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From the Supremes to the Slits: An Analysis of Femininity in Music

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines how femininity was portrayed in the music industry in order to determine how ideas of femininity changed or remained consistent over two decades. First, I will analyze how femininity was portrayed in girl group music from 1960 through 1964, specifically by studying the careers of the Supremes and the Ronettes. Second, I will analyze femininity in the counterculture movement that took place from 1964 through 1972, specifically by examining the life and career of Janis Joplin. Third, I will analyze femininity in the punk movement from 1975 through 1979, specifically by studying U.S. punk Patti Smith, and the all-female U.K. punk group, the Slits. I will conclude with a summary of my arguments and a comparison of these three genres and five artists to determine changes and consistencies in their portrayal of femininity, and their relation to mainstream feminine ideals at the time.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Girl Groups 1960-1964 .....	4
The Supremes .....	9
The Ronettes .....	18
Chapter 2 : Counterculture 1964-1972 .....	25
Janis Joplin.....	31
Chapter 3 : Punk 1975-1979 .....	49
Patti Smith .....	57
The Slits.....	65
Conclusion .....	75
Bibliography.....	81

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## Introduction

In a 1976 article for *Sounds*, journalist Vivien Goldman wrote, “Suddenly there seem to be an awful lot of women musicians, or women bands, in the *Sounds* gig guide. It seems that a women’s underground is suddenly emerging overground...When women perform a professional, hard-rocking set, with no concession to female stereotypes, they’re an automatic threat. They’re a threat to men because they challenge male supremacy in a citadel that has never been attacked before; they threaten women who perhaps never dare acknowledge that THEY want to be onstage doing the energizing instead of watching their boyfriends do it, in passive admiration.”<sup>1</sup> This quote was written at the height of the punk rock movement, but it is applicable to every genre covered in this paper. Women were making strides in music that had never been done before. They were creating a space to have conversations about femininity and how it is represented within the music industry and by women artists themselves. In my discussion of artists from girl groups, counterculture, and punk, it is evident how women impacted the music industry and the everyday lives of many women.

I utilized research from historians such as Jacqueline Warwick, Susan J. Douglas, Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, Gillian G. Gaar, Vivien Goldman, and Richard Weight. In her book *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s*, Jacqueline Warwick determines that girl group music was at its height from 1960-1964 and explores female identity within this genre. She outlines the elements of girl group music, including the interests of young girls; the role of songwriters, session musicians, and the recording studio; and the role of the

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<sup>1</sup> Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks*, 1.

orchestral sound of girl group music paired with the voices of adolescent girls. Susan J. Douglas also explores girl groups in the fourth chapter of her book *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. In this chapter, titled “Why the Shirelles Mattered,” she argues that girl group music was a method for everyday girls to express themselves and explore their identities. In her book, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo explores the hippie generation and the roles of women within that culture. She argues that while it was still a heteronormative, hierarchal culture, women had new freedoms and roles. Gillian G. Gaar, Vivien Goldman, and Richard Weight move into the punk movement of the 1970s. In chapter six of the book, *She’s a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock and Roll*, Gaar discusses the beginnings of the punk movement. She examines the role of artists such as Patti Smith, Poly Styrene, and the Slits and their influence on later artists. Vivien Goldman, in her book *Revenge of the She-Punks: A Feminist Music History from Poly Styrene to Pussy Riot*, also explores the role of women in the punk movement. She examines the beginning of the movement, how punk created a space for women to explore and vocalize their identities as women, and the roles of wealth, love, and protest in punk. Lastly, Richard Weight comments on women in the punk movement in his book *Mod: From Bebop to Britpop, Britain’s Biggest Youth Movement*. He argues in chapter seven that punk justifiably asserted itself as a more feminist youth culture than the mod subculture, which was a youth subculture in the 1960s that was influenced by British and American music and fashion, but also discusses that this was not an overarching feeling for all in the punk movement. He also observes the differences between punk in the United States and in the United Kingdom, arguing that British punk attempted to move away from the “Americanization” of British culture and music.

In this thesis I will examine the various ways in which femininity was portrayed in the music industry by female artists, and how this was received by audiences and critics, in order to illuminate how ideas of femininity changed or remained consistent over two decades. First, I will analyze how femininity was portrayed in girl group music from 1960 through 1964, specifically by studying the careers of the Supremes and the Ronettes. Second, I will analyze notions of femininity in the counterculture movement that took place from 1964 through 1972, specifically by examining the life and career of Janis Joplin. Third, I will analyze conceptions of femininity in the punk movement from 1975 through 1979, specifically by studying U.S. punk Patti Smith, and the all-female U.K. punk group, the Slits. Fourth, and finally, I will conclude with a summary of my arguments and a comparison of these three genres and five artists to determine changes and consistencies in the portrayal of femininity and their relations to mainstream feminine ideals at the time.

## Chapter 1: Girl Groups 1960-1964

### Introduction

During the late 1950s and 1960s, girl group music played a significant role in representing girls' ideas of femininity and identity. Historian Susan Douglas writes about girl group music, "The most important thing about the music, the reason it spoke to us so powerfully, was that it gave voice to all the warring selves inside us struggling, blindly and with a crushing sense of insecurity, to forge something resembling a coherent identity."<sup>2</sup> Girl group music emerged in the late 1950s and was at its height between 1960 and 1964.<sup>3</sup> Girl group music is recognizable because of the construction of the group of three to five teenage girls, and the themes of their music addressing what were considered the concerns of young girls- boys, parents, and womanhood. Typically, the music sung by these groups was written by professional songwriters, such as the Brill Building writers, and the groups were backed by professional studio musicians.<sup>4</sup>

Historians have argued that the music of girl groups was important because it united girls in their struggles and identities and gave them a platform to voice their concerns.<sup>5</sup> The construction of the group and the themes present in their music was accessible for audiences, allowing audiences to imagine themselves as part of the group or in the scenarios addressed in the group's music.<sup>6</sup> This sense of being part of the group was especially prominent in the construction of girl groups because they are made up of a group of girls who embody different roles through a call and response style. The call and response style allowed for a conversation to

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 87.

<sup>3</sup> Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*



occur in the music just as girls would have conversations with their friends.<sup>7</sup> The presence of background singers was important, because it is a symbol of a collective and enhances the conversational style of call and response. Jacqueline Warwick notes that background singers also created a sense of “sisterhood” because their voices “strengthen the statements of an individual vocalist.”<sup>8</sup> This function of sisterhood allowed girls to feel a sense of shared experiences and see their concerns, such as with boys or parents, represented and discussed.<sup>9</sup> This is further enhanced with the “look” of girl groups, with its emphasis on wearing coordinating outfits with matching makeup and hairstyles. This also led to a sense of replaceability because the members of the group were meant to blend in together, which meant girls from outside of the group could be used to fill their spot if needed. This created a sense of equality within the group and allowed for audiences to see themselves in the place of the girl groups.<sup>10</sup>

Girl groups were also important in their representation of the complexities of women’s identities by providing them an environment to voice their experiences and concerns.<sup>11</sup> This displays that despite girl group music uniting girls in a sense of shared experiences or concerns, there were still layers to these issues that meant that girls could not be uniformly defined by them. One prominent example highlighted by Susan Douglas is in her discussion of sexuality and gender roles. She writes how this music allowed women to express their frustrations with being confined to a stereotypical role and to grapple with their own sexual feelings. She also notes the music helped girls to deal with those frustrations in a society that tended to condemn or repress aspects of female sexuality. She discusses tensions between feelings of rebelliousness and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Cyrus, *Selling an Image*, 176.

<sup>11</sup> Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*, 47.

conformity and suggests that girl group music could be an outlet to explore the tensions girls felt.<sup>12</sup>

Race played a prominent role in girl groups, showing that girls and femininity could not be confined to one specific definition and experience. Race is especially important in the conversation about girl group music because many of the girl groups were made up of young black girls. The conflict between ideas of respectability and sexuality became an important discussion in girl group music for girls of different identities- primarily in the music of black groups.<sup>13</sup> Girl groups and girls who were part of the girl group culture had to navigate differing ideologies where they were expected to find a way to be “respectable” in a movement that allowed girls to explore their sexuality and self-expression.<sup>14</sup> This pressure was heightened for girls of color, especially the young black girls who were integral to the girl group culture. Susan Douglas describes that white music was more repressed than black music throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Douglas adds that black music was often a source of hope or longing and commented on society in a way that white music did not, especially in the 1960s with the civil rights movement. This led to stereotyping black women and made the competing pulls of respectability and sexuality even more difficult for them to navigate. Douglas writes that black teens in girl groups felt pressure from society to seem more “feminine, innocent, and as white as possible”<sup>15</sup> because of these stereotypes. She discusses Berry Gordy’s Artist Development Program at Motown as an example of this because it was an effort to make sure Motown artists were as sophisticated and well-mannered as possible in order to sell records to a larger audience.

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 87.

<sup>13</sup> Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*, 142.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 95.

Another notable aspect of girl group music was the role of the mostly male producers and songwriters. Since many of the groups did not write their own music and were not involved in its production, girls did not have much control over the music they made, and it could still primarily represent male ideas of femininity. Warwick observes that male producers viewed the female musicians as less threatening than their male colleagues and that in some instances the "...girl group is thought of primarily as the creation of its producer."<sup>16</sup> Berry Gordy, the founder of Motown which launched the careers of groups such as the Supremes and the Temptations, wanted to create groups that would be successful in "crossing over" to white audiences. He saw black women as the best way to accomplish this because he viewed them as less threatening.<sup>17</sup> The Supremes also understood the importance of appearing sophisticated and well-mannered, which was something that was important to them even prior to signing with Motown. Mary Wilson of the Supremes notes that many of the acts that came to Motown naturally wanted to be successful, and that she disliked the assumption that Motown acts had "sold out" because they accepted what some thought were "white" values.<sup>18</sup> This seems to indicate that they did not share Berry Gordy's ideas about respectability and crossover appeal. Phil Spector was another significant male producer who asserted control over his acts. He was the founder and producer for Phillies Records which signed groups such as the Ronettes and the Crystals. Phil Spector created the "wall of sound," a technique that focused on the sound of the whole song rather than individual voices or instruments by layering in each of the voices and instruments over each other, creating a fuller, more combined sound.<sup>19</sup> Warwick describes this technique as an example

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<sup>16</sup> Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 150.

<sup>19</sup> Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*, 121.

of Spector's need for control and his inability to treat the groups he worked with- many of whom were young girls whose careers were in his hands- as equals.<sup>20</sup>

The role of songwriters was also important in girl group culture. Most of the groups did not write many of their own songs, but sang songs written for them by professional writers such as the Brill Building writers. Typically around the same age as the groups they were writing for, the Brill Building writers were comprised of both male and female writers who usually wrote as teams and were married (for example, Carole King and Gerry Goffin, and Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry).<sup>21</sup> Many of these songwriters began their careers as teenagers, but despite being the same age as the groups they wrote for, writers such as Carole King were considered to be women by their colleagues, while the groups she wrote for, such as the Shirelles, were considered girls. Warwick emphasizes that this distinction has to do with race (King was white and the members of the Shirelles were black), class, and relationships to men (King was married, while many of the artists were single).<sup>22</sup>

Girl group music, popular between the late 1950s through the mid-1960s, was able to speak to the complexities of female identities. These groups, typically made up of young girls who were primarily girls of color, helped express the experiences of young girls and create a sense of sisterhood among them. There were a variety of experiences faced by girls at the time, but this music provided them with an outlet to explore this in a male dominated field and world.

In this chapter I am going to be analyzing the Supremes and the Ronettes as examples of girl groups. The Supremes were a trio of young black women from Detroit who were signed to Motown by Berry Gordy in 1961. The Ronettes were a trio of family members who were also

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 111.

women of color from Harlem and were signed to Phillies Records in 1963 by Phil Spector. I am analyzing these two groups because they had different ways of handling the dual calls of respectability and sexual expression. It seems that the Supremes embodied the more respectable side of girl group music, as their music and style was more polished, and they focused considerably on maintaining a respectable public image that would help them reach white audiences. The Ronettes embodied the more sexual side of the girl group culture, with Ronnie Spector's sultry vocals and their more "dangerous" style, but because of their race they too felt pressure not to take this image too far.<sup>23</sup> In analyzing the similarities and contrasts between these two groups and their representation of girl group culture, I will be able to demonstrate how they portrayed femininity and how that reflected widely-held feminine ideals of the time.

### **The Supremes**

In 1959, the Primettes were formed as a sister group to the Primes (who later became the Temptations) and was made up of Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, Florence Ballard, and Betty McGlown, who attended school together in Detroit.<sup>24</sup> They began playing gigs together around Detroit under the management of Richard Morris. At their gigs, Morris made sure that the Primettes did not interact with the audience beyond the stage out of concern for their safety, but also because he knew that being "unattainable" performers added mystery to their act.<sup>25</sup> Eventually, Betty McGlown left the Primettes because she wanted to be married. This left the group with the question about who to replace her with since many groups at the time were made

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 60.

up of four girls,<sup>26</sup> and they eventually decided on Barbara Martin. Still under the management of Richard Morris, a new label called LuPine was created for the Primettes until they were signed to Motown in 1961.<sup>27</sup> After signing with Motown, the Primettes became the Supremes and began creating music with the “Motown sound,” which included handclaps, heavy drums, repeated choruses, and melodic hooks.<sup>28</sup> Eventually in 1962, the Supremes lineup became the well-known trio with Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard after Barbara Martin left to have a baby.<sup>29</sup>

The Supremes were well known for their distinct look. According to one of their members Mary Wilson, as the Primettes, they began creating this look by sewing their own clothes and doing their own makeup and stage design. This focus on their image would carry over into their career as the Supremes and was also a major aspect of Motown records.<sup>30</sup> The Supremes were known for their polished and sophisticated look. Wilson notes in her memoir that this made them stand out from other girl groups at the time stating, “...while the other girl groups were in cute, matching outfits that seemed to play up their sweetness and innocence, we were wearing the most sophisticated dresses we could find.”<sup>31</sup> This aspect of wearing matching, sophisticated outfits was important in the Supremes image, and helped establish them as a respectable group. They developed this sophisticated look through wearing outfits that were more glamorous. As they mentioned in an interview in 1964, they remained so “ladylike” on stage because they did not wear tight dresses. The interviewer wrote that the Supremes “...have set out to prove that a girl can be a success in modern show business without leaning on “sex”

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 69, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 137.

appeal.”<sup>32</sup> This displays the Supremes’ image as a respectable group, but also that sexuality was an element of girl group music. This does not seem to mean that the Supremes did not have sex appeal, but that theirs was considered more respectable because it did not include wearing tight dresses or outfits with slits in them. This is further emphasized by Mary Wilson describing their style as “sexy but wholesome.”<sup>33</sup>

The Supremes concentrated a lot on their image. Beyond constantly being well dressed, they also made sure to appear neat and coordinated, and they focused on crafting a sound that enhanced this image. Motown staff coached the group on how to speak and they were warned about who they should date and to make sure whoever they were with made a similar amount of money as they did.<sup>34</sup> This coaching went even further with Motown’s Artist Development program, an etiquette training program that taught the groups how to act proper and respectable. Under this program, the groups received training from coaches such as Maxine Powell, who focused on making sure the groups spoke and appeared proper. The groups at Motown also worked with choreographer Cholly Atkins, who created the dance moves that the Supremes are so well known for. It is important to note that many of the groups that were signed to Motown records were already ambitious and well-mannered groups. Wilson highlights in her memoir that Gordy would not sign groups that did not embody these qualities, and the artist development courses just elevated their confidence and appearance. The stereotype that Motown helped “uneducated” young black artists become proper was incorrect, and Wilson emphasizes that people of all ages, races, and classes needed etiquette training.<sup>35</sup> Since the Supremes spent a lot

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<sup>32</sup> *New Journal and Guide, Success Without ‘Sex’*

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 160.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 145, 149.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 150-153.

of time creating their own style even before they were signed to Motown, they were held up as an example in the Artist Development program, in addition to receiving training. Wilson also notes that “Not only did we have more self-confidence, but other people began treating us differently.”<sup>36</sup> This shows that the Artist Development program did not create, so much as enhance the group’s image and confidence and helped contribute to their reputation for sophistication and respectability. This is seen in their performances, such as on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1966, where the Supremes appeared wearing long gowns that displayed elegance and a grown-up look. They are also shown doing simple dance moves and only moving around slightly<sup>37</sup> which could contribute to the image of sophistication, as they are not attempting to put on an elaborate show.

As black women, the image the Supremes cultivated was even more important. Due to racial stereotypes, many people were surprised by their appearance and composure. Mary Wilson notes this was even more evident in England because they “...liked to romanticize the plight of the disadvantaged,” which is how they viewed the Supremes as black girls from the “inner city.”<sup>38</sup> She recounts the story of when the group first met the Beatles and George Harrison confessing to them later “We expected soulful, hip girls. We couldn’t believe that three black girls from Detroit could be so square!”<sup>39</sup>

On their first tour in the American South, the Supremes encountered some of their first experiences with racism. They were called names and had a hard time getting into restaurants or were told they had to enter through the back.<sup>40</sup> In addition, during this tour while in Macon,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>37</sup> The Supremes “You Can’t Hurry Love,” *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 177.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 120-125.



Georgia, a sniper shot at the bus that was carrying all of the Motown acts. Diana Ross described how terrified they sometimes were on this tour, and that they could "...feel the bigotry in the air."<sup>41</sup> These experiences with racism demonstrate the added difficulties they faced beyond just being women in a male dominated industry because they had to find ways to bring their music to places where they were not accepted, and where their lives were even threatened.

Despite these experiences with racism, the Supremes and other groups helped break down racial barriers. Mary Wilson notes that on their first southern tour they played some of the first integrated shows in a few of the towns, and that the tours helped to weaken racial barriers because of Motown's role as the "sound of American youth."<sup>42</sup> She also notes a difference in her experience as an entertainer, stating, "The other interesting thing about people in general is that they have two different standards: one for common blacks and another for entertainers and other famous blacks."<sup>43</sup> This indicates the importance of their image, and the role they played in weakening racial barriers. Wilson describes this in discussing their style and the impact their music had, saying, "We were living examples of the slogan 'black is beautiful'."<sup>44</sup> Ross also remembered how the music of the Supremes helped weaken racial barriers, as people, both white and black, were buying their records and listening to the radio. She writes, "...we were already crossing color lines and breaking racial barriers... So our tours through the South, as dangerous and scary as they were, ended up serving a higher purpose: Since both blacks and whites were listening to, loving, and enjoying the music, we were actively changing the world by doing what we loved best- singing."<sup>45</sup> In addition, the civil rights movement had a major impact on the

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<sup>41</sup> Ross, *Secrets of a Sparrow*, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 120-125.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

<sup>45</sup> Ross, *Secrets of a Sparrow*, 130.

Supremes. They felt a major influence from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diana Ross recalls that when the Supremes were supposed to play at the Copacabana in New York on the day he died, they incorporated lines from his “I Have a Dream” speech in their cover of “Somewhere.”<sup>46</sup>

Touring also displayed the different experiences for male and female performers. The girls were given female chaperones on tours and warned not to be intimate with the male performers because of the impact it could have on their families, futures, and careers. Wilson also remembers that every chaperone they had, except for Diana Ross’ mother, took the opportunity to lecture them about the opportunities they were given and how not to jeopardize that.<sup>47</sup> This seems to display how women were more at risk for jeopardizing their opportunities and image than men, and implies less security in their careers, because they were constantly warned against intimacy.

The relationships the Supremes developed with other female acts was an important aspect of their time at Motown. Despite the occasional conflict and frustration with other groups at Motown, Mary Wilson highlights the friendships the Supremes made with other women signed to the label, recalling that they would frequently get together to talk about boys, clothes, and makeup.<sup>48</sup> This demonstrates an important sense of common identity and camaraderie that developed among the female groups.

The Supremes’, and Motown’s, sound began to be recognized globally. Mary Wilson highlights the Supremes’ frustration with the attention given to the other groups, such as the Miracles and the Vandellas, because they did not have many hit songs until 1964. The Supremes were stereotyped as sweet and soft because of their songs and had trouble moving away from

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>47</sup> Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 116.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 131.

that stereotype.<sup>49</sup> Despite this, the Supremes became the most successful girl group out of Motown, with their influence and popularity expanded beyond the United States. Their songs, primarily written by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland (HDH) since 1963,<sup>50</sup> were relatable and recognizable. Diana Ross writes, “The romantic quality of the innocent love songs that the Supremes became associated with were not only extremely well suited to our style, they were easy for people to understand and relate to.”<sup>51</sup> In a 1965 article describing their upcoming appearance on ‘The Sound of Motown,’ the author writes that “The ‘Motown Sound’ has become as remarkable as the ‘Liverpool’ or ‘Mersey Sound’ (the Beatles, etc.) ...”<sup>52</sup> which demonstrates how recognizable the Motown groups had become. The sound of the Supremes also became popular outside of the United States with number one records on the U.S. and British charts in 1964,<sup>53</sup> and tours and appearances on television in Europe in 1965.<sup>54</sup> In an article by *Ebony*, they were described as the “sweethearts of the world”<sup>55</sup> and “[b]esides being attractive, the three chirpers are intelligent, friendly, witty...”<sup>56</sup> which demonstrates that their talent and image was respected all over the world. At home, the Supremes were even given an award by the Detroit Common Council, celebrating their role as a good example for teenagers in Detroit and across America,<sup>57</sup> and thus showing that they were a respectable group and an act to be admired in the mainstream.

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<sup>49</sup> Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 136.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

<sup>51</sup> Ross, *Secrets of a Sparrow*, 108.

<sup>52</sup> *Chicago Daily Defender*, “The Supremes to Hit TV In the ‘Sound of Motown’”

<sup>53</sup> *New Journal and Guide*, “No. 1 in America- And England”

<sup>54</sup> *Gettysburg Times*, “Rock Recordings Place Detroit on the Map”

<sup>55</sup> *Ebony*, “The Supremes Make It Big, 86.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>57</sup> *Soul*, “Orbiting With Astronauts Supremes Soar.”

Diana Ross began to be singled out as a leader in the group. As this occurred, strains arose between her and Martha Reeves on tour. Wilson recalled how whenever there was a conflict between them, she and Florence Ballard were expected to be on Ross's side out of solidarity within the group.<sup>58</sup> This is a notable example of Diana Ross arising as the leader and face of the group. Mary Wilson discusses the progression of this change: "In the beginning we had been treated as three individuals and were quoted equally. Slowly, though, Diane started answering questions that were clearly directed at Flo or me."<sup>59</sup> This also reflects changes in femininity from interchangeability to individuality.

Ross's ascent as leader highlights another major aspect of the girl group design: replaceability. Girl groups were meant to depict an image of equality which allowed for audiences to see themselves as part of the group, but also meant group members could easily be replaced. This was evident when Florence Ballard was asked to replace one of the group members of the Marvelettes on tour when one of them became pregnant.<sup>60</sup> This aspect of replaceability in girl groups would also arise later in their career when Ballard began thinking about leaving the group. Ross becoming the face of the group also coincided with Ballard's growing issues with alcohol and desire to leave the Supremes. Wilson describes wanting support from Motown and to return back to the feeling of equality in the group but being told to stay in their places with Ross as the primary figure.<sup>61</sup> Eventually Ballard began to miss shows and was temporarily replaced by Marlene Barrow,<sup>62</sup> while Gordy and other management at Motown began to look for a permanent replacement. Motown eventually decided to replace Ballard with

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 196.

Cindy Birdsong, previously a member of Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles, because she had a similar look to Ballard.<sup>63</sup> This enforces the idea of replaceability in girl groups, because it was difficult for people to recognize that Ballard had left the group.

During this period, the Supremes' name had changed to Diana Ross and the Supremes, which pushed the other group members out of the spotlight even more. Mary Wilson describes feeling that the group no longer existed after the name was changed and Florence Ballard left.<sup>64</sup> This separation between the lead and the background was further solidified when the group was interviewed on Johnny Carson and Ross told him that there were replacements for all of the group members but her.<sup>65</sup> This separation is important because a major aspect of girl group design had rested in the equality of the group. It was vital in promoting the feeling that women in the audiences were being represented and could be part of the group because they recognized themselves and the problems they faced in the group's image and performances. This divide was emphasized further when Diana Ross left the Supremes in 1970. In an article from *Ebony* magazine in 1970, the author writes that "...it is probably impossible for any three women to spend nine years together in daily proximity without problems."<sup>66</sup> Besides the sexist observation that women cannot spend an extended period of time together without conflict, the author overlooks that the group had grown up together and were essentially family. He disregards the pressure of the group changing and the pressure they probably experienced from becoming famous. Despite this, the article highlights the divide in the Supremes which again destroys the image that allowed audiences to be part of the group.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 197.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>66</sup> *Ebony*, "Why Diana Ross Left the Supremes," 122.

The Supremes were one of the most successful groups out of Motown, and well known for their style and performances. They seemed to embody the respectable side of girl group music while approaching sexuality in a way that fit the respectable aspect of the genre. This contrasts with the next group, the Ronettes, who seem to embody the side of girl group music that was more overtly sexual. Unrestricted by the Artist Development program that was part of the experience for Motown groups like the Supremes, the Ronettes approached their fashion and performance style in a more openly sexual way, although this does not mean the Ronettes did not feel pressure to fit into the idea of respectability expected of girl groups.

### **The Ronettes**

Before they were the Ronettes, sisters Ronnie Bennett (later Spector), Estelle Bennett, and their cousin Nedra Talley grew up in Harlem, New York. Their mother was black and Cherokee, and their father was white. Ronnie Spector remembers being bullied in school as a child because they came from a mixed-race background.<sup>67</sup> While they were in high school, they were discovered by talent agent Phil Halikus who helped arrange small gigs for them. Originally, called the Darling Sisters, and then became Ronnie and the Relatives, the group signed a record deal with Stu Phillips at Colpix Records in 1961.<sup>68</sup> Also that year, unable to be admitted into the popular Peppermint Lounge in New York because they were underage, their mothers helped dress them up to look older.<sup>69</sup> Ronnie and the Relatives were allowed into the club where they were mistaken for dancers and sent on stage to dance for Joey Dee and the Starlites. It was

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<sup>67</sup> Spector, *Be My Baby*, 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 22-23.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

quickly discovered that they were not the dancers, but during the Starlites cover of “What’d I Say” by Ray Charles, Ronnie Bennett took over singing and the group was offered a job at the Peppermint Lounge.<sup>70</sup> After receiving this offer, their name changed once again to the Rondettes and soon after the “d” was dropped from their name to officially become the Ronettes.<sup>71</sup>

In 1963, Estelle Bennett called Phillies records and landed a meeting with Phil Spector to discuss the Ronettes.<sup>72</sup> In her book, Ronnie Spector seems to imply that this was a surprising occurrence despite their decision to take a risk and attempt to speak to Spector, but this also displays an element of taking their careers into their own hands and pushing for what they wanted. During their audition, Spector loved Ronnie Bennett’s voice, and when he met with their mother, she said the Ronettes were a group and could only be signed together. When Phil Spector agreed, the Ronettes ended their contract with Colpix and officially signed with Phillies.<sup>73</sup>

Similar to the Supremes, the Ronettes became well known for their image, but theirs was tough and more openly sexual compared to that of the Supremes. Before the Ronettes were signed with Spector’s label, they were discovered by DJ Murray “the K” Kauffman, who put the group on the bill for his show at the Brooklyn Fox after watching them perform in Florida. As one of his acts, the Ronettes began to experiment with makeup looks while cementing their image. Ronnie Spector writes, “The girls loved us because we were different- we followed our own style and didn’t care what anybody thought. And the boys liked us for obvious reasons. The Ronettes were what the girls wanted to be, and what the guys dreamed about.”<sup>74</sup> This emphasizes

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 33-34.

how the Ronettes' style - with exaggerated makeup and tight, slitted skirts - set them apart from other groups at the time, who wore more conservative gowns and party dresses, and established them as sexual symbols. This sexual image could be risky for women, especially women of color, to portray, and even caused conflict within the Ronettes at times. Ronnie Spector remembers once being told by her sister Estelle and Estelle's boyfriend that she went too far sometimes and was even compared to the Supremes and told to be "classier" like they were.<sup>75</sup> Their image as sex symbols was furthered in a 1968 article from *Rolling Stone*, which displays some journalists' sexualization of the group. In this article, the male author discusses the image of the Ronettes and another girl group, the Shangri-Las. He writes, "They were the archetypes of a significant part of America at that time. They were the tough, whorish females of the lower class, female Hell's Angels who had about them an aura of brazen sex." He also describes the Ronettes as "hooker types," adding that their songs had a sexual sound. He goes on to compare them to other acts at the time, stating that Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix have similar sexual images but asking, "...but how come Mama Cass isn't shaking it down and inviting people in? How come Grace Slick and Janis Joplin really aren't that sexy?"<sup>76</sup> These comparisons are important because they demonstrate the Ronettes being sexualized by male audiences, but do not acknowledge their role in creating a space in girl group music for women to express themselves. The importance of creating a space for girls to explore their identities and sexuality is expressed by Susan Douglas when she writes, "...girl group music let us try on and act out a host of identities, from traditional, obedient girlfriend to brassy, independent rebel, and lots in between."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>76</sup> *Rolling Stone*, "Da Doo Ron Ron," 18.

<sup>77</sup> Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 88.



Similar to the Supremes, the Ronettes also experienced racism while touring. Being mixed race, the Ronettes passed as lighter skinned than their parents. In her memoir, Ronnie Spector recounts one of her first experiences with racism on tour in Florida while the group was still signed with Colpix Records. She writes that she, her sister, and her cousin had gone to a restaurant and were served, but when their parents met them later, they were told to leave.<sup>78</sup> Later, when the Ronettes were signed with Phil Spector's label, Phillies, they continued to question where they fit in because of their race. While performing at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, they worried that they would not pass as black enough. The Ronettes did become respected among black audiences. Ronnie Spector wrote, "We'd earned an ovation from the audience at the Apollo Theater, and that meant something. When the street kids applauded us at the Apollo, it was like we were getting our wave- from that moment on, we knew we could pass in the black world."<sup>79</sup> Their experience with racism and questioning their identity is important because it shows that many of the girl groups had to consider more than just their identity as women in their music and performances. They were set apart from other acts during the time because they had to wrestle with the double standard of respectability versus sexual expression while also attempting to appeal to audiences of different races.

Phil Spector's role as the producer for the Ronettes is also important to emphasize. Beyond producing the sound of their records, Spector became a highly controlling figure in their careers. In one instance, the Ronettes were supposed to tour with Dick Clark and his Caravan of Stars, but Spector would not allow Ronnie Spector to go and had her cousin Elaine replace her for the tour. While they toured, Ronnie Spector recorded "Baby I Love You" and the rest of the

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<sup>78</sup> Spector, *Be My Baby*, 32.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

Ronettes were not featured on it.<sup>80</sup> Besides demonstrating the control Spector had on their careers and what the Ronettes were allowed to do, this also displays the aspect of replaceability evident in many girl groups because none of the members were featured more prominently than the others and could have someone outside of the group fill in for them. The control Spector had over the Ronette's careers was furthered as his relationship with Ronnie Spector progressed. She describes that she could not end her relationship with him without risking her career and the careers of the other Ronettes stating, "If I said bye-bye to Phil, I would've been saying bye-bye to my career and I had a sister, a cousin, and lots of other relatives depending on me for a living."<sup>81</sup> As late as 2002 in a court case between the Ronettes and Phillies records, Spector's control in their careers remained evident. The Ronettes sued the label over breach of contract because their songs had regained popularity with the development of new technology and their use in film, but they had no say in this and argued that Phillies did not have the right to use their masters for this purpose.<sup>82</sup> The Ronettes lost this case meaning that Phillies records could utilize their masters as they pleased, again displaying the role of the record producer in the girl group culture.

The Ronette's music style and the production at Phillies Records created a complex attitude in their music. Spector is well known for his technique called the "wall of sound," which was an experiment he conducted with sound where recordings are layered and there are multiple of the same instruments, creating a thick sound in his records.<sup>83</sup> This sound is evident in the Ronettes record "Be My Baby" which was their first major hit as a band in 1963. Ronnie Spector

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 65-66.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>82</sup> *Greenfield v. Phillies Records* (2002)

<sup>83</sup> Spector, *Be My Baby*, 51-52.

describes it as “a tough record, but it had a sweet side to it, just like the Ronettes.”<sup>84</sup> About “Be My Baby,” one of the songwriters Ellie Greenwich also commented, “ ‘Be My Baby’ had an attitude...The Ronettes were street; they were innocent-but- tough sex symbols, and there was a whole package that went along with that record.”<sup>85</sup> In a video of “Be My Baby”, it shows a compilation of images and performances of the song. The Ronettes and their background dancers are seen using hip and arm movements<sup>86</sup>, which differs from the Supremes who were the sole focus of the performance and usually only used choreographed arm motions. This displays a key difference with the Supremes, as the Ronettes seemed to use their style and music to be intentionally sexual but still maintain an appearance of innocence, while the Supremes worked hard to maintain a sophisticated and respectable image with a less noticeable aspect of sexuality.

Both the Supremes and Ronettes were active throughout the 60s, but their major records and fame seemed to be at its height in the 1960 through 1964 era of girl group music as defined by Jacqueline Warwick. Author Susan Douglas argued that girl group music created a space for girls to have their experiences and concerns voiced. This seems to indicate a sense of freedom, which is evident in the sense that girls were more freely able to express themselves, but the artists still mainly had their careers dictated by male producers. Both the Supremes and the Ronettes had to carefully navigate the duality of respectability and sexuality, especially as women of color. They helped create a space for women to be more represented but still had to fit into this spectrum. Warwick and Douglas both also discussed the emphasis on collectivity in girl group music, which is evident especially with the Ronettes, and with the Supremes until Diana Ross began to be singled out. This change in the Supremes seems to display a move to more

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>85</sup> *Rolling Stone*, “The 100 Best Singles of the Last 25 Years: Be My Baby,” 110.

<sup>86</sup> namnoiz, “Be My Baby.”

individuality for women in music. The mid to late 1960s also saw changes in rock music as is evident in the 1968 review from *Rolling Stone* discussed in relation to the Ronettes fashion. In this article the author references Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Mama Cass, Grace Slick, and Janis Joplin who were all prominent artists in the youth counterculture movement that was arising in 1964.

## Chapter 2 : Counterculture 1964-1972

### Introduction

The youth counterculture, which took place between 1964-1972, was a rejection of mainstream culture of the 1950s. It was largely a reaction to the Vietnam War, racial segregation, women's rights, and the materialism of the American dream.<sup>87</sup> The youth counterculture was also characterized by its individualist and anti-authority feeling, the "sexual revolution," and the idea of expanding consciousness through drug use, meditation, and yoga, fashion, and music of the period.<sup>88</sup> The movement was mostly made up of white, middle-class, youth who had time to focus on social issues. It was a very divisive movement, because to some, it represented freedom, gender and racial equality, and peace, while to others, it was a self-indulgent and unpatriotic attack on morals.<sup>89</sup> The youth counterculture collapsed around 1973, in part because many of its goals were making progress. This included civil rights, environmentalism, gender equality, and sexual freedom. In addition, the deaths of many counterculture figures and people settling into mainstream society led to this downfall.<sup>90</sup>

While the counterculture encouraged new ideas on such matters as sexual and romantic relationships, economic ideas, and living style, it still largely maintained heteronormative and hierarchical gender constructs. Women within the counterculture attempted to fight back against these constructs by encouraging "productive" labor and rejecting the traditional nuclear family for communal living. Labor for women in communes was still primarily in the domestic realm, but there was more of a variety of work and they learned new skills which many viewed as

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<sup>87</sup> Lumen, "Counterculture."

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

challenging and empowering. Social constructs were also still largely heteronormative, but because many counterculture women lived outside of mainstream society, this encouraged slightly more flexibility, which allowed for different types of relationships, such as lesbian relationships. The biggest change that the mainly middle-class counterculture women experienced was in their access to experimenting with drugs, new religions, and travelling.<sup>91</sup>

The youth counterculture reached its peak in 1967 during the “Summer of Love,” when around 100,000 young people travelled to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco.<sup>92</sup> As captured by Scott McKenzie’s song “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair),” San Francisco became the center for the hippie movement and the music that was developing in this period.<sup>93</sup> San Francisco also became a center for the rising trends of folk and psychedelic rock,<sup>94</sup> with artists such as the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and the Holding Company. A variety of venues emerged in the area, such as the Avalon, Fillmore, and Golden Gate Park, which occasionally held free concerts. In addition, social protest music from many San Francisco bands was especially prevalent between 1965-1971, as exemplified by the anti-Vietnam War anthem “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-To-Die” by Country Joe and the Fish. Artists such as Joan Baez and Malvina Reynolds also wrote important protest songs.<sup>95</sup> The “Summer of Love” was characterized by colorful, experimental music, experimentation with psychedelic drugs (such as LSD, peyote, psilocybin mushrooms, MDA, marijuana, and others), creative expression, new forms of dress and politics, communal living and sharing of resources, and the

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<sup>91</sup> Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius*, 2-5.

<sup>92</sup> Lumen, “Counterculture.”

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Albright, “San Francisco: Jazz and Rock.”

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

idea of free love, which meant that sexual relationships could be practiced outside of marriage or a committed relationship.<sup>96</sup>

This idea of “free love” was an aspect of the sexual revolution. Historians sometimes argue that the sexual revolution of this period was the second sexual revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the era of World War One. Beginning in the 1960s, the revolution was characterized by more open ideas about homosexuality, women’s sexuality, and sexual freedom, which meant people could pursue different relationships beyond marriage or committed relationships. It is argued that these ideas developed because of Freudian theorist Wilhelm Reich and research conducted by Alfred Kinsey, free speech cases about sexual speech, and movements such as the women’s movement and LGBTQ+ movement.<sup>97</sup>

The establishment of new forms of music presentation, such as outdoor festivals, acted as gathering points and sources of ideas.<sup>98</sup> The most well-known festivals of this period which were pivotal in the movement and in establishing the careers of many musicians were Monterey Pop, which took place in Monterey, California in 1967 during the “Summer of Love,” and Woodstock Music and Arts Fair, which took place in New York in 1969.<sup>99</sup> Another notable festival was the Harlem Cultural Festival in 1969. This festival, sometimes also referred to as “Black Woodstock,” took place at Mount Morris Park in New York and was a concert series that had already been occurring for two years. In 1969, the free festival took place over six Sundays from June 29<sup>th</sup> to August 24<sup>th</sup> and attracted around 300,000 people. The 1969 festival brought together

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Escoffier, “The Sexual Revolution, 1960-1980,” 1.

<sup>98</sup> Albright, “San Francisco: Jazz and Rock.”

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

a variety of acts such as Edwin Hawkins, B.B. King, Gladys Knight and the Pips, and Stevie Wonder.<sup>100</sup>

Monterey Pop was the first of these music festivals and it marked a major change in the rock music industry. John Phillips of the band the Mamas and the Papas headed the non-profit booking team, and he also wrote Scott McKenzie's hit "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)" to promote the festival. Monterey Pop attracted around 75,000 people each night and featured performances from California groups such as the Byrds, the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and Holding Company, along with Indian sitar player Ravi Shankar, and the first American performances from the Who and the Jimi Hendrix Experience.<sup>101</sup> Woodstock, probably the most famous of these festivals, was a defining moment in the counterculture period. The festival, which took place from August 15 - 18, 1969, on a dairy farm in the town of Bethel, New York, featured many notable performances including Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin's Kozmic Blues Band, and the Who. The event attracted around half a million people and quickly became extremely chaotic and unorganized with issues due to traffic, bad weather, and drug use, among other things, but was ultimately extremely successful because it demonstrated the themes of peace and love that were central to the counterculture movement.<sup>102</sup>

Music became more electric and psychedelic in this period, and song lyrics usually addressed themes of love and political issues such as the Vietnam War.<sup>103</sup> Folk rock and psychedelic rock arose in this period and became defining aspects of counterculture. The folk rock of this period drew from many influences such as the singing style of folk revival,<sup>104</sup> the

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<sup>100</sup> Brooks, "In 1969, Harlem Had Its Own Woodstock."

<sup>101</sup> Jarnow, "Monterey International Pop Festival."

<sup>102</sup> Jarnow, "Woodstock."

<sup>103</sup> Lumen, "Counterculture."

<sup>104</sup> The folk music revival began in the late 1940s and it was a youth music movement to perform traditional music. It included groups, solo singers (such as Joan Baez), blues musicians, "source singers," and "old-time white rural



instrumentation and arrangement of rock, as well as elements from blues, jazz, country, bluegrass, and Indian ragas.<sup>105</sup> Folk rock utilized many traditional instruments such as mandolin, fiddle, flute, as well as many non-Western instruments. Folk rock became more electric sounding in this period as well, and many guitarists were influenced by blues, country, pop, and the Indian sitar.<sup>106</sup> Many of the lyrics written for folk rock music were inspired by Civil Rights and anti-war protests, which contributed to the idea that rock music was “serious music.”<sup>107</sup> Artists such as Bob Dylan and the Byrds were notable because of their influence in the electrification of the genre. On Bob Dylan’s 1965 album *Bringing It All Back Home*, he used a full rock band on half of the songs instead of accompanying himself on guitar. Also in 1965, the Byrds released their versions of folk songs like “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “Turn, Turn, Turn,” which helped bring the genre into the mainstream music scene. Folk rock also influenced psychedelic rock<sup>108</sup> which emerged in San Francisco and London in 1965.<sup>109</sup> Psychedelic rock was a response to cultural and social developments, such as the sexual revolution and the Vietnam War, and a desire to go against the mainstream culture through consciousness expansion, free love, and drug use.<sup>110</sup> Psychedelic rock was also influenced by “acid tests” done by Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters from 1965 to 1966 in San Francisco which included all night shows with use of LSD and a light show. These shows also featured music from local bands such as the Grateful Dead and Big Brother and the Holding Company.<sup>111</sup> This genre was also characterized by colorful, and

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music.” This movement inspired many singer-songwriters across the U.S. and U.K. such as Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan, although they moved away from the traditions of this movement. (Laing, “Folk Music Revival.”)

<sup>105</sup> Mather, “Folk Rock.”

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Cohen, “Psychedelic Rock.”

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

eccentric clothing, music expansion using improv, and music lyrics which would sometimes discuss effects and feelings of drugs, such as in “White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane.<sup>112</sup> This genre also drew inspiration from 1960s rhythm and blues, rock, country, folk music, and jazz music improv.<sup>113</sup>

To a considerable degree, the counterculture grew out of a youth movement known as the “Beat Generation.” This was introduced by writer Jack Kerouac in 1948, and the origins of this movement have been traced to Columbia University where well-known members of this movement such as Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Lucien Carr, Hal Chase, and others attended.<sup>114</sup> This group would earn the nickname “beatnik” which was a reference to the Russian satellite Sputnik and Beat Generation and demonstrated that they were far from the mainstream and maybe pro-Communist.<sup>115</sup> This “generation” was known to celebrate creativity and being outsiders, and they experimented with drugs such as LSD, peyote, and marijuana which they thought would help their creativity and productivity. Many also identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, explored Eastern religions, and rejected materialism.<sup>116</sup> They were inspired by and had a major impact on the sexual revolution, drug use, speech and expression, rock music, environmental issues, and anti-military activism<sup>117</sup> which were all integral to the emerging counterculture movement in the 1960s. Also in the 1960s, the term “beatnik” shifted to “hippie” and hippies began to dress more colorfully and grow long hair.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Lumen, “Counterculture.”

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

The counterculture saw more opportunities for women and was more open about ideas of relationships and sexual expression. Women were able to move away from the typical nuclear family and domestic work expected of them, although there was still a sense of hierarchy in this movement. These changes created more freedoms for women in being able to explore new ways of living and types of relationships. This seems to create a sense of being able to explore their own identities. In the 1950s, Janis Joplin would begin to identify heavily with the “beatniks” and in exploring her life and music, I will be able to identify how she challenged or fit into ideas of femininity during the counterculture, as well as her influence on these ideas.

### **Janis Joplin**

Janis Joplin was born on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1943, in Port Arthur, Texas.<sup>119</sup> She grew up as an outsider in her town and was heavily influenced by the culture of the “Beat Generation.” In 1961, Joplin learned about the town of Venice, California, which was founded by Abbot Kinney in 1905 and modeled after Venice, Italy, eventually becoming a hub for the “Beat Generation” that inspired Joplin.<sup>120</sup> After high school, she had gone to live with her aunt in Los Angeles, California and had saved enough money to live by herself in Venice where she could further experiment with drinking, drugs, and sex.<sup>121</sup> In school, she had begun to question her sexuality and thought that a diagnosis of a hormone imbalance explained her bisexuality,<sup>122</sup> but her move to California gave her a space to explore these feelings. In Venice, she was also able to further explore her identity as a “beatnik.” She developed her look with a WWII bomber jacket which

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<sup>119</sup> George-Warren, *Janis*,

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

she wore inside out. She also began to frequent clubs and coffeehouses that were popular with the members of the Beat Generation. This included the Fox and Hound where she made friends with the doorman, Dave Archer, who found her tomboyish, and her southern look humorous.<sup>123</sup>

Joplin eventually returned to Texas to be with her family, after exhausting herself out West, and would begin to venture back and forth between Texas and California for the next few years.<sup>124</sup> While at home, she enrolled at University of Texas in 1962 to study art. 1962 was also the height of the girl group movement, so changes in Joplin's life were occurring in the same period. Women had to live in approved housing with curfews, but Joplin would break curfew to go to a house at the university called "The Ghetto" which was filled with other Beats and musicians.<sup>125</sup> At the University of Texas, she was interested in studying blues music, which was rare for white women at the time, and she was invited to join a band called the Waller Creek Boys.<sup>126</sup> While in the band, she was interviewed by the school paper *Summer Texan* in 1962 in an article titled "She Dares to be Different!," which described her as a beatnik, one who was different from the other women at the school because she wore jeans and sometimes went barefoot instead of getting her hair done or wearing trendy clothes.<sup>127</sup>

In 1963, Joplin hitchhiked back to San Francisco with her friend Chet Helms. There, she was able to further explore her musical identity especially her interest in and connection to blues singer Bessie Smith,<sup>128</sup> whom she discovered while listening to records at her local record store in Port Arthur growing up.<sup>129</sup> While in San Francisco, she became a regular performer at a venue

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 64

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 59.

called Coffee and Confusion (previously the Fox and Hound), where writer John Gilmore described her as looking “Like a beatnik, yet also country-bumpkin looking. She wore old jeans that had baggy legs but were so tight at the seat and hips the seams were coming apart. Despite the winter chill, she was barefoot.<sup>130</sup>” She eventually began playing with duo Larry Hanks and Roger Perkins. Their first gig together was at Coffee Gallery which was slightly bigger than Coffee and Confusion. Performing in an oversized shirt and jeans and sporting long hair, she was described as being very emotionally expressive.<sup>131</sup>

Joplin was also known for her tough personality, periodically getting into fights at bars, but this competed with a sensitive side. John Gilmore remembered her fighting at Coffee and Confusion, describing her as “A tough-talking, pushy, hard-nosed, barroom brawler ready to slug it out, and then suddenly [she’d] grin and laugh and be a pal, which in turn could give way to this sad, delicate person, intimate and feather voiced, neither feminine nor sexy, just vulnerable.<sup>132</sup>” While in San Francisco she became engaged to Peter de Blanc. Joplin, having constantly struggled with her identity and how to fit in, felt that this engagement and a life of domesticity would help this struggle.<sup>133</sup> Joplin returned to Texas and eventually the engagement ended.

Joplin began to book gigs around Texas again and addressed issues of femininity. One gig included auditioning at Sand Mountain Coffeehouse with “Winin’ Boy Blues.” The performer Don Sanders said he “didn’t know what the hell to make of it. Her face turned red, and she kinda swung back and forth and whacked on her guitar and sang with all her body...powerfully crossing the gender line.<sup>134</sup>” She also returned to school at Lamar Tech in

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 130.

1966 and visited her friend Powell St. John in Austin where she sang him her song “Women Is Losers.” He said the song “encapsulates Janis’s feminist side...connecting to that strong female in her. Janis was smart. It was a gripe about what a bitch it was to be a woman.”<sup>135</sup> In the song Joplin writes, “Say honey women is losers/ Well, I know you must have heard it all,/ And everywhere/ Men always seem to end up on top,”<sup>136</sup> displaying her observation of a patriarchal society. She was able to utilize her music to express the frustration she felt, and it displays how men and women were placed in society. She points out that men were able to take advantage of women and still “end up on top.”

Later that year, Joplin returned to San Francisco, where she would find a place to expand her music and become part of the counterculture. She found a family among the band Big Brother and the Holding Company.<sup>137</sup> Big Brother and the Holding Company were looking for a female singer to complement the male voices, similar to other groups in the scene- Jefferson Airplane and Great Society, and Joplin joined with James Gurley, Peter Albin, Dave Getz, and Sam Andrew.<sup>138</sup> Author Holly George-Warren recalled that “Janis looked more Texas tomboy than glamorous ‘girl singer.’ Her hair pulled back, she wore denim cutoffs and a baggy shirt, along with a healthy glow. The guys on the other hand, looked hip, with longish hair and cool clothes...”<sup>139</sup> Drawing on the inspiration of black blues artists such as Reverend Gary Davis and Bessie Smith,<sup>140</sup> Joplin began to experiment with her vocals and had her first performance with Big Brother at the Avalon Ballroom in 1966.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>136</sup> Joplin, “Women Is Losers.”

<sup>137</sup> George-Warren, *Janis*, 136.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 143.

In 1966, Big Brother began a residency in Chicago, after Jefferson Airplane had a fairly successful residency there. Despite this, Big Brother did not have a successful time in the city. George-Warren writes, “Chicago, like much of America at the time, did not have a counterculture to support Big Brother’s ‘freak rock.’”<sup>142</sup> In order to gain the attention of their audiences in Chicago, Janis began to experiment more and took up instruments such as the tambourine, maracas, and Cuban guiro which also demonstrated how musically skilled she was.<sup>143</sup> In a review of their performance, the *Chicago Sun Times* stated that although they were “Lacking the finesse and the drive of the Jefferson Airplane, this group still is exciting...and ugly...but not one in Big Brother and the Holding Company would win beauty prizes either...”<sup>144</sup> Joplin took this statement to heart, displaying that behind her tough persona she was sensitive and cared what people thought. The quote also shows how standards of beauty in music were changing, and not just for women. The review focused on the look of the whole band, writing that despite their looks, they were still talented. This indicates an assumed connection to beauty and talent. While in Chicago, the band was spotted by Nick Gravenites, a local blues bar owner who said about Big Brother, “They scared the hell out of me. Especially Janis- reeking of patchouli and a long granny gown and covered with pimples. She had this weird, shrieking voice...”<sup>145</sup> While in Chicago, they were approached by Mainstream Records, which signed them in 1966.<sup>146</sup>

Joplin continued to struggle with her identity. A part of her dreamed of a domestic life. Upon returning to California from Chicago, the band moved into a house at Lagunitas where she

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 163.

embraced the side of her that desired domesticity. She cooked communal dinners and sewed, even buying a sewing machine for costumes.<sup>147</sup> This was a struggle she dealt with throughout her career. She felt that domesticity would allow her to fit in and be the daughter her parents wanted. This was revealed earlier with her engagement to Peter de Blanc. Author Holly George-Warren argues that Joplin had also viewed this engagement as an escape from drugs which she felt related to her music career. In fulfilling this domestic role and becoming a mother, she would be safe, but this path really conflicted with her love of music.<sup>148</sup>

As Joplin became very well-known in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, Big Brother began to receive exposure from magazines such as their first interview published in the fanzine *Mojo-Navigator* in October 1966.<sup>149</sup> Joplin began to receive recognition for her talents and was periodically singled out from the band. She wrote to her parents about her fame and goals for her career. Author Holly George-Warren discusses her evolving “from being “one of the boys” in Big Brother to becoming the group’s central focus.”<sup>150</sup> She continued to struggle with her identity, and desired to be supported by her family, despite becoming the queen of the counterculture.<sup>151</sup>

Joplin began to have a major impact on representations of femininity in society. In a 1970 article by Lillian Roxon, she highlights that Janis did not fully support the Women’s Liberation Movement despite being one of the first women to really be publicly liberated. Roxon emphasizes Joplin’s fashion style, which was mostly secondhand, and did not include any elegant gowns or sequined clothing. In addition to this, she did not wear makeup, and her hair

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 179.



was usually wild and unkempt, and this style inspired many other girls of her generation.<sup>152</sup> This contrasts with what was observed of girl groups of a few years prior to Joplin's popularity. Girl groups were very conscious of creating an image of elegance and sophistication, but Joplin had more of an attitude of not caring and was much more unruly. Her version of femininity seems to have been more androgynous and fitting into the image of the beatnik and hippie cultures. Her depictions of femininity and womanhood extended beyond her style. She was a bisexual woman who had a few known relationships with women, and she was also comfortable having many sexual partners which displays ideas of dating and relationships that were not usually expected of women by society. She could also have a loud and aggressive attitude in public, which contrasts with the typical expectation of women to be well-behaved, and again displays the tensions she felt with her conflicting desire for domesticity.

Fame was also something that had become important to Janis Joplin, but this was not a sentiment she could express to hippies and others in the counterculture because it went against their values, as well as values typically expected of women. George-Warren describes her excitement about being depicted on buttons and posters because it meant people knew who she was and she even expressed this excitement to her family.<sup>153</sup> A major value of the counterculture was in rejecting the mainstream, but fame would make her part of the mainstream. This is interesting because it seems to display her desire to fit in among her peers and in the counterculture, but also her desire to make her music known.

Joplin was also able to express her creativity outside of music. In Big Brother's photoshoot with Bob Seidemann, Joplin was shot only wearing bead necklaces and a sparkly

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<sup>152</sup> Roxon, "Janis Joplin: Girl of the Electric Generation."

<sup>153</sup> George-Warren, *Janis*, 183.

black cape, and another showed her with just the beads. George-Warren writes, “The portraits came to represent a woman to whom the whole country would soon be introduced: a woman unafraid to express naked emotion onstage and in her recordings.<sup>154</sup>” She became known as “Haight-Ashbury’s first pinup” and her photos shot by Seidemann were going to be released as posters.<sup>155</sup> The image of naked emotion that George-Warren describes captures Joplin’s desire and ability to be herself. In the counterculture movement she had the freedom to create music that she wanted, and that resonated with her. She was able to be authentic and inspire others to be themselves as well.

Joplin’s desires for success and companionship would occasionally clash. During this time of her rising fame, she was in a struggling relationship with Joe McDonald from Country Joe and the Fish. Joplin was receiving a lot of attention and George-Warren writes, “She was driven and ambitious, focusing hard on her music and career rather than catering to her ‘old man.’”<sup>156</sup> After their relationship ended, she cowrote the songs “I Need a Man to Love” and “Catch Me Daddy,” both of which emphasized her emotional and powerful vocals.<sup>157</sup> In both of these songs Joplin writes about feelings of loneliness. In “I Need a Man to Love” she describes being surrounded by loneliness and needing a man to love her. This feeling is also described in “Catch Me Daddy,” where she writes about being lonely and declares “I want ya, I need ya, I gotta have ya.” These songs seem to depict her struggle with being on her own and her need for acceptance. Her relationship ended because of her career which was very important to her, but her success did not seem to keep her from feeling alone.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 194.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 195.

Joplin's success in her career continued to grow. As mentioned above, a major aspect that defined counterculture and its music was the arrival of music festivals. Big Brother and the Holding Company's powerful performance at the Monterey Pop Festival shocked audiences, much of which was not familiar with the group.<sup>158</sup> About the performance Joel Selvin who wrote *Monterey Pop* a few decades later observed, "It was as if the earth had opened up... The audience was spellbound, startled at the crude power unleashed...She [Janis] was the first real hit of the festival, a taste of what everybody had come to see." Mama Cass Elliot of the Mamas and the Papas said, "I'd heard from David Crosby about this girl from Texas who could sing her ass off. And I'd never seen anybody work without a bra before. She was sexy. It was an electrifying performance."<sup>159</sup> Joplin continued to be singled out and receive praise for her Monterey performance. Writing for *Esquire*, Robert Christgau described her as "...a good girl from Port Arthur, Texas, who may be the best rock singer since Ray Charles, with a voice that is two-thirds Willie Mae Thornton and one-third Kitty Wells...She got the only really big nonhype reaction of the weekend, based solely on her sweet, tough self." Michael Lydon for *Newsweek* wrote, "...Janis leapt, bent double, and screwed up her plain face as she sang like a demonic angel. It was the blues big mama style, tough, raw, gutsy..."<sup>160</sup> The *San Francisco Examiner* called her "the real queen of the festival," again displaying how she was singled out from the band and placing her as a central figure in the counterculture. The quotes also show that the performance was about more than just her singing. Many commented on her body as well, showing that her looks were still a focus. She was also compared to blues musicians, which were her main musical inspirations. The quotes also indicate the complexities of her identity, describing her with words

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 201.

such as “good,” “sweet,” and “tough,” showing that she was not easily put in boxes. A video of Big Brothers’ performance of “Ball and Chain” displays how emotional Joplin was, as she seems to put her whole body into the performance. She sways around the stage and stomps her feet, so she is almost coming out of her shoes, and puts so much energy into her singing. The emotion in her performance makes the viewer feel her same pleading feeling. The video also displays the power of Big Brothers’ performance, showing audience members standing with their mouths open and transfixed on the band.<sup>161</sup> The emotion and power portrayed by Joplin seem to shock the audience because her strength and toughness may not have been expected.

Joplin was well-known for her style and personality. George-Warren writes that her “...wild-woman persona overshadowed the fact that she had a keen mind.”<sup>162</sup> She began to make a new group of friends, including Linda Gravenites, who became her roommate and an important caring figure in her life; artist Robert Crumb who described Janis and her friends as “...loudmouthed, hard-drinking hippie-Okie girls, kind of tough and rough, kind of intimidating...”; and Nick Gravenites, who said Janis and her friends were “...wild and crazy, loud, hard-drinking, liberated women! They’d go out and raise hell, cussed like lumberjacks. Nobody could keep up with them.”<sup>163</sup> George-Warren also writes that “No woman had ever performed like her- or talked like her to the press.”<sup>164</sup> These quotes highlight her strong personality, and the perception that she was breaking the mold of what it meant to be a woman. She is described as wild, loud, and liberated, in ways that emphasize her individuality and desire to be herself. It is notable that she is described as acting like no women before her, which shows

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<sup>161</sup> criterioncollection, “Janis Joplin.”

<sup>162</sup> George-Warren, *Janis*, 212.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 233-234.

how she was creating a new definition of femininity, and thus serving as an inspiration to others. Her sexuality was highlighted as well, with reporter Karl Dallas writing in 1968, "...Janis Joplin, the 25-year-old ex-college drop-out who is probably the world's sexiest white female singer..." and "Lock up your sons, all you mothers, if you're not sure that they can take the full undiluted impact of Miss Janis Joplin." He declares this after commenting on her clothing and voice, observing that she wore "a micro-length dress with a neckline plunging down to the navel" as she moved around stage "like some kind of female bat about to get a kinky thrill from drinking your blood." He writes that her voice "promises unmentionable pleasures" as she threw the cape she was wearing "with the showmanship of a good stripper."<sup>165</sup> This article displays his ideas of "sexiness" in his sexualization of Joplin's revealing outfit and her bluesy voice. He highlights her voice, fashion style, and stage presence in defining her "sexiness" and warning mothers to keep their sons from her show if they could not handle her image and presence. The emphasis on her race is also important because although the author does not compare her to any specific acts, many of the musicians that she was inspired by were black. In addition, this speaks to the intersection of gender and race because it indicates a sexualization of musicians of color as well as female musicians.

Big Brother was quickly becoming one of the most famous of the counterculture groups despite the irony of a counterculture group making it into the mainstream. In 1967, the band began working with new manager Albert Grossman, who started trying to get them out of their contract with Mainstream.<sup>166</sup> Columbia Records had to spend about a quarter of a million dollars to get Big Brother out of their contract and onto Columbia's label, which was an unheard of

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<sup>165</sup> Dallas, "Janis Joplin: Lock Up Your Sons."

<sup>166</sup> George-Warren, *Janis*, 219.

amount of money to sign a band at the time,<sup>167</sup> and they officially signed with Columbia in 1968.<sup>168</sup> Under Columbia, Big Brother and the Holding Company began recording their landmark album *Cheap Thrills* with producer John Simon.

Joplin's tough attitude and dedication to her career carried over into the studio. Simon described Joplin as "...a very strong force in the studio" and said that she "definitely didn't keep quiet when she had opinions," which included many aspects of the recording and production process.<sup>169</sup> She had some conflict with Simon because of her attitude and swearing but she worked very hard. He did not see her as authentic enough because she did not improvise like many blues and jazz musicians did, but George-Warren writes that "Janis's soon-to-be iconic and influential style...was the result of much thought and practice."<sup>170</sup> This ability to speak up in the studio was different than what was observed of many girl groups, whose replaceability made them reluctant to challenge male producers. Joplin was able to be a large part of the creative process which was not a luxury that many girl groups were given. As George-Warren emphasizes, Joplin cared deeply and worked very hard on her music style, and this style was heavily influenced by black artists.

Joplin drew a lot of inspiration from black artists such as Otis Redding-- whose emotional and sexually charged performances influenced her own performing style<sup>171</sup>-- along with Etta James, Aretha Franklin, and Tina Turner. Etta James said about Joplin, "She gave me respect. When I heard her sing, I recognized my influence, but I also heard the electricity and rage in her own voice."<sup>172</sup> Black music also influenced the art for the *Cheap Thrills* album cover designed

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 266.

by Robert Crumb. George-Warren writes, that the cover art "...combined his own style with the exploitative imagery of early blues, or 'race records,' advertisements, including a 'mammy' for "Summertime" and voluptuous images of Janis, with accentuated cleavage, nipples, and hips..."<sup>173</sup> Joplin and Big Brother received criticism on the grounds that they were appropriating black music. William Kloman of the *New York Times* said Big Brother were "middle-class white kids with long blond hair pretending to be black. The whole thing comes off as bad parody, a kind of plastic soul..." while *Downbeat* called them "embarrassing blackface" and "impostering."<sup>174</sup> This displays the influence of black music on the music of the counterculture and in Joplin's life, as well as the criticisms that could draw. In addition, George-Warren points out that Big Brother was able to use exploitative imagery, but it is interesting to note the contrast with the Supremes and the Ronettes who had to focus on ideas of respectability. This displays a difference in how sexuality was accepted from white women versus women of color.

After being singled out by journalists during her time with Big Brother, Joplin would soon become a leader in her own bands. In September of 1968, after Big Brother headlined the Hollywood Bowl, Joplin signed a letter resigning from the group and set up her own organization called Fantality.<sup>175</sup> Big Brother had a few more performances together and then she formed a new group, called the Kozmic Blues Band. The band included the saxophonist Cornelius "Snooky" Flowers, who became a leader in the band. He was featured prominently, such as when they played on *Ed Sullivan*, which was notable because they were a biracial band which was uncommon for television performances at the time.<sup>176</sup> The Kozmic Blues Band played at the

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 256.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 269.

Woodstock festival early on Sunday, August 17th.<sup>177</sup> In a review of their show for *The Great Speckled Bird*, Miller Francis Junior wrote, “Joplin is less strung out, more efficient, and maybe more than a bit less exciting. Although — no matter what you think of her — she is simply one of the most exciting performers to watch and to hear. Her band is no more than a setting for her voice; it emphasizes showmanship with arrangements built around her voice.” He added, “Joplin still strains, but she does it more elegantly now with a backup group under her command. Janis has done the exact opposite of Grace Slick [of Jefferson Airplane]; she has gone off on her own, highlighted her own talents, turned her back on the spirit that arose from the California experience.”<sup>178</sup> These quotes show how she was singled out from her band, and that she was defining her role as a musician, standing out for her desire to showcase her individuality.

Despite an attitude of not caring, people’s perceptions really mattered to her. The first album from the Kozmic Blues Band called *I Got Dem Ol’ Kozmic Blues Again Mama!* debuted in October to mixed reviews, which made Joplin question her musical direction again. One review from Johanna Schier in the *Village Voice* said Joplin “was singing stronger and better...She breaks through into greatness by anyone’s standards,”<sup>179</sup> which was one of the few positive reviews for the album. A review from *Variety* observed, “Technically, the songstress is in top form and she reaches new emotional peaks. But the album as a whole doesn’t match up to its scattered but frequent high points.”<sup>180</sup> David Griffiths wrote for *Record Mirror* “It’s reminiscent of an unwanted baby screeching for attention from its pram. Pretty it ain’t. There’s passion — of a cheap sort — there. The simple conventions of declamatory, self-pitying Negro

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 276.

<sup>178</sup> Francis Jr., “Woodstock.”

<sup>179</sup> George-Warren, *Janis*, 278.

<sup>180</sup> *Variety*, “Record Reviews.”



blues are trotted out one more time. Her backing labourers sound convincingly studlike, especially when she whines for one good man.”<sup>181</sup> Griffiths use of word such as “self-pitying” and “whines” display a criticism of Joplin and of her blues influences. He makes her out to be a musician that is not serious about her work, and as desiring attention. There also seems to be a difference in perceptions from male and female journalists. Journalist Johanna Schier Hall said “I look at Janis with a feminist filter. She invented herself as this bawdy blues mama—there wasn’t anyone like her. She created herself and walked her own path, and that was difficult. There was a lot of sexism.”<sup>182</sup> This again emphasizes popular recognition of Joplin’s individuality and how she helped pave the way for future female artists. It’s important that Hall emphasizes that there was a lot of sexism in this very male-dominated music industry, and how Joplin was able to create her own identity and become an extremely successful and well-known artist in the counterculture.

Janis Joplin eventually ended the Kozmic Blues Band, and formed her last band called Full Tilt Boogie. She also began experimenting with her identity more through her fashion and desire for tattoos. Joplin was one of Lyle Tuttle’s first female clients, which inspired other women to get tattoos from him. Tuttle stated, “With women getting a newfound freedom, they could get tattooed if they so desired. For three years, I tattooed almost nothing but women.”<sup>183</sup> This emphasizes her influence outside of music and again displays how she challenged what was typical for women.

Joplin’s identity as a woman continued to be a topic that she and others grappled with. She discussed femininity while interviewing with Dick Cavett when he asked, “Why aren’t there

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<sup>181</sup> Griffiths, “Janis Joplin: I Got Dem Ol’ Kozmic Blues Again, Mama.”

<sup>182</sup> George-Warren, *Janis*, 291.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 294.

more ladies that do what you do?” and she said “It seems so natural to me. It’s not feminine, maybe...to get into the bottom side of music, the feeling of the music.”<sup>184</sup> This seems to emphasize her feeling of not belonging to a certain identity and indicates that expectations of women did not usually include being musicians. It also highlights that not many women were present in the music industry. This is further emphasized in her conversation with Bonnie Bramlett (from the duo Delaney and Bonnie) who said, “Our pain is common...It’s like a woman can understand another woman...” and “You know that a lot of people say the trouble with women is they don’t think about what they say before they say it” and Janis stated, “That’s the good thing about women, man. Because they sing they fuckin insides, man. Women to be in the music business give up more than you’d ever know. She’s got kids she gave up, any woman gives up a home life...”<sup>185</sup> This conversation highlights that women make many sacrifices to be in the music industry and that it is a very difficult industry for them to make it into, but Janis observes that many women are honest and open in their music. This also again highlights what was expected of women. They typically were not meant to be part of the music industry in a way that Joplin was because they give up the domestic life that was expected of them.

On October 3, 1970, Janis Joplin died from a heroin overdose.<sup>186</sup> On October 18 her album with the Full Tilt Boogie band, *Pearl*, was completed. The band had gone back to finish recording instrumentals after her death and it was released in January 1971.<sup>187</sup>

Joplin continued to inspire women and many female musicians.<sup>188</sup> In 1976, *Rolling Stone* published an article about Joplin that also discussed the difficulties faced by women in the music

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 298.

<sup>185</sup> *Rolling Stone*, “Janis.” 42.

<sup>186</sup> George-Warren, *Janis*, 313.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 314.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, XVII.

industry, writing that Joplin was the only woman to really break into the realm of male rock star fame. They wrote that she was "...the only Sixties culture hero to make visible and public women's experience of the quest for individual liberation, which was very different from men's." They also discuss that Joplin referred to singing as having sex and sex as liberation, which was part of rock culture and the counterculture, but that "The male-dominated counterculture defined freedom for women almost exclusively in sexual terms." The author highlights that the conflict of public personality versus private self was more of an issue for women and writes that "...women need images simply to survive. A woman is usually aware, on some level, that men do not allow her to be her "real self," and worse, that the acceptable masks represent men's fantasies, not her own."<sup>189</sup> This article emphasizes the struggles faced by women in a male dominated industry, especially in the image they are expected to portray which is not always their true self. Joplin tried to be true to herself and in that, she exposed the struggles faced by many women, in and outside of the music industry. George-Warren highlights artists such as Patti Smith, Debbie Harry, Chrissie Hynde, and others who watched Janis Joplin which impacted their future careers.<sup>190</sup> She discusses Joplin's influence on young women who saw her live saying, "It was like she was singing to or for them, telling their stories, feeling their pain, emboldening them, and absolving them of pain. Janis was a walking live nerve capable of surfacing feelings that most people couldn't or wouldn't, and she was willing to endure the toll it took on her." She emphasizes that Joplin never compromised herself or her vision, was not afraid to cross boundaries, and was criticized for wanting to leave Big Brother but did it anyway because it was holding her back.<sup>191</sup> After Joplin's death, Lillian Roxon wrote for the *Sydney*

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<sup>189</sup> *Rolling Stone*, "Janis Joplin."

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, XIV.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, XV.

*Morning Herald* that "...she was the embodiment of an ideal... the Woodstock generation" and "...at 27, she was as unlike the conventional image of a lady singer as was humanly possible."

Roxon also highlights how Joplin influenced the style and attitudes of women outside of the music industry commenting, "It so perfectly expressed their own feelings and yearnings — to be all woman and yet equal with men, to be free and yet a slave to real love; to be a living nose-thumb to every outdated convention, and yet to get back to the basics of life. When she got on stage and screamed and yelled and stamped her feet, her voice so hoarse everyone was convinced it was going to give out altogether. A generation of girls that was sick of demureness screamed and yelled and stamped with her."<sup>192</sup> Joplin embodied the spirit of the counterculture by paving her own, non-traditional route despite being in a male-dominated world and industry. She challenged what it meant to look and act like a woman, inspiring many in and outside of music. Janis Joplin would inspire many, including Patti Smith, who became a leading figure in the developing punk music movement that further embraced outsiders.

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<sup>192</sup> Roxon, "Janis Joplin: Girl of the Electric Generation."

## Chapter 3 : Punk 1975-1979

### Introduction

Punk music, a more aggressive music style, created a new space for women to become involved in the music scene. The punk scene allowed for more creative freedom which differed from girl groups and female performers of the counterculture, each of whom were still primarily held to the creative desires of their mostly male producers. The fashion style of punk also allowed women more space for self-expression and varying representations of femininity. This section draws artists from the U.S. punk scene and U.K. punk scene, which is important in displaying how those scenes differed as well as influenced each other. It also indicates how femininity was represented across different western countries.

The punk movement began in 1975, but its city of origin is debated.<sup>193</sup> Some argue that punk originated in London, while others argue that it arose in New York. In his book *Mod: From Bebop to Britpop, Britain's Biggest Youth Movement* Richard Weight writes that punk began in New York in the early 70s,<sup>194</sup> while in *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll* Gillian G. Gaar argues that 1976 was the start of the "punk revolution" and it began in Britain and later arrived in the United States.<sup>195</sup> In his article "Punk Rock," Allen F. Moore agrees with Gaar, writing that punk "...was part of a deeply contradictory movement initiated in London by Malcolm McLaren in 1975."<sup>196</sup> Malcolm McLaren had worked with the New York Dolls and formed the Sex Pistols in London in 1975,<sup>197</sup> and the formation of the Sex Pistols is largely thought of as the beginning of the punk movement.

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<sup>193</sup> Encyclopedia of Popular Music, "Punk"

<sup>194</sup> Weight, *Mod*, 244.

<sup>195</sup> Gaar, *She's A Rebel*, 189.

<sup>196</sup> Moore, "Punk Rock."

<sup>197</sup> Encyclopedia of Popular Music, "Punk"

The debate over the origins of punk relates to the question of how to categorize the predecessors of punk. Weight writes that punk was a reaction to how corporations exploited youth, previous youth movements, and the misogynistic treatment of women in youth movements. He specifically emphasizes that punk was especially critical of the artistry of prog rock and “utopianism” in the hippie movement. Weight also highlights how punk’s fashion style and musicality went back to the basics of rock music, with less of an emphasis on long solos and showing off musical talent, and less showy outfits and fashion style.<sup>198</sup> The entry in the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music* argues that punk was preceded and influenced by the “No-Wave” movement that arose in New York in the mid 1970s with bands such as the Ramones and Television.<sup>199</sup>

While the origins of punk are debated, punk all over the world largely encompassed similar ideas and characterizations. Punk was influenced by the anti-authoritarian and rebellious culture of the 50s and 60s, while also critical of some of its politics and social movements as previously mentioned. Founders such as Malcolm McLaren were impacted by the student protests in Paris in the 60s, as well as the minimalist musical sound cultivated by the Ramones as one of the founding groups in the U.S. movement.<sup>200</sup> The music of the punk movement was also characterized by aggressive instrumentation and its confrontational performance style and lyrics.<sup>201</sup> This is seen in songs such as “God Save the Queen” by the Sex Pistols with the lyrics “God save the queen/ The fascist regime”<sup>202</sup> which criticize the English monarchy, comparing it to a fascist state. Gaar highlights that punk arose from the desire to play and return to the more

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<sup>198</sup> Weight, *Mod*, 244.

<sup>199</sup> *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, “Punk”

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Moore, “Punk Rock.”

<sup>202</sup> Jones, Cook, Matlock, Lydon, “God Save the Queen.”

accessible rock music roots, as well as it focuses on starting indie labels, publishing fanzines, and the importance of hard work and drive over musical skill.<sup>203</sup> The idea of the importance of hard work rather than skill is further emphasized in the book *Revenge of the She-Punks: A Feminist Music History from Poly Styrene to Pussy Riot* by Vivien Goldman. Goldman states that “Punk was a music by and for outsiders, and technical virtuosity was irrelevant; absolute beginners were almost preferred.”<sup>204</sup> Punk music was open to anyone who had a desire to play and it “...legitimized access to an art form previously reserved for career musicians - a reaction in part to the perceived studied, detached virtuosity of the rock groups of the early and mid-70s.”<sup>205</sup> This is important because it promoted new ideas of art and creativity. One of the other values promoted by the punk movement was in shocking audiences. Some musicians would use Nazi symbolism, not to support those ideas but to shock audiences.<sup>206</sup> The use of these type of symbols in fashion and performance style were important to the image of punk as rebellious and its desire to draw attention to social issues and for a more equal society.<sup>207</sup> This is ironic because it seems that using Nazi symbolism to draw attention to inequalities in society would be the exact opposite of promoting equality and social change, but it appears that in utilizing these symbols it could shock people into beginning a conversation about these issues important to many in the punk movement. A DIY attitude was also important in the punk scene which included the development of DIY fanzines and self-promoted concerts<sup>208</sup> as well as had a major influence on the fashion of the movement.

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<sup>203</sup> Gaar, *She's a Rebel*, 190.

<sup>204</sup> Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks*, 6.

<sup>205</sup> Encyclopedia of Popular Music, “Punk”

<sup>206</sup> Weight, *Mod*, 246.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 255.

<sup>208</sup> Encyclopedia of Popular Music, “Punk”

Punk is largely thought to have originated in Britain because of the influence of the Sex Pistols in the mid-1970s. British punk incorporated issues of class disparity<sup>209</sup> and the nihilistic attitude of groups such as the Sex Pistols drew a huge following from British youth.<sup>210</sup> This nihilistic attitude also influenced experimentation in punk music.<sup>211</sup> The Sex Pistols are well-known for their shock value and confrontational attitudes as well. The band swore on television and wrote songs that challenged English authority, such as “God Save the Queen” which displayed and influenced the aggressiveness of punk and desire to draw a reaction.<sup>212</sup>

Although many British punk bands, including the Sex Pistols, were inspired by American bands, the sound of British punk differed from American punk because many groups wanted to move away from the “Americanization” of rock. British artists were using American accents and writing about U.S. cities and punk wanted to move away from this.<sup>213</sup> Richard Weight discusses how British punk drew influences from the 60s mod music and subculture, known for bands such as the Kinks and the Who, which was one of the reasons it differed from American punk. He also argues that this is a reason that punk was popular in Britain, at a time when American culture was very influential, but British punk had its own distinct characteristics.<sup>214</sup>

Punk music also allowed for more female representation than previous movements because of the attitude of the movement. Gaar writes, “...with all the rules being broken, even if sometimes only for the sake of breaking them, women for the first time found it easy to join in the new movement from the start and be just as involved as their male counterparts.”<sup>215</sup> Punk

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<sup>209</sup> Weight, *Mod*, 245.

<sup>210</sup> Encyclopedia of Popular Music, “Punk”

<sup>211</sup> Moore, “Punk Rock.”

<sup>212</sup> Encyclopedia of Popular Music, “Punk”

<sup>213</sup> Weight, *Mod*, 252.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, 251-252.

<sup>215</sup> Gaar, *She's a Rebel*, 190.



was more of a feminist movement with more female-led groups than previous youth movements,<sup>216</sup> but despite this, male punks did not always agree with female liberation through the movement; for example, the bassist from the band the Nipple Erectors remembers their cords at gigs being cut by sound men or being attacked by skinheads, and feeling like she had to play better than the men to be accepted.<sup>217</sup>

Punk still opened many doors for women to create a place for themselves in the music industry, and this also coincided with the passage of new laws. In 1974 in the United Kingdom, a Sex Discrimination Act was passed which protected female workers, and there was a female factory worker strike in North London which Goldman writes, "...helped politicize a generation and galvanize a movement."<sup>218</sup> In addition, in 1976, a Domestic Violence Act was passed in the UK.<sup>219</sup>

In the United States, the country was in the midst of the second wave feminist movement that began in the 1960s. In the 1970s, court cases and laws were passed that were pivotal to expanding women's rights, such as the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that protected abortion rights. During this time, new women's organizations addressing the concerns of black women and other women of color began to form. This included the Combahee River Collective, a black feminist organization formed in 1974, which also began discussions of sexuality that had not been present in many of the other women's organizations. Second-wave feminism is known for its internal division over the place of various groups including women of color and LGBTQ+ women, and this wave of the feminist movement began to die out toward the end of the decade

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<sup>216</sup> Weight, *Mod*, 250.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, 251.

<sup>218</sup> Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks*, 24.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

because of its various divisions.<sup>220</sup> Overall, this suggests that in both the U.K. and U.S., women's lives were changing in the eyes of the law and the wider culture, and those changes were reflected in music as well.

Punk music allowed women to explore their identities in ways that previous movements had not. Shifting notions of gender identity raised new questions about what makes music feminine.<sup>221</sup> Goldman highlights Poly Styrene, the frontwoman for the U.K. band X-Ray Spex, writing, "Artists like the world's first black punk, the mixed-race Poly Styrene with frizzy hair and braces, would likely have been deemed unfuckable, thus unmarketable, by the old-school record industry. Yet with her ear for a hook, incisive wit, and expansive political and spiritual consciousness, she immediately became one of punk's great sheroes, her unfettered howl shattering the idea that girls had to sing prettily to be heard."<sup>222</sup> In a performance of X-Ray Spex's song "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!," Poly Styrene exemplifies this comment. She begins the song by stating, "Little girls should be seen and not heard" then shouts, "Oh bondage! Up yours!" and launches into the song, shouting the lyrics and making the listener experience her desire to not be held back by a consumerist, patriarchal society.<sup>223</sup> Poly Styrene represented and voiced the question of identity and where to fit in,<sup>224</sup> but this question of identity was present for most women in punk. Goldman writes, "All these punk women, however, had more space to try identities on for size till they found the right fit"<sup>225</sup> and emphasizes the importance of the concept of identity politics, which had just recently been developed, in women's thinking.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> National Women's History Museum, "Feminism: The Second Wave."

<sup>221</sup> Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks*, 125.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>223</sup> robbanzana, "X-Ray Spex."

<sup>224</sup> Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks*, 21.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

Women's place in society and within the music industry continued to be a complicated issue during the punk movement. Goldman discusses women's identity alongside men in mainstream British society and how this society still tended to view women's success and happiness as tied to the men in their lives.<sup>227</sup> In 1979, she observed that in her interviews with women musicians, they discussed their emotions more than men did, which, she states, is because they were socialized to express their feelings. She also discusses power relations and women having to work independently and pave their own way.<sup>228</sup> Goldman discusses their place and struggles within the music industry, writing that while women were using punk to face challenges, they still struggled to make the music they wanted to.<sup>229</sup> She continues to comment on the male gaze and women's challenges in the music industry stating, "We [women] must make a place in a market manipulated to pander to the clichéd male gaze; find a voice for our feelings. When we've never heard anyone sound the way we hear in our head; break generations of our family's female mode of being; construct new forms of family and effective motherhood; position ourselves within the newly possible flexing of gender experimentation and fight for the right to do so. All this while adapting to changing projections of girly sexuality, from 1950s repression to the free love, polyamorous flirtations of the 1960s, '70s, and early '80s..."<sup>230</sup> Along with the struggle for women to be accepted in music, this struggle was further experienced by women of color.<sup>231</sup> In her book, Goldman includes a quote from Phanie Diaz (from the band Fea) about Alicia Velasquez (of the group the Bags), stressing the importance of seeing a woman of color on stage because it influences others to join bands and shows that anyone can.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 51.

Another major aspect of punk is in its handling of relationships and sexuality. Goldman discusses the presence of “unlove” songs instead of the typical “love” songs that existed in music. She writes, “...when punk began in the mid-1970s, it was an invigorating yet confusing time for sexuality. Love songs were perceived in the counterculture as being a bit weedy and wet; unlove songs were the way to go.”<sup>233</sup> This displays changing ideas of love and relationships. In addition, in her comment that sexuality in the 1970s was “an invigorating yet confusing time” it seems that this could be in relation to the feminist movements in the U.S. and U.K. and their fights for women’s expressions of sexuality such as with the *Roe v. Wade* case in the U.S., and the LGBTQ+ movements that were also occurring. Goldman writes that in punk, people were not usually in relationships and sex was more casual, non-judgmental, and with friends: “Sex, punk style, suggests a quick, messy encounter—having it off in club toilets or groggy squats, as most punks did not have deluxe accommodation.”<sup>234</sup> This theme in punk music and attitudes reflect how notions of domesticity and relationships, even in mainstream society, were changing at the time, although this was not necessarily without backlash.<sup>235</sup> Identity is also intertwined in the punk idea of relationships. Goldman discusses questions about what to sacrifice and how to create a community and establish an identity in conjunction to relationships. “If you don’t recognize yourself,” she writes, “love is harder to find; you don’t know who might fit.”<sup>236</sup> She also states that “As punk is a loose collective of different people united in being deemed outsiders by conventional standards...some degree of alienation is the default mode of punk love.”<sup>237</sup> These ideas highlight the changing attitudes in punk about love and relationships and

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 90-91.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 95-96.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 139-140.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 94.

how to represent that in music, especially for women. Through analyzing U.S. punk poet and musician Patti Smith, and U.K. punk band the Slits, and their ideas and representations of femininity as punk musicians, I will be able to understand how ideas of femininity changed or remained consistent in music.

### **Patti Smith**

Patti Smith was a monumental figure in the emerging punk scene in the 1970s. She represented punk's connection to "outsiders," and influenced many other punk acts. She was a leading figure in establishing the New York venue CBGB as a hub for punk music. She was born in Chicago but grew up mostly in Pennsylvania and New Jersey where she developed a love for reading. Smith recalls being ridiculed and lonely in school, so she immersed herself in books and music. After high school, she began attending teachers' college and worked at a factory in the summer.<sup>238</sup> In July 1967, when she was 20 years old, Smith left her home in south New Jersey to escape to New York City and pursue art.<sup>239</sup> For a few years, she was employed at bookstores and other places around the city. At the same time, she was working on art and writing while meeting other artists, musicians, and poets, some of the pop art, counterculture, and emerging punk scenes. She also eventually began writing songs and more poems as well as reviews for rock magazines such as *Crawdaddy*, *Circus*, and *Rolling Stone*.<sup>240</sup> She began thinking about performing her poetry, and wanted especially to perform at the Poetry Project, an organization founded in 1966 to provide a space for people to share their work in the community, and with the

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<sup>238</sup> Smith, *Just Kids*, 4-12.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

idea that local cultural action can change society.<sup>241</sup> Her friend and occasional romantic and creative partner, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, helped her get a gig opening for poet Gerard Malenga's reading. This took place at St. Mark's Church on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1971, with Lenny Kaye accompanying her reading on electric guitar.<sup>242</sup> This was her first public reading and the first time an electric guitar had been played at St. Mark's.<sup>243</sup> She writes that this reading helped connect her more in the rock music community, and some of her poems were published in the magazine *Creem*. Patti Smith's reading was also attended by writer Sandy Pearlman, who then began to discuss his visions for her future, which included fronting a rock band.<sup>244</sup> She continued working on writing and singing. Pearlman introduced her to Allen Lanier, who was in a band that would become Blue Öyster Cult, so that he could help her with her songwriting, and she could write songs for his band.<sup>245</sup>

In 1973, after being in New York for about six years, she began working with publicist Jane Friedman, who helped schedule more poetry readings for her, including booking her to open for bands such as the New York Dolls. Smith writes that the crowds were not very receptive though, it seems because they were there to see a rock band, and she writes that she was there without any musicians, and accompanied only by a tape recorder, megaphone, and toy piano.<sup>246</sup> In July of that year, she performed a reading in memory of Jim Morrison, which she headlined. There was a large audience, including writer and musician Lenny Kaye, and Jane Friedman wanted her to work more with him, as she thought they could expand their audience.<sup>247</sup> Towards

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<sup>241</sup> The Poetry Project, "About."

<sup>242</sup> Smith, *Just Kids*, 180-181.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 219.

the end of the year, on the anniversary of the death of the poet Arthur Rimbaud (who had been a major influence on Smith's life and writing from the time she stole a copy of *Illuminations* when she was sixteen),<sup>248</sup> she gave her first "Rock and Rimbaud" performance, where she worked with Kaye again, along with pianist Bill Elliott. Inspired by the large audience, they realized that they could go somewhere with their performances.<sup>249</sup> Smith and Kaye began opening for the folk singer Phil Ochs at Max's Kansas City in December, marking their first extended job as performers.<sup>250</sup> In 1974, they added Richard Sohl on piano, which helped improve their performances,<sup>251</sup> and the group completed their first recording, "Hey Joe" in honor of Jimi Hendrix at his Electric Lady studio.<sup>252</sup> They also recorded her poem "Piss Factory," which Smith describes as a personal anthem about her escape from working in a factory, and she and Kaye designed their record on a label they created called Mer. They pressed 1,500 copies of "Hey Joe" and sold them at gigs. The B-side of the record was "Piss Factory" which was more popular than their recording of "Hey Joe."<sup>253</sup> In 1975 they began performing at CBGB (a music venue founded in New York City in 1973 and becoming well known for featuring punk musicians such as the Ramones)<sup>254</sup> with the band Television and also played a few gigs around California. When the group returned to New York, they began looking for a guitarist, but many of the people who auditioned did not like that a woman was the leader of the band. This indicates that Smith was challenging what was expected of women because she was taking on a role as a leader and

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 241.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 242.

<sup>254</sup> CBGB, "About Us."

making decisions for the band. They eventually hired guitarist Ivan Kral,<sup>255</sup> signed with Arista Records and added Jay Dee Daugherty on drums.<sup>256</sup>

1975 was also the year that Patti Smith and her band began recording the album *Horses*<sup>257</sup> which was released late that year.<sup>258</sup> The cover of *Horses* had a major impact. Gaar writes, “The cover itself (photographed by [Robert] Mapplethorpe) made it clear Smith was no ordinary female singer: skinny, dressed in jeans and white shirt with a tie draped around her neck, Smith faced the camera with a defiant, uncompromising stare. Her commanding, androgynous presence presented a view of a female performer that hadn’t been seen on a record cover before, and the music on the record was just as striking.”<sup>259</sup> Smith’s look was also frequently compared to Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones. *Rolling Stone* wrote about her in 1975 as “...looking like a female Keith Richard (and wearing a Keith Richard T-shirt), she exudes an inimitable aura of tough street punk and mystic waif, in whose skinny, sexy person...”<sup>260</sup> This indicates that sexiness was still a trait that was desired among artists, but also seems to show that ideas of sexiness were changing to something more androgynous. In an interview for *Crawdaddy!*, the author writes that she was “...a cross between Keith Richards and Mia Farrow; an omniseual high priestess careening freely between the genders, elevating rock'n'roll into incantation.”<sup>261</sup> Smith addresses her androgyny and punk attitude in this interview as well stating, “People like to look at me as this tough, punky shit-kicker. Well, I am like that... but I'm also very fragile. It's important that people know that; I couldn't stand being just

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>258</sup> Gaar, *She's a Rebel*, 196.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> *Rolling Stone*, “Other End.”

<sup>261</sup> Shapiro, “Patti Smith: Somewhere, Over the Rimbaud.”



some leather boy. There are masculine and feminine rhythms in me. We're all made up of opposites, and they often crucify us, but I deal with that by accepting the bad stuff. I don't feel guilty or stupid because of my weaknesses..."<sup>262</sup> Her comment displays that she sees herself as more complex than many of the Keith Richards comparisons give her credit for. This feeling also elicits comparisons to Janis Joplin who exuded a tough personality but had a sensitive side as well.

Patti Smith was frequently compared to other performers and her sexuality was emphasized in interviews and reviews. In an article in *Phonograph Record*, Mitchell Cohen writes, "FOR SOME OF US, Patti Smith is the girl of our rock and roll dreams. As a performer she doesn't merely flirt with danger, she seduces it, trying at the same time to be both audacious and ingratiating, to challenge an audience and win it over."<sup>263</sup> In this quote, Cohen is displaying how the male gaze defines femininity in rock music. The use of the word "girl" implies a sense of youth and innocence, but this is combined with the sexuality of rock and roll which he displays with his use of the word's "flirt" and "seduces." He also discusses her sexuality as a performer, writing, "...Patti is, above all, a very sexual performer. She's a turn-on musically; her songs, like her poems, build on repetitious, steadily escalating rhythms, based on what seem like intense, intimate breathing patterns rising to a crescendo: This regular rising momentum is part of what makes her provocative." Cohen compares her to male performers: "...Patti Smith is not Marlon Brando by any means, but she has some of his instinct. And any rock singer, especially female, who invites even tangential comparisons to such figures as Brando and Godard, as well as Kerouac, Coltrane and any number of rock influences, is someone who must be preserved and

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Cohen, "Patti Smith: Avery Fisher Hall, NYC."

encouraged.”<sup>264</sup> This shows that he took her more seriously because he sees influences from male artists in her performances, also indicating that if she was not able to be compared to male artists, she might not have been praised. In a 1976 performance of “Horses” and “Hey Joe,” her sexuality seems to be represented in the performance of her lyrics. She sounds as if the words are being forced out of her and they are expressed with an intensity<sup>265</sup> that the journalist Cohen seems to hint at. In her book, Vivien Goldman also discusses Smith’s style, writing, “The radical newness of her downbeat, un-girly-girl image would remain her “look” and be a consistent aesthetic foil for Madonna’s decades of frisky ego games.”<sup>266</sup> These comments from Goldman suggest that Patti Smith presented femininity in an original way. Her descriptions of Smith’s “downbeat” and “un-girly-girl” image emphasize journalist’s comments about Smith’s androgynous image and set her apart as a sort of “outsider.” In a 1975 interview, Smith is asked about these divisions: “Smith scratches her head and the creative process takes off once more. She dismisses any talk of androgynous appeal by citing Jagger as rock’s first two-way trouble shooter and jumps into words from a poem called ‘Beyond Gender’. ‘I’m totally vulnerable as a girl,’ she admitted. ‘But when you’re doing art you have no time for divisions. I don’t want to start with exclusions...’ ‘Like I don’t want to be anything yet. People say, are you a rock poetess, a girl singer, a rock singer? I’m not anything.’”<sup>267</sup> Here Smith is offering a critique of the standards faced by many women in the music industry, and the widespread conceptions of sexuality in rock music. Also, writing the poem “Beyond Gender” reflects changes in the 1970s

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Leonardo, “PATTI SMITH.”

<sup>266</sup> Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks*, 56.

<sup>267</sup> Katz, “Patti Smith: Poetry In Motion.”

of people being able to express their gender and sexuality in ways that did not necessarily fit into typical binary stereotypes.

Into the later '70s, Smith's popularity progressed unevenly. In 1976, the Patti Smith Group's second album, *Radio Ethiopia*, was released but was not as well received as *Horses*. In 1978, the album *Easter* was released which included the single "Because the Night." Smith remembers first hearing "Because the Night" blasting out of record stores and the song eventually reached number 13 on the Top 40 charts.<sup>268</sup>

In a review of *Easter* in *Rolling Stone*, the author calls Patti "the mother of punk rock" and also writes, "On the LP's best track, "Because the Night," written with Bruce Springsteen, Smith stakes out her own turf as the first female rock & roller: she doesn't owe anything to folk music and very little to blues."<sup>269</sup> This quote indicates a sense of originality and that she does not seem to draw influence from the folk and blues genres. In previous interviews though, Smith had discussed the major influence from other genres and especially black musicians. In a 1975 interview she stated, "'Little Richard... was a big part of my life as a kid. It was really important especially in high school cause I was a great dancer. One of the reasons I was so bad in school was because I was up all night dancing, mimicking.

'I can mimic every Marvelettes Record. I got all their hand gestures down... That's where I got a lot of the stage motions I use now... 'I remember when Ben E. King played at the Airport Drive In and taught me and 400 other kids how to do The Monkey. He introduced us to Little Stevie Wonder. He carried him onstage like a little monkey on his back, and everyone went nuts. Smokey Robinson did 'Mickey's Monkey' and Ben E. King, who had done 'Spanish Harlem',

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<sup>268</sup> Smith, *Just Kids*, 258.

<sup>269</sup> *Rolling Stone*, "Can Patti Smith Walk on Water?."

started doing this dance. And like the next day, The Monkey had wiped out South Jersey. ‘At that time, it was all James Brown, all black. I didn't like white music. It was either John Coltrane or Smokey Robinson. We didn't have no time for the Beach Boys or the Beatles. ‘CEPT when Jagger came out. Then, I was happy to be white. There was nothing like him.’”<sup>270</sup> This shows how she was heavily influenced by black music, similar to Janis Joplin. She also views Mick Jagger with a similar music style to the black artists she liked. These quotes also indicate that dances and music from black artists had a major influence on Smith and many other young people, but this was sometimes overlooked, and Smith was credited as something completely original.

Patti Smith was heavily influenced by black artists but was sometimes seen as taking advantage of this influence. The author of a 1976 interview also wrote, “New York warms to the enigma. Smith has a cult following hanging on her every word in the sort of clubs where she most often performs – small, smokey and sexually-confused. Her biggest fans are the critics, who have struggled gamely with the task of coining a succinct description of her. She has been called 'a pouting fru-fru', 'a foxy strutting bitch' and the embodiment of all the elements of womanhood from 'earth-mother to dyke', but Smith dismisses such earth-bound definitions with a muttered expletive. ‘Poets should be beyond gender, beyond race – like up there, in the stars, looking down. Me, I'm part women, part black, part genius, part idiot. I'm blasphemous, religious, dirty, innocent, funny and dumb. I've always had this rag-pickers aesthetic – wanting to be all things, not just one.’”<sup>271</sup> She also received criticism for her comments about and use of black music. In a review of her album *Easter*, one listener criticized her for stating she can use a

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<sup>270</sup> Katz, “Patti Smith: Poetry In Motion.”

<sup>271</sup> Brown, “Patti Smith: Part Woman, Part Black, Part Genius, Part Idiot...”

slur because words can be “redefined,” stating, “As a black man, I still get sick and tired of the crass, condescending racism of some white musicians, no matter how “talented”—like Patti Smith.”<sup>272</sup> Patti Smith, like Janis Joplin, utilized techniques she learned from black artists which inspired her portrayal of femininity. Smith’s comment about being “part black” is interesting because she is not part black, but this indicates her feeling of connection to black music. This also displays the observations made by the listener who criticized her album because she is taking advantage of an identity that she is not part of. This shows how white women could use other identities to express femininity, and largely be celebrated, but this was more difficult for women of color to do.

### The Slits

The influence of Patti Smith on the Slits and their representation of punk in the United Kingdom make them an interesting comparison to Smith. They display the different music and fashion styles in U.K. punk and are a pivotal group in that scene. The Slits embodied more of the stereotypical traits of punk than Patti Smith because of their fashion style and attitudes, but Smith was an inspiration for many in punk. In her memoir, Viv Albertine remembers reading about Smith’s 1975 album *Horses* in the magazine *NME* and being inspired by it. She writes, “I have never seen a girl that looks like this. She is my soul made visible, all the things I hide deep inside myself that can’t come out. She looks natural, confident, sexy and an individual. I don’t want to dress like her or copy her style; she gives me the confidence to express myself in my own way.”<sup>273</sup> Albertine was also inspired by the sexuality of *Horses*, writing that she realized

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<sup>272</sup> *Rolling Stone*, “Patti Smith.”

<sup>273</sup> Albertine, *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes*, 79.

that "...girls' sexuality can be on their own terms, for their own pleasure or creative work, not just for exploitation or to get a man."<sup>274</sup> The Slits formed in London in 1976 with their lineup consisting of Arianna Forster (Ari Up) on vocals, Suzi Gutsy on bass (soon replaced by Tessa Pollitt), Kate Korus on guitar (replaced by Viv Albertine in 1977), and Palmolive on drums, who would leave to join the Raincoats in 1978.<sup>275</sup>

Albertine writes about seeing the Sex Pistols and being inspired that she could also make it in music because they showed that you could make it by being yourself. She says that before she watched them, she had "...always thought that my particular set of circumstances – poor, North London, comprehensive school, council flat, *girl* – haven't equipped me for success."<sup>276</sup> She began playing guitar at twenty-two with no prior music lessons or experience and everyone she knew that played was male.<sup>277</sup> She was also in a relationship with Mick Jones of the Clash, but she did not want to be an exclusive couple because she did not want to be seen as 'Mick's girlfriend.' She wrote, "Mick can play guitar, he's been in bands before. He's a bloke. He doesn't have to prove himself like I do."<sup>278</sup> These quotes emphasize how hard women had to work in the music industry just to be taken seriously, prompting many to try to be independent from male musicians. To further emphasize this, Albertine states, "Expressing myself through the guitar is a very difficult concept to grasp. I don't want to copy any male guitarists, I wouldn't be true to myself if I did that. I can't copy Lita Ford from the Runaways or the guitarist from Fanny: they don't sound like women, they sound like men. I keep thinking, 'What would I sound like if I was a guitar sound?' It's so abstract."<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>275</sup> Gaar, *She's a Rebel*, 201.

<sup>276</sup> Albertine, *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes*, 86.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 104.

The fashion in the punk movement was probably one of its most notable aspects. The clothing and hairstyles were meant to shock audiences and Albertine remembers that being one of the goals of her fashion and art style. She describes how sex was an easy way to shock audiences. She would wear small, slashed up clothes, fishnets, pink boots from the store Sex, and had bleached, matted hair, commenting that she had "...crossed the line from 'sexy wild girl just fallen out of bed' to 'unpredictable, dangerous, unstable girl'. Not so appealing."<sup>280</sup> This contrasts slightly with Patti Smith because Smith's use of fashion was shocking in the sense that it was more androgynous, but the Slits' use of fashion was shocking because it was intentionally chaotic and messy. Albertine's observation displays the attitude of punk as being for outsiders and its ability to make people uncomfortable because it differs so far from mainstream culture. It also shows how they used sexuality to make people uncomfortable because they would go so far beyond what was considered "feminine" and "sexy." The store Sex was owned by Vivien Westwood and Malcolm McLaren and was a vital piece of the punk scene. Albertine writes, "Vivienne and Malcolm use clothes to shock, irritate and provoke a reaction but also to inspire change. Mohair jumpers, knitted on big needles, so loosely that you can see all the way through them, T-shirts slashed and written on by hand, seams and labels on the outside, showing the construction of the piece; these attitudes are reflected in the music we make. It's OK not to be perfect, to show the workings of your life and your mind in your songs and your clothes..."<sup>281</sup>

Viv Albertine has discussed being a feminist, and how it influenced her music, but she has also mentioned disliking the Slits being singled out because they are women in the music industry. In 1977, Viv Albertine was asked to join the Slits as a bassist, but originally turned the

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 111-112.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 130-131.

offer down because she wanted to play lead guitar and did not want to be in an all-girl band. She wrote, "...I said, 'It's gimmicky and tokenistic being in an all-girl band, isn't it?' ...I read a lot about feminism and I'm a feminist, apply it to everything I think and do, but I don't want to be labelled in any way."<sup>282</sup> This seems to indicate some internalized misogyny because of how she views women in bands. In her fear of being labelled, she is labelling the band as "tokenistic" because of ideas of where women should be represented in the music industry. Later Albertine watched the Slits perform and was inspired by Palmolive's drumming and Ari's singing and realized she wanted to be part of the band and eventually replaced Kate Korus on guitar. She writes that she wanted boys to watch them play and want to be them and part of their band.<sup>283</sup> This contrasts with the typical process of women being inspired by men in the industry because they did not have as many heroes to look up to.

Viv Albertine talks about being inspired by the Slits' very influential frontwoman Ari Up, who was the youngest in the band at fifteen, and received the most hatred from critics and audiences. She writes about Ari Up not caring about what boys thought and that the way she dressed and acted was for herself. Albertine wrote, "...I'm constantly questioning stereotyping through my work but I'm still enslaved by the stereotype of femininity in my mind...In these times, when girls are so uptight and secretive about their bodies and desperately trying to be 'feminine', she is a revolutionary."<sup>284</sup> Ari also received the most hatred from people, including being stabbed twice. Viv Albertine wrote that "Being attacked, spat at, sworn at and laughed at is part of all our lives, but I think Ari's especially brave. Being so young, she is more vulnerable

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 154, 156-157.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 164.



but she never hides away, or adapts her clothes and behaviour to protect herself.”<sup>285</sup> She was attacked by people outside of the punk movement who disliked and did not understand it. Up’s self-expression threatened the expected ideas of gender, but she refused to back down and be defined.

In 1977, when the Slits were opening on the Clash’s 1977 *White Riot* tour, they experienced many difficulties and judgements. The tour bus driver gave them dirty looks, which Albertine states was typical of men they encountered, and he had to be bribed by their tour manager Don Letts to allow them to stay on the bus.<sup>286</sup> They were also not welcomed in many of the hotels because of their clothes and wild personalities, and frequently had to stay in a different hotel than the rest of the male acts. Albertine wrote, “No one must see us. We do not exist. Everywhere we go, we’re treated like we’re a threat to national security.”<sup>287</sup>

The Slits were redefining what it meant to be women in the music industry. About their performances on the *White Riot* tour Viv Albertine writes, “Most of the audience have never seen girls play before, let alone with the fuck-off attitude we’ve got. Lots of people come just to have a look at us and cause trouble. They think ‘punk’ is an excuse to let their frustrations out in a violent, non-creative way...”<sup>288</sup> Albertine is pointing out that the Slits embodied the punk attitude of being yourself, but people would often take advantage of this. For the Slits, the punk movement was a way for them to express and be comfortable with themselves but others who did not understand the movement used it as an excuse for violence. Vivien Goldman also wrote a review of one of their performances on this tour and commented, “Arianna sings lead in a black

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 177.

leather mini-skirt with de rigueur runs in her black fishnet tights. She's as winsome a brat onstage as she is offstage, stamping her foot and chiding us for bein' silly when we clap even though we don't understand the songs. She moves FREE in a way I haven't clocked since Patti Smith was in town, and it's exciting to watch. Palmolive drums fanatically (does that include like a fan?) For a first-ever gig, it was outstanding. See them AS SOON AS YOU CAN.”<sup>289</sup> Goldman’s reactions display how the Slits were changing how women could act in the music industry, and that this brought a new excitement to music. Writer Caroline Coon also reviewed their performance on the tour writing, “Ari Up and the Slits are highly defined examples of an ideal type that is becoming more attractive to women all the time. What they represent is a revolutionary and basic shift of female ego from one which is biologically defined to one which is made strong by an assertive, mainstream role in society. Thus they are far more 'threatening' than the male musicians they are touring with. At their most outrageous, the antics of male rock stars are only traditional expressions of male aggression and delinquency. An inconvenience but hardly a fundamental threat to the established way of life – as over twenty five years of wrecked hotel rooms will testify. The Slits however, without giving up their capacity to be warm, emotional people, are fighting for power, independence and recognition for their ideas and what they do. They are driving a coach and various guitars straight through a cornerstone of society – the concept of The Family and female domesticity.”<sup>290</sup> Coon points out how the Slits were redefining what it meant to be women in the music industry as well as redefining broader ideas of femininity. They were confident and powerful and actively breaking down barriers for women and creating a space for women to be represented outside of a domestic life.

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<sup>289</sup> Goldman, “The Clash etc: Harlesden's Burning.”

<sup>290</sup> Coon, “The Slits.”

Similar to other women in music, the Slits' femininity was a frequent subject in interviews and reviews. In a review in *ZigZag*, the author commented "The Slits are out on their own, proving almost singlehandedly that girls can form a group and play hard, vital music without relying on their attributes to get away with musical murder" and "...There've been girl members in male groups but never before has a group of girls like this come along and threatened the male domination of rock. It's no novelty with The Slits... they just happen to be girls. They've got more spirit and enthusiasm than most male rock bands I've met, and can thrash out a sound that has nothing to do with any of them..."<sup>291</sup> The use of the word "girl" in contrast with "male" indicates an idea of what was considered "serious" in music. "Girl" implies that they were young and inexperienced compared to the more developed "male." In another review of a performance with Subway Sect, author Jane Suck commented, "It's funny because I loved the Slits who were on before the Sect. I love the very fact those girls exist — and they are girls, real girls..."<sup>292</sup> In addition, in an interview with *NME*, the author commented that "THE SLITS may well have the most disorientatingly bedazzling collective visual of any group going right now. Yet having seen the group live some seven or eight times in their two years existence, the full sense-swerving visual impact was only truly forced home to me when one day last spring I chanced to witness the foursome walking down Oxford Street, causing all other pedestrians to step back in a heated display of awe, disgust and fear" displaying how they were shocking to mainstream audiences because their portrayal of femininity did not fit typical ideas. The author continues, writing, "Yeah, that was more like it: total sensory disorientation... The Slits — with their colours aloft — imperiously blazing a trail of chaotic collective resolve — immaculately

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<sup>291</sup> Needs, "The Slits."

<sup>292</sup> Suck, "Subway Sect/The Slits: Music Machine, Camden, London."

bedraggled in the territory of Lipstick Vogue a gogo, temps, secretaries, cheese-cloth blouses, and simpering femininity in full facile bloom.”<sup>293</sup> These comments display the impact they had as women in the music industry and their connection to punk as trailblazers who did not care how they were perceived. They were authentic and creating a space for people to express themselves.

The Slits were able to control how they were portrayed, which was new for many women in the music industry. In 1979, the Slits signed with Island Records and began recording their album *Cut*.<sup>294</sup> The label assigned photographer Dennis Morris to create their record cover, which he wanted to be pink with zips and rips, but Viv Albertine said that did not reflect who the Slits were, or their music, and she argued with him when he said he wanted to use a wind machine for their photos. In the end, the band had been given creative control, so they were able to cultivate the image they wanted.<sup>295</sup> In her memoir, Albertine discusses when the band was photographing the cover for *Cut*. She remembered feeling comfortable with their female photographer Pennie Smith and the Slits decided to take some nude photographs which they said they would not have done with a male photographer.<sup>296</sup>

On *Cut*, the band both embraced and commented on ideas of femininity. Albertine writes that they incorporated concepts from playground songs into their songs because that is the experience with music that they and other girls grew up with. She writes, “Of course we’re going to be derided by people who haven’t heard music used in this way before, played by a bunch of wild, scruffy girls: new things are often threatening or considered frivolous and take a while to

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<sup>293</sup> Kent, “Girl Trouble with The Slits.”

<sup>294</sup> Albertine, *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes*, 209.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid*, 223.

sink in.”<sup>297</sup> Their use of playground songs show how they utilized typical ideas and experiences of femininity, but they were also doing this in a new way that people may not have understood. Albertine points out that they were doing this as “wild, scruffy girls” noting that new things scare people, which displays how they were reclaiming and challenging feminine ideas. The group recorded “Typical Girls” for this album, and it was written by Albertine. She comments that “Ari got ‘Typical Girls’ immediately; that I was taking the piss out of all the expectations and clichés...”<sup>298</sup> In reviewing the album and interviewing the group for *Sounds* the author emphasizes the ironies present in the album with the cover displaying the group naked and he comments that, “The content of the songs too was interesting, ‘Spend Spend Spend’, ‘Shoplifting’ and ‘Typical Girls’ for example each hinting at a kind of psychosis in the band’s songwriting. The songs are self-consciously anti-feminine. They reveal a solid consciousness of typical female activities (like shopping) and revel in a sort of gleeful, pathological, you could say middle-class rebellion (like shoplifting) against those very activities. The Slits castigate these ‘norms’ of female behaviour while at the same time going into such detail (like the shopping or portrayal of boyfriend/girlfriend romance situations) that suggests they are in some way inadequate or frustrated or incomplete because of their consciousness of these situations.”<sup>299</sup> This contrasts slightly with Albertine’s view of their songs because she saw them commenting on the ridiculousness of female expectations. The journalist seems to pick up on this but also sees them as still being defined by these feminine norms in a way. In another review the author writes, “What’s the record like? It sounds like The Slits! It’s restrained, tough, deliciously melodic in places (harmonies and other vocal surprises all over the place, regular mine-field of pleasures

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 232-233.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>299</sup> McCullough, “The Slits: Awkward in Interviews, Awkward in Life.”

both subtle and brash), funny, intoxicating...The playing's... I wouldn't call it great because I'm not sure what that means any more; I'd say the playing was right though..."<sup>300</sup> displaying how the Slits were their authentic selves on this album. In having control over the creative process of the album, they were able to portray their femininity in a way that best represented them.

As one of the pioneering bands in punk, the Slits were an inspiration for many other female musicians. Vivien Goldman highlights Gina Birch of the Raincoats, writing "...for Gina Birch, seeing the Slits, West London white girls with dreadlocks and perfectly imperfect outfits, perform their off-kilter, dub-infused, reckless music was just such an epiphany. That is what I want to do, she thought. This is it."<sup>301</sup> They were also an inspiration for many in the Riot Grrrl movement in the 1990s. Goldman quotes Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill writing, "Hanna explains, 'It wasn't just like they were girls in a rock band doing it like the guys; it didn't sound the same. They pushed things to another level; they weren't going to play like the guy bands. They schooled us'"<sup>302</sup> revealing that the Slits created a space for future female artists to be able to express themselves and challenge what music and femininity meant.

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<sup>300</sup> Dadomo, "One Day, All Girls Will Be Made This Way: The Slits: Cut (Island)"

<sup>301</sup> Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks*, 28.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

## Conclusion

My goal has been to explore how ideas of femininity changed or remained consistent in representations throughout three genres in rock music- girl groups, counterculture, and punk.

The first chapter was an analysis of girl group music from 1960-1964. This section highlighted the main characteristics of girl group music, including their construction, main themes in the music, and the role of songwriters and producers. In addition, the section emphasized the role of race and class in shaping girl group music's representation of the complexities of girls' identities. This chapter focused on the differing roles that the Supremes and the Ronettes played in the girl group genre's representation of femininity. As women of color, race was tied into their experiences, and this dimension further shaped the genre's handling of the dual quests for respectability and sexual expression. I argued that the Supremes and the Ronettes embodied these ideas on different sides of the spectrum, with the Supremes considered more on the respectable side and the Ronettes more on the side of overt sexual expression. I noted the importance of race in this conversation, as women of color felt special pressure to be more conscious of how they were expressing their sexuality in order to still be seen as sophisticated and respectable. In the analysis of the Supremes, I noted the role of Berry Gordy and his Artist Development program for Motown acts as well as the Supremes' own desire to appear more sophisticated in my argument of their embodiment of respectability. Perhaps most notably and woven throughout the section was the idea of "replaceability" that was present in the girl group genre. I noted that this was extremely important in the image of girl

groups as a space for girls to see themselves represented. This also displayed how acts could change and members could be replaced, and even singled out, as seen with Diana Ross.

My analysis of femininity in music continued with an exploration of the counterculture movement from 1964-1972, focusing specifically on the role of Janis Joplin. I discussed the main ideas and goals of the counterculture and the influence of the “beatnik” culture on the movement. I highlighted the music of this movement, emphasizing the role of protest music and music festivals. Moving into an analysis of Janis Joplin, I discussed the formative influences of the “beatnik” culture and blues music, specifically by black artists. This was specifically highlighted in her fashion and music style, relating to how she presented femininity. I also discussed her struggle with her identity, which was a theme present throughout the section. While she projected a tough, I-don’t-care attitude, she was actually very sensitive to what people thought about her and her work. She struggled with her desire to be famous and the irony of this with her role as the “queen of the counterculture.” I highlighted her roles in various bands- Big Brother and the Holding Company, the Kozmic Blues Band, and the Full Tilt Boogie band- and how she grew as an artist and was singled out for her talent, especially at festivals such as Monterey Pop. Her role in the studio was also important. While Joplin still did not have full creative control, she was able to, and not afraid to, voice her opinions about what she thought her records should sound like. This is an important distinction from the girl groups who did not really have a role in the production and songwriting processes. Especially as seen with the Ronettes, Phil Spector and his label had total control of their sound and could end their careers at any moment. In addition, Berry Gordy and Motown also had total control over the Supremes’ sound and song lyrics. Another major difference from these groups is how Joplin was able to express herself. She had a very androgynous look and could be tough and unkempt in public, but the Supremes and the



Ronettes always maintained an element of sophistication and respectability in their fashion style and in public.

In my last chapter, I considered the role of the punk movement that took place from 1975-1979 by discussing U.S. punk singer Patti Smith, and the U.K. punk band the Slits. In this chapter I discussed the debate over the origins of punk and its role in the United States and United Kingdom. I also emphasized the ideas and influences in the movement, especially the notion that punk was meant to be inclusive of everyone regardless of musical talent. This was also important in creating a space for women to actually be able to play music because it was a genre for “outsiders.” Fashion was an extremely important aspect to this genre because of its ability to shock. I also discussed the changing ideas of relationships and sexuality in this genre, with sex and relationships becoming much more casual. Changing ideas of femininity were also emphasized in this section, and particularly their relation to the changing climate (cultural and legal) regarding gender in both the U.S. and U.K. I then moved into the role of Patti Smith in the punk movement. I discussed her move to New York in the late 60s and her beginning to become involved with various artists, writers, and musicians. She began her work as a poet but eventually moved into putting her poems with music and began playing shows. I also discussed the importance of her fashion style and her androgynous look. What seemed to be most emphasized was that hers was not a “girly-girl” persona. She seemed to inspire people- including Viv Albertine of the Slits- with this style, and with her confident and defiant attitude. In the section about the Slits, I emphasized that they seemed to embody more of the stereotypes of what people associate with punk, with their wild hair and DIY, ripped clothing, which was seen as threatening and not feminine. This section also discussed their role as women in the movement. I noted the important role of the lead singer Ari Up and her I-don’t-care attitude, which was also seen with

Janis Joplin in the counterculture movement. One of the most significant features that I noticed in this section was in their creative freedom. In the Slits' 1979 album *Cut*, they had creative control over the album, meaning they wrote most of their own songs and were able to decide how they wanted the cover to look. This represented a notable change from the Supremes, the Ronettes, and even Janis Joplin.

An important aspect throughout each chapter was the artists' fashion styles. The chapters moved from the elegant and sophisticated look of the Supremes and the more sexual but still respectable look of the Ronettes, to the "beatnik," androgynous look of Janis Joplin, to the androgyny of Patti Smith and the slashed-up, DIY style of the Slits. This displays changes in ideas of femininity, as musical performers were expressing themselves in various ways that moved away from "traditional" ideas of how women should dress. Each of these artists also influenced how many girls outside the music industry dressed and expressed themselves.

Most notable throughout these chapters was public commentary, from men and women, on sexuality and femininity as expressed by these artists. A quote I highlighted about the Ronettes described them as "whorish" and "hooker types" and emphasized their sexuality as well as their songs. This is also seen in comments about Janis Joplin. One that I noted from a male journalist called her "the world's sexiest white female singer,"<sup>303</sup> while another from a female journalist called her "unconventional" and "the first genuinely liberated public woman in her generation."<sup>304</sup> These comments highlight the emphasis on her sexuality and suggest how differently she was received by male and female journalists. Comments about the Slits from a male journalist that calls their album *Cut* "...restrained, tough, deliciously melodic in places

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<sup>303</sup> Dallas, "Janis Joplin: Lock Up Your Sons."

<sup>304</sup> Roxon, "Janis Joplin: Girl of the Electric Generation."

(harmonies and other vocal surprises all over the place, regular mine-field of pleasures both subtle and brash)...<sup>305</sup> and by a female journalist commenting that they were “fighting for power, independence and recognition,”<sup>306</sup> do not focus as explicitly on their sexuality, and they also seem to recognize the changes the Slits were bringing to the music industry. These quotes show how perceptions of femininity in music were changing, along with differences in how male and female journalists recognized these artists.

This analysis has just scratched the surface of the many female artists who have had an impact on portrayals of femininity in each of these genres. In future research, it would be valuable to study artists from girl groups such as the Shirelles or the Shangri-Las. In addition, in the counterculture future research could be done on Grace Slick of Jefferson Airplane or Michelle Phillips and Mama Cass Elliot from the Mamas and the Papas. In punk, Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex was a vital aspect of U.K. punk. Each of these artists represent femininity in their own ways and had an impact on women in and outside of the music industry. In my thesis I have touched on a few subgenres of rock music, but there are plenty more subgenres that could use research as well as other genres. Pop, country, rap, soul, and many others include women that were pivotal in music and in representations of femininity. Each of these styles can represent many different ideas of femininity and also include various subgenres of their own. In my research I focused on a period of about two decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but music and representations of femininity in music have been around long before the decades I analyzed and continue today. My research is important in capturing a few major artists in decades of mass change for women, but there is much more to explore. In any such research, it is important to

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<sup>305</sup> McCullough, “The Slits: Awkward in Interviews, Awkward in Life.”

<sup>306</sup> Coon, “The Slits.”

remember that femininity is not the same for everyone. There is no “correct” method in portraying femininity, and music also deals with representations of other gender identities beyond men and women. This research was meant to explore how each of these artists represented their female identities in their own way and how that corresponded to - either by conforming to or challenging - stereotypical ideas of femininity in each of the periods covered. This research could go further because it raises the question of what makes music feminine or gendered, if anything, and how artists of different gender identities express or cope with this.

Today, many female artists are still exploring ideas of femininity through their music and performances. Artists of various genres such as Billie Eilish, Megan Thee Stallion, and Taylor Swift all discuss and express femininity in their own ways. Through their fashion styles, song lyrics, and performances they express their ideas of sexuality and what it means to be a woman, just as was observed with the girl group, counterculture, and punk artists analyzed in this paper. They bring attention to issues faced by many women such as body image, sexuality, and relationships, which are important because they are able to start and contribute to conversations on these topics. Music today, just as music in the past, can be used to comment on the world we live in and can be a method to make sense of our place in it.

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# ACADEMIC VITA

## Alyssa McIltrout

### EDUCATION

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**The Pennsylvania State University** **University Park, PA**  
Schreyer Honors College, Paterno Fellows Program  
Bachelor of Arts in History December 2021  
Bachelor of Arts in Political Science Dean's List (4 semesters)

**International Education of Students (IES) Abroad** **London, England**  
Study London Program **January-April 2020**

- Completed a semester study abroad program with courses focused on History and Political Science prior to transitioning to online learning due to the coronavirus pandemic.

### Awards

Penn State History Department "Best HIST 302W Paper" (Fall 2020)

- Nominated by Dr. Prakash Kumar for my paper titled "Gandhi and Women in the 1930s"

### RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

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**Student Tutor** **State College, PA (August 2021- Present)**

- Helping a high school student with organization and time management as well as helping with class content.

**Newton Hamilton Lockhouse** **Newton Hamilton, PA**  
**Research Intern** **August 2021 – November 2021**

- Research local history regarding the lockhouse and canal and working towards registering the lockhouse as a historical site by Pennsylvania.

**Maine Public Health Association (MPHA)** **Augusta, ME**  
**Research Intern** **July 2020 – February 2021**

- Research and identify methods to increase student involvement at the MPHA by meeting with professors and students at Maine universities.
- Create and implement a mentorship program for students, early career professionals and those new to the public health field by working with a team at MPHA to develop and implement surveys for prospective mentors and mentees (launched February 2021).

**The George and Ann Richards Civil War Era Center** **University Park, PA**  
**Transcription Intern** **July - August 2020**

- Transcribed documents from the Cresson Literary Society at Penn State and the Soldiers Aid Society of Hartsville to be included in Penn State's library for access for future research.

**Student Tutor** **Sykesville, MD (2018)**

- Tutored a high school student in European history.

### ACTIVITIES

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**Penn State University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA)** **University Park, PA**  
**Votes Fellow** **August 2020 – November 2020**

- Involved in civic engagement including working with the student government and helping students register to vote.
- Wrote resolution 28-15 in Support for Governor Wolf's Decision to Fund Mail-in Ballot Postage and Creation of a Mail-in Voting Educational Campaign.

**Pi Sigma Alpha National Political Science Honor Society** **October 2020 – Present**  
**Phi Alpha Theta National History Honor Society** **February 2020 – Present**  
**Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society, Member** **March 2019 – Present**