

# THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF GENDER STEREOTYPES ON WOMEN IN MUSIC

## INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality in music has been well documented for decades. Academics have analysed lack of access to musical spaces for people identifying as women; the so called “boys' club” excluding women from networking; and mechanisms in the documentation of the musical cannon focusing on male achievements. However, the current academic debate rarely uses a combined approach linking both numerical data with a theoretical sociological analysis, nor does recent study in the field use wide-ranging data sets. Through a mixed methodology approach, the study will count the number of women present in musical platforms such as Glastonbury Festival, Coachella Festival, Download Festival, Rolling Stone Magazine, which will be examined through several theoretical lenses: genre and sociological analysis, Michel Foucault's gaze theory, and feminist theory - including concepts of the “other” and the somatic norm. I argue that musical genre has replicated gender stereotypes performed in society, thus creating extreme gender inequality in music. Ultimately, the study displays a shocking deficit of female performers in major musical spaces of visibility from the 1970s to 2019.

## AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to understand the effects of gender stereotypes on female performers in popular music. Furthermore, this research aims to explore gender stereotypes and how these are represented and perpetuated in popular music. This study aims to contribute to the discussion of women in music by understanding gender stereotypes in music and explore how these occur in society. The objective is to use a mixed methodology to combine the sociological importance of gender in relation to real-world data the study can provide a well rounded and relevant representation of gender in music.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- ☐ How do gender stereotypes negatively impact women in music?
- ☐ Is it possible for philosophy to explain why such formations of cultural and societal hierarchies occur?
- ☐ How has the patriarchy and capitalism impacted women's place in the music canon?
- ☐ What can be done to combat the deficit of female participation in the music?

## BACKGROUND

Though these are big questions, I hope that by using real-world data and several different philosophical and sociological approaches, I can understand the way in which women are impacted by society in music.

Current research in the field of gender and music has either focussed solely on sociological interpretations, or quantitative interpretations of specific areas of music such as Gender and the Billboard Top 40 Charts between 1997 and 2007 by LaFrance et. Al. Thus, this combined method is rare, and so I have few examples to follow.

The main issue encountered when conducting a study in the field of gender and sex is how to determine the sex of a person without asking them. Thus, the sexes of the band members are determined through images, band websites or Wikipedia. Furthermore, gender is fluid and presented sex can change. Therefore, I have elected to take the gender or sex representation at the time of performance, as opposed to present-day identities.

I have decided not to conduct my own interviews, because there are many sources of existing interviews with female performers across genres and span from the 1960s – present day. Furthermore, the internet is a great source for women to publish their experiences on their own platforms.

## METHODOLOGY

### ONTOLOGY

Ontology presents questions of the world before constructing the methodology. *How do I see the truth of female representation on musical platforms? Does my truth correlate to reality? Is the truth external to social actors?* These questions provide justification for a mixed methodological approach. On the ontological continuum, this study sits between objectivity and subjectivity. Thus, this requires both qualitative and quantitative data. The objective data, such as the number of women featured on the cover of Rolling Stone Magazine or featuring on the Coachella Line-Up Poster, will be cross referenced the subjective - existing interviews with female performers in online and printed publications. Ontology also allows for assumptions to be made, this is important when examining sex and gender, and how these are performed in Anglophone societies.

### EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. The use of a mixed methodology using sociology and large, real-world data sets is rare; this is the epistemological contribution the study will make to the cultural field of study. Akin to ontology, on the epistemological continuum this study is placed in the middle. I believe, when examining cultural and social production (such as music), that the truth is best expressed through a blended approach of truth and belief. The numerical data shows the real-world representation of women on musical platforms, and the experiences of those women told through their truth provides their social and cultural experience of gender in music.

### AXIOLOGY

Axiology is the philosophical study of value. Value can be either objective or subjective depending on the type of study. However, this study takes a feminist stance and therefore value is being placed on the way in which women are represented and counted in music. The use of real-world data is classes as objective, but axiologically the study places value on female representation. Thus, on the axiological continuum the study is value bound, as opposed to value neutral.

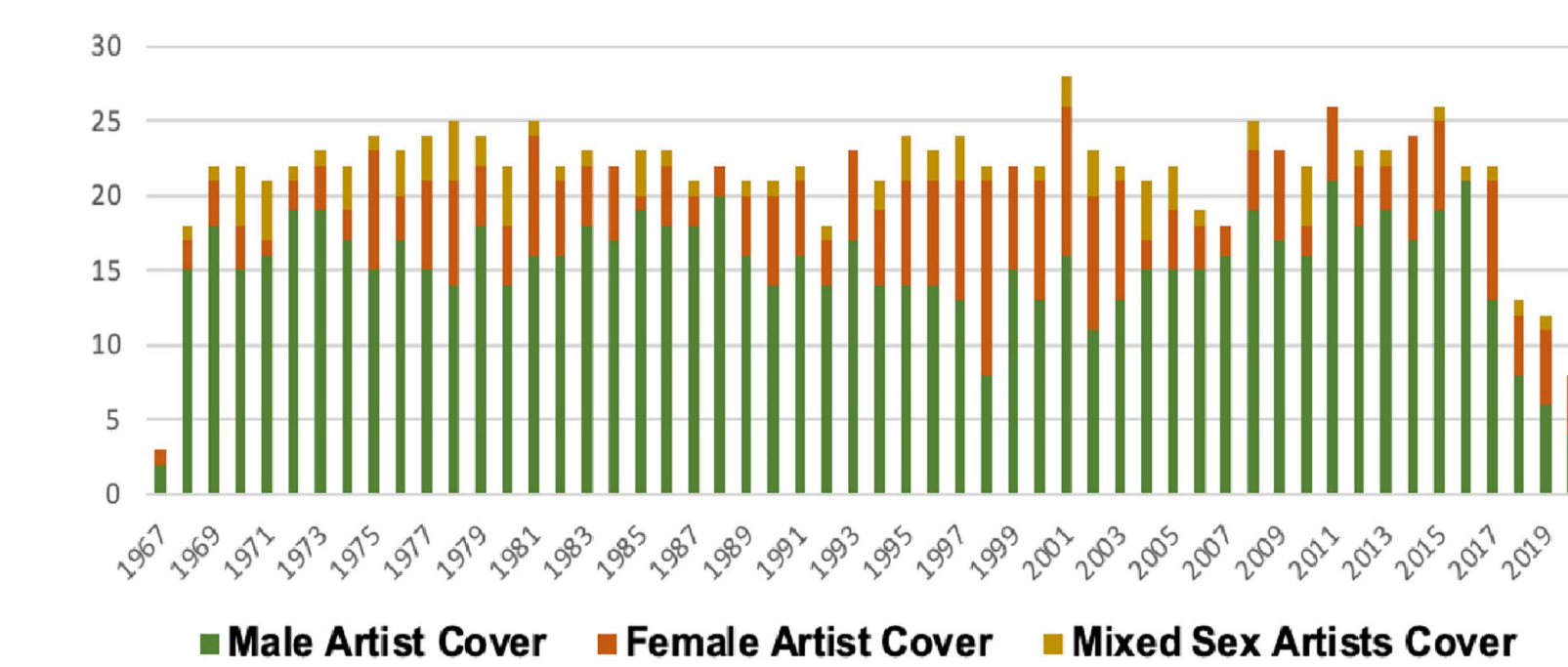
### METHODOLOGY

Combining the ontology (truth), epistemology (knowledge), and axiology (value) we can construct the methodology accordingly. Gender and the Billboard Top 40 Charts between 1997 and 2007 by LaFrance et. Al provides the closest example of quantitative research from which to draw influence. To discern the frequency of female performers in comparison to male, the way in which women have been counted is as follows: Female Performer, Male Performer, Female Band, Male Band, and Mixed Sex Band. The qualitative data for this study will be collected from existing publications such as A Seat at the Table by Amy Raphael. This allows us to understand the truth of the social actors (female performers) on these musical platforms. Finally, theories such as gaze theory provide philosophical understanding of how, and why such social and cultural views of sex and gender operate and are perpetuated.

## RESULTS

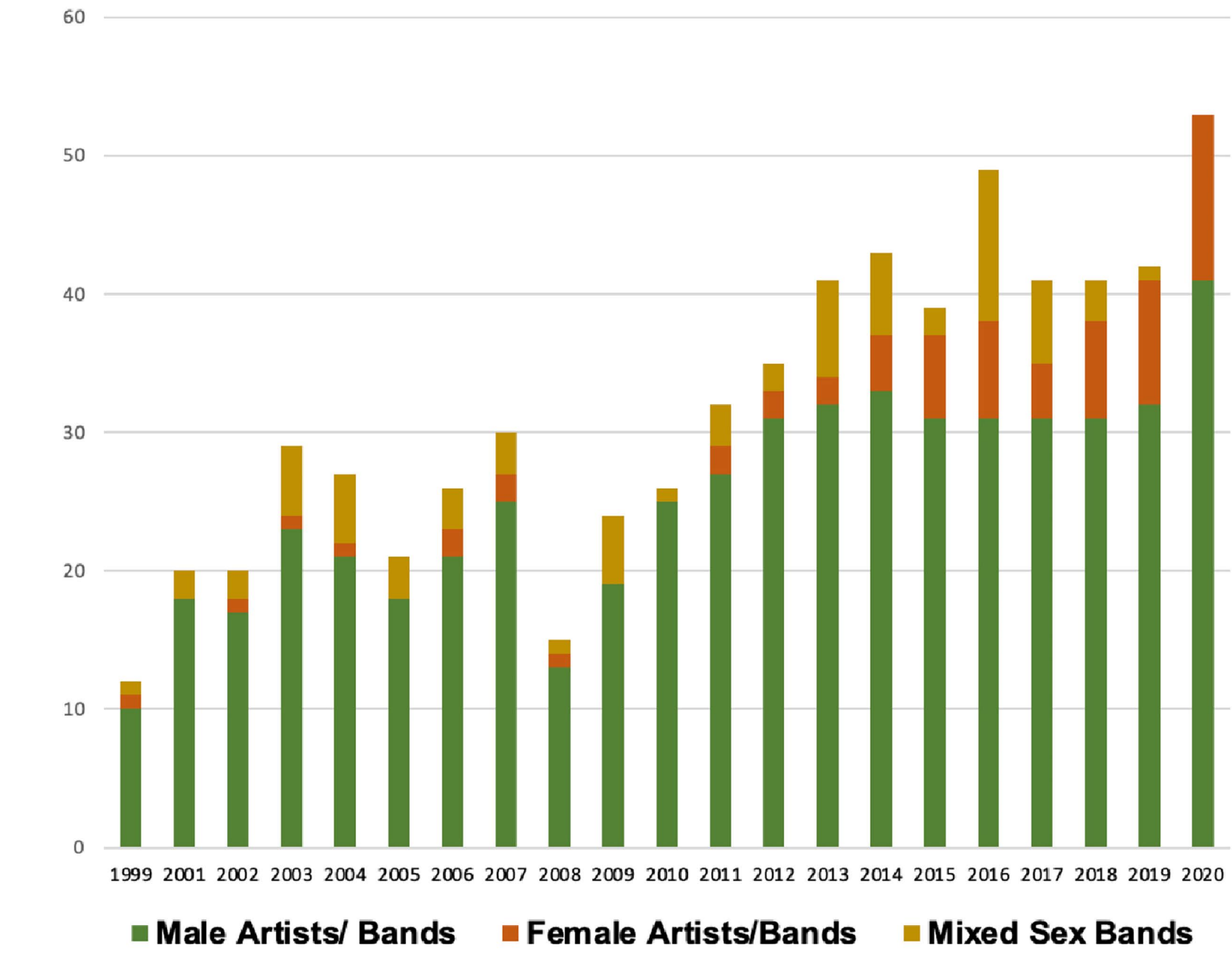
The graphs below represent major musical platforms of visibility for musicians. For the purpose of this poster Rolling Stone Magazine and Coachella Festival are being examined. It is perceived in Anglophone societies that gender equality has improved or, in some cases, that we are in a post-feminist political landscape. However, I believe that the data shows otherwise.

### ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE COVERS 1967- 2020



As you can see from the graph above female representation on the cover of Rolling Stone Magazine has not improved drastically over time. Over the 53-year span **71%** of the covers of Rolling Stone Magazine have featured solely men. **22%** of the covers feature solely women, and 7% show mixed sex covers. There are a few anomalies that should be acknowledged: in 1998 and 2001 there were more women on the cover of the magazine than men. Therefore, the historical and cultural importance of this year can be examined. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a sharp increase in girl groups, and the over sexualization of women for marketing, this could account for the increase in female representation on the covers of Rolling Stone Magazine.

### ARTISTS & BANDS HEADLINING COACHELLA FESTIVAL (1999-2020)



The graph above shows the astonishingly male dominated Coachella Festival. **79%** of the artists and bands featured at Coachella were male compared to **10%** women. I acknowledge that some artists that perform at festivals do not appear on the poster, but this further exacerbates the perceived lack of women on performance platforms. The anomalous result of Coachella Festival is 2020, where **12 female artists** were featured on the poster (the highest of the festival's history), as opposed to the **41 male artists** on the poster that year.

## CONCLUSION

The real-world data collected here shows the huge deficit in female performer representation at a major festival, and a long-standing musical and cultural publication; which does not dramatically improve over time, despite the proclaimed postfeminist advances in Anglophone societies. Lead singer of the band CHVRCHES stated:

**“There are often tours where I can go virtually weeks at a time without encountering another woman”**  
(Lauren Mayberry)

This does not seem such an exaggeration after looking at the data. Other female artists have expressed their resistance to being called a “female artist” as it limits the opportunities that they have. By being pigeonholed to a genre that is based on gender as opposed to ethos or musical style, women are forced to compete against one another. Which displays that genre led by gender has replicated gender stereotypes in society that women are “other”. Furthermore, this has caused female musicians to be identified as women first, before musician, impacting the way in which they are treated in the industry.

Therefore, gender stereotypes have negatively impacted women in music by reducing the numbers of women in musical spaces of visibility; categorizing female musicians as women first; diminishing their perceived ability; and by the cultural and social notion that women can only be compared to other women:

**“We are encouraged to think that there can only be one woman at the top of her game in any genre”**  
(Ibeyi)

In addition, the male gaze is a common theme that many women in music are aware of and the sense of being “the other” in the room, making the musical world much harder to navigate than their male counterparts. This is displayed by Foucault’s philosophical gaze theory, whereby those being observed self-regulate their performance to attain social acceptance. But, by being a woman in a male space it is almost impossible to blend with the surroundings, therefore meaning less women can enter musical platforms such as Rolling Stone Magazine and Coachella Festival. In turn, this has forced the canon of musical performance and cataloging to be skewed towards male performers.

**“The music industry and the media are just as sexist as they ever were. I've stopped counting the number of times people have assumed that a man wrote and produced my songs”**  
(Christine and the Queens).

**What can be done to change the deficit of female performers?**  
Unfortunately, as with most cultural and societal structures there is no simple fix. Sexism, racism, and classism are rampant in Anglophone society. But, most realistically the data and interviews show that equal visibility and equal opportunity are the key factors as this would allow more women access to musical platforms, but also provide female listeners with examples to reference themselves in those places deemed once inaccessible to them. This is by no means a simple feat, but I hope that the current feminist discussion and global recognition of the #MeToo movement will encourage change.

## REFERENCES

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