the heteronormative patriarchal sex/gender system, since they reproduce the notion that men and women are opposites and that all women (and all men) share similar experiences. Nevertheless, some songwriters have challenged these traditional gender politics by questioning gender norms and broadening the range of gendered behaviors beyond the binary formulation of masculine/feminine. These strategies are musical examples of what Judith Butler calls **gender trouble** and Gracyk refers to as **gender transgression**.

Men's Vulnerability

Several male rock lyricists have problematized hegemonic masculinity by exploring forms of manhood that do not adhere to the macho sex gods and dark lords that populate many hard rock songs. This lyrical development has not necessarily replaced phallogocentric lyrics that privilege heteronormative masculinity, however. It has merely expanded the range of masculinities represented in rock songs.

For example, let's return to the lyrics of Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run" (1975). Despite the song's possible interpretation as validating men's superiority over women, the lyrics speak to the difficulties working-class young men face as a result of their socioeconomic status (particularly during the era of Reaganomics) and their limited options for escape. Indeed, the lines "Girls comb their hair in rearview mirrors / And the boys try to look so hard" speak directly to gender as performed and thus suggest the possibility of men failing at hegemonic masculinity. Taking a different stance on working-class masculinity, Gang of Four's "Not Great Men" (1979) draws attention to the absence of poor men from history while also asserting their essential role in society: "No weak men in the books at home / The strong men who have made the world."

While Bob Dylan is perhaps the first rocker to write explicitly about male vulnerability and thus to debunk the myth of male machismo (e.g., "It's Alright Ma [I'm Only Bleeding]" [1965]), it wasn't until the rise of punk that male vulnerability became a common theme in rock lyrics. Unlike heavy metal lyrics, which tend to depict men's hatred and aggression as directed toward others, many male-centered punk and postpunk songs focus on self-loathing, a quality more often associated with femininity. Joy Division's "Isolation" (1980) is prototypical in this regard: "I'm ashamed of the things I've been put through / I'm ashamed of the person I am." Black Flag's "Damaged I" (1981) follows suit: "Stupid feelings / Stupid illusions / I'm confused . . . / Scars for me to wear."

As Terri Sutton has noted, several male rock musicians of the 1990s, particularly those associated with alternative rock, put forth songs that pointed to male vulnerability, including Stone Temple Pilots' "Creep" (1992), Nirvana's "Rape Me" (1993), and Nine Inch Nail's "Hurt" (1993). While few of these songs contain social critiques on the subject, Pearl Jam's "Jeremy" (1991) suggests that the recent trend of American white boys turning on their schoolmates in violence is the result of family and peer abuse: "Daddy didn't give attention/ Oh, to the fact that mommy didn't care . . . / Clearly I remember picking on the boy / Seemed a harmless little fuck." Interestingly, the narrator, whose relationship to Jeremy is unclear, includes himself in the larger group of people who unwittingly "unleashed a lion."

Although male vulnerability was quite popular in 1990s rock culture, perhaps demonstrated best by the popularity of Beck's "Loser" (1994), Sutton argues that we should be suspicious of this lyrical parade of male victims. For while such songs suggest that men can be wounded and suffering, they typically deny patriarchal hegemony and thus do not acknowledge the abuse heaped on women as a result of misogyny. In other words, in failing to address the structural imbalances between men and women that leave the latter much more disenfranchised, such songs do little to subvert traditional gender politics.

Powerful Females

As a result of the dispersion of liberal feminist ideologies since the 1970s, female rock lyricists have increasingly represented powerful women outside heterosexual narratives. Helen Reddy's "I am Woman" (1972) is prototypical in this regard and quickly became a feminist anthem because of its assertion of female strength and invincibility. Since Reddy's hit, numerous contemporary feminist songwriters have written rock lyrics that present women as powerful figures. Ani DiFranco's "Not a Pretty Girl" (1995) made a significant impact when it was released, given its assertions of female strength, independence, and

self-respect: "I am not a pretty girl / That is not what I do / I ain't no damsel in distress / And I don't need to be rescued." Despite receiving less airplay than DiFranco's song, Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl" (1993) is a punk- and feminism-infused anthem to girl power: "When she talks / The revolution's coming / In her hips / There's revolution." These latter two songs take a defiant tone not found in the more popular "Just a Girl" from No Doubt (1995), whose lyrics focus less on women's power than their oppression under patriarchy.

Other female rock lyricists have similarly constructed songs objecting to the pressure they feel to conform to the traditional roles of wife and mother simply because they are women. Joan Jett's song "Spinster" (1994) is particularly potent in its rejection of these patriarchal heteronormative roles: "I'm no one's wife and I'm not your little girl / Don't tell me I'm useless 'cause I want more from this world." In striking contrast to rock's historical privileging of youthfulness, Jett proudly takes on the role of spinster in this song, reconfiguring and reclaiming it through the dual lenses of queerness and mature adulthood.

A common method for presenting women as powerful is to place them in a historically male-dominated position, often alongside masculine objects. In relation to music videos, Lisa Lewis labels this strategy **access,** since it reveals women's occupation of male roles, practices, and spaces historically off limits to them. L7's "Shirley" (1994) is a good example of lyrical access, or what Judith Halberstam would call **female masculinity**. The song is an homage to Shirley Muldowney, the first woman to receive a license from the National Hot Rod Association to drive a top fuel dragster and a three-time champion racer in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Pointing to the sexism that keeps most women out of male-dominated activities, the song includes an audio clip of a male sportscaster asking, "What's a beautiful girl like you doing racing in a place like this?" Shirley's curt response, "Winning," not only answers his question but points to the ludicrous assumptions embedded in it about appropriate female behavior and the limits of women's achievement.

Revealing Gender Construction and Fluidity

As a result of the wide dispersal of feminist and queer sensibilities over the past four decades, numerous rock lyricists have brought attention to the social construction of gender norms in their songs. Yet such themes were evident, albeit to a far lesser extent, in rock culture of the 1970s, a time of significant social transformation. Lou Reed's "Take a Walk on the Wild Side" (1972), an homage to some of the nonconformists associated with Andy Warhol, was one of the first (and few) rock songs to trouble gender performance outright by

drawing attention to transgender body politics: "Shaved her legs and then he was a she / She said, 'Hey Babe, take a walk on the wild side.'"

While Reed dabbled in transgender identity for only a brief period in the 1970s, Jayne County, a trans rocker associated with the early punk CBGB scene, has regularly focused on gender trouble in her songs. For example, in her cover of the Barbarians' "Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?" (1980), County sings: "In your bleach blonde hair / You look like a girl / Well, you may be a boy, but / Hey, you look like a girl." Her "Man Enough to Be a Woman" (1978) is more specific in its exploration of gender as a performance: "conditioned to portraying the mask of masculinity / Another blend of different shading / I am what I am / I don't give a damn." Such lyrics are all the more powerful when performed live as listeners are able to see the transgender body singing them.

Although not all gay men and lesbians fit the gender nonnormative stereotype (i.e., effeminate gay men and masculine lesbians), several gay and lesbian rock performers have taken up this theme, perhaps as a means of affirming their sexual identities. Sung by a then-closeted Elton John, "The Bitch Is Back" (1974) was one of the first rock songs in this vein and opened the door for similar themes in later songs, such as Skinjob's "Gender Bender" (2003), written by male vocalist Mitch Fury: "I don't really care what they think / Or what they have to say / Just give respect / And get the pronouns straight / That's Ms. Fury to you, boy." Meanwhile, Gina Dent's "Supergirl" (2002) comments on the gender passing that lesbians employ to protect themselves in a homophobic culture: "Supergirl lives a double life / Pretends she wants a husband instead of a wife . . . / She's fighting the scrimmage on both fronts / Trying to be two places at once."

Several other rock lyricists have commented also on the social construction of femininity, although not necessarily from a queer perspective. Perhaps the most explicit rock song to discuss emphasized femininity as a result of women's subordination to men is John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Woman Is the Nigger of the World" (1972). Controversial both then and now, the lyrics connect women's oppression to black people as enslaved property while also drawing attention to how femininity is constructed in heteronormative patriarchal societies: "We insult her everyday on TV / And wonder why she has no guts or confidence." The Slits' "Typical Girls" (1978) similarly calls attention to women's performances of emphasized femininity, albeit via irony: "Typical girls stand by their man / Typical girls are really swell / Typical girls learn how to act shocked/ Typical girls don't rebel."

Some male rockers have attempted to problematize hegemonic masculinity by critiquing its social construction. For example, Pulp's version of "I'm a Man" questions: "I start to wonder what it takes to be a man / Well I learned to drink and I learned to smoke and I learned to tell a dirty joke / If that's all there is,

then there's no point for me." Meanwhile, other rock groups, like Tenacious D, have parodied rock's heterosexual machismo in their lyrics, sometimes running the risk of honoring the object of their ridicule.

Queerness

While numerous rock songs discuss the constructed nature of gender, few actually subvert the binary sex/gender system that grounds heterosexual patriarchy. Indeed, in only crossing sex and gender identities, such songs may ultimately reify the oppositions of male/female and masculine/feminine. In contrast, queer songs blur the boundaries between these subjectivities while suggesting gender as nonbinary, fluid, and multiple in expression. In other words, in queer culture sex and gender are not aligned but exploded. Here "queer" means antinormative and resistant to dualistic forms of meaning making while also not necessarily being indicative of homosexual desire. Some rock lyrics are explicitly queer in their gender nonconformity or homoerotics. Yet many queer theorists, like Alexander Doty, would argue that queerness runs throughout mass culture and can easily be read by those who know its nonnormative codes, including gender trouble.

David Bowie's "Rebel, Rebel" (1974) was one of the first rock songs to receive considerable discussion as a result of its attention to genderqueerness: "You got your mother in a whirl / She's not sure if you're a boy or a girl." Released a half decade later, Prince's "I Wanna Be Your Lover" (1979) queered its narrator by suggesting both gender and sexual fluidity: "I wanna be your brother / I wanna be your mother and your sister, too."

While Bowie and Prince often flirted with gender ambiguity in lyrics, other rock songwriters have commented more explicitly on gender fluidity in contemporary society. Beginning with a lyric that references traditional gender politics, Joe Jackson's "Real Men" (1982) repeatedly questions: "What's a man now," thus pointing to the fluidity of gender performance and thus a disruption of the sex/gender system. Moreover, the song deconstructs the stereotypical portrayal of homosexuals as gender deviant: "All the gays are macho / Can't you see their leather shine." A decade later, Tribe 8's "Femme Bitch Top" (1995) queers its subject by noting her masculine and feminine qualities simultaneously: "Her phallic tricks are the butt of a whip / And a handful of lipstick."

Songs like "Real Men" and "Femme Bitch Top" explore queer identities yet do so with one toe still planted in a bigendered world, as can be seen with the use of terms like "man" and "she." Yet some rock lyrics subvert such binary gender logics more explicitly. For example, the Replacements' "Androgynous" (1984) comments on the fluidity of a nonbinary genderqueer world: "Now, something

meets Boy / And something meets Girl / They both look the same . . . /Unisex, evolution." Despite the queer utopia suggested by the lyrics, note how the songwriter's use of "something" here suggests the difficulty of communicating about nonnormative subjectivities when language often restricts us to gendered pronouns.

Some rock vocalists have queered gender politics by singing lyrics whose narrator is constructed as a member of a different gender. Genderqueer interpretations occur because listeners typically associate the gender of a song's narrator (the "I" of the song) with the gender of the person singing it. For example, Deborah Harry's performance of Blondie's "Rifle Range" (1976), Linda Ronstadt's singing of the Rolling Stones' "Tumbling Dice" (1978), and k.d. lang's cover of Steve Miller's "The Joker" (1997) disrupt the gender construction of the songs' male narrators through their vocalization, while also problematizing the women singers' relationship to femininity by taking on a masculine role.

If romance or sexuality is a theme in a rock song, and the vocalist covering it does not change the pronoun used originally to describe the narrator's lover, such performances are often interpreted as sexually queer as well as genderqueer. This happened when Joan Jett covered Tommy and the Shondells' "Crimson and Cover" (1982), Lyle Lovett performed Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man" (1989), and Janet Jackson recorded Rod Stewart's "Tonight's the Night" (2000). In contrast to these lyrical transgressions by straight performers, an increasing number of queer people are writing songs that speak openly about same-sex desire, a significant change from the days when gays and lesbians closeted such desires lyrically through metaphor and connotation.

The increased presence of queer lyrics in rock culture over the past two decades is indicative of progressive change. Indeed, such lyrics suggest not only the further diversification of gender identities in rock culture but also the undermining of its historic patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies. Yet it is important to keep in mind the limited popularity and commercial viability of such songs in a much larger cultural context where queerness is still marginalized and members of the LGBTQI community are still feared and abused.

Summary

This chapter has examined rock lyrics so that we can understand how gender is constructed, negotiated, and subverted through song. Most rock lyricists have been men, which has contributed to an overvalorization of males and masculine power as well as the subordination of females and femininity in rock lyrics. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the increased presence of feminist and queer perspectives that honor women and trouble gender, rock lyrics have evolved over the past six decades. Yet that evolution has never been linear, nor has it been necessarily progressive, despite rock culture's self-congratulatory rebellious spirit. Indeed, many male rock songwriters continue to privilege

a form of sexually virile and technically powerful masculinity, and plenty of female rockers compose lyrics that affirm women's essential femininity.

At the same time, we must remember that just as some feminist scholars have struggled to reconcile their radical politics with their love of the Rolling Stone's misogynist lyrics, other rock fans must negotiate their own identities and values with their pleasure in music that moves them. In other words, lyrics alone do not determine our pleasure, or displeasure, in a song. We can make sense of such contradictory impulses only by attending also to the musical sounds in which rock lyrics are embedded. In addition to exploring gender in rock lyrics, this chapter also addressed song structure and the various methods used to study rock lyrics. Chapter 11 explores the constructions of gender in rock print media, specifically album covers.

Further Exploration

1. Study the lyrics of your top five most favorite songs

How many of these songs were written by males? How many were written by females? What kinds of representations of males and females appear in these lyrics? What methods do the songs' lyricists use to affirm traditional gender norms? What methods are used to subvert such norms?

2. Study the lyrics of the entries in *Billboard*'s current "Hot Modern Rock Tracks" (http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/charts/chart_display.jsp?g=Singles&f=Hot+Modern+Rock+Tracks).

How many of these songs were written by males? How many were written by females? What kinds of representations of males and females appear in these lyrics? What methods do the songs' lyricists use to affirm traditional gender norms? What methods are used to subvert such norms?

3. Peruse *Rolling Stone*'s list of the five hundred "Greatest Songs of All Time" (http://www.rollingstone.com/news/coverstory/500songs).

How many of these songs were written by males? How many were written by females? What does this information tell you about the gender politics of songwriting? Do you notice any gendered patterns with regard to particular genres of music (e.g., rock, hip-hop, etc.)?

4. Visit the website of the Songwriters Hall of Fame (http://www.songwritershalloffame.org).

While perusing the list of inductees, count the number of female versus the number of male lyricists who have been inducted and note the style of music