

Amplifying the voice of women

**On the representation of female musicians in
alternative music publications (2000-2015)**

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Abstract

This master's thesis questions how alternative music publications represent female musicians from the year 2000 until 2015. It does this by looking at the history of the press and its gendered discourse, and by making a case study of the publications of *The Wire* and *Pitchfork*. At the same time, it asks how and why discourse formation happens, how the music press has developed to its current state, and whether there is a relation of fourth-wave feminism to the analysed alternative music publications that are analysed. The time frame of 2000 until 2015 serves as a way to set up this possibility. Through a calculation of the number of women on the cover of *The Wire*, the number of women in the end-of-year lists of *Pitchfork*, and an analysis of the language used in both of these publications when discussing female musicians, it attempts to draw a general conclusion concerning their discourse in relation to female artists. It does this by placing the publications in the context of the various waves of feminism.

The thesis concludes that neither of the alternative publications can be said to have a gendered discourse. The connection of these alternative publications with the larger context of the music press shows that, despite their participation in the same field, they do not take the same stance as the mainstream press. Both take a different approach to gender from the mainstream press, and can be seen as a continuation of feminist critiques of the mainstream's gendered discourse. While riot grrrl was a self-published alternative to mainstream music journalism, and an example of third-wave feminism in the nineties, *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* are clear expressions of fourth-wave feminism (which is recognised as taking place from the noughties onwards) in their attempt to move past gender inequalities. It is only in a few cases that their music critics refer to a female musician's role as a woman in the music industry, but this is done precisely in order to criticise the mainstream's focus on femininity and female sexuality when discussing these artists. As such, this thesis's case study of alternative music publications fills a gap within the ongoing debate of misogyny in the music press, while placing them in the context of the developing waves of feminism.

Introduction

Music critics serve an important intermediary role between the music industry and its consumers. On first consideration, one would say music critics listen to and report new releases by musicians, while giving an elaborate opinion on these products. In doing so, critics kindle debates surrounding the value of these releases through their writing, while simultaneously guiding their readers as to whether to purchase specific releases or whether to ignore them. Although it is difficult to measure the impact music critics have on their readers, they are generally considered to also be an important element of the reproduction of (sub)cultural values and its accompanying discourse, the spoken expression of these values, morals, and truths. This master's thesis researches the gendered discourse of the contemporary, alternative music press. In doing so it traces the development of the music press's traditionally masculine culture and considers whether later countermovements, that have arisen at the end of the 20th century, have had an impact on the music press's different portrayal of female musicians compared to male musicians.

Even though feminist countermovements have grown in prevalence, and are still alive today, the contemporary mainstream music press easily shows that it has not greatly changed its gendered discourse (if at all). One only has to open a recent Rolling Stone release to see that female musicians are sexualised and rarely considered in terms of their artistry. Similarly, opening up other mainstream music publications (Mojo, Rock & Folk, Kerrang, Hot Press, etc.) clarify that gendered discourse has not disappeared. This study does therefore not focus on today's mainstream music press, but is rather focused on alternative music press outlets. Contrary to the mainstream publications, alternative magazines have barely been the subject of academic study. However, it is important to consider these alternative magazines, because scholars at the cross-section of the fields of Media Studies, Popular Music Studies and Gender Studies found that the late eighties gave way to an increasingly feminist response to the publications of mainstream music journalists. In this reaction, the mainstream's dominant discourse was challenged by writing that celebrated female musicians. While the mainstream press has remained largely unchanged in the end, due in part to the low circulation of these feminist writers' work, it will be important to consider what these alternative, unstudied publications offer their readers in terms of their approach to female musicians (and thus their expressed discourse). In other words, this study considers whether the continuing evolution of the music press in the 21st century has resulted in alternative publications with a different approach to female musicians, and as such fills a gap within the bigger debate concerning the music press. Its key research question in this is: how do alternative music publications present female musicians from the year 2000 up to 2015? In this research, several other questions are of importance, namely how and why discourse formation happens, and how the music press has developed to its current state. Central too, is questioning whether there is a

relation of fourth-wave feminism to these alternative music publications: a deliberate time frame of 2000 until 2015 sets up precisely this possibility.

The first section of this thesis will theoretically look at how the press should be understood in general. What is the power of journalists and the press? What role do journalists or music critics play for music listeners? How do they impact culture in general? Its aim is to understand why and how newspapers contribute to discourse formation and what the purpose of this creation is. More specifically, it will look at the influence of the press and its role in a social group's identity formation through the perpetuation of shared values as expressed in a discourse. The ideas of Stuart Hall and Stephen Vella will be of particular interest here. This section will also consider the social framework inherent to discourse and identity formation as theorised by the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945).

The second section of this thesis will look specifically at the development of the music press. What changes has the music press undergone and what did its discourse look like throughout its evolution? Have any alternatives developed alongside the mainstream press? This chapter will specifically look at the music publications of the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, those of the United States. This will be done with the aid of the tradition of academic literature on the topic, which has primarily focused on these dominating areas within Western pop music culture. As such it will provide a clear overview of research done by academics like Chris Atton, Eamonn Forde, Steve Jones and Jason Toynbee.

Through a consideration of its early developments as a sales charts publication up to the branding of today's press organisations, one will come to understand how a theoretical discourse, as will be elaborated upon in the first section of this thesis, takes shape in practice. Through this consideration of the music press's development, the perpetuation of a gendered discourse of music journalism will become clear, which is an important step in understanding the press's representation of female musicians. It will show that several phases were key in the construction of a masculinist discourse that permeates the music journalist culture. This chapter will also look at how a countermovement of feminist musicians and music listeners came to be. A historical overview of music publications is necessary to contextualise the rise of these countermovements. It is necessary to understand why a feminist answer to music journalism, and the music business at large, developed and why it is actually a necessary continuation of the press's development. Tracing the development of the press's gendered history to understand why a feminist movement came to be at all, is in turn necessary to question whether contemporary alternative magazines offer a different voice. The continuation of feminist waves gives one a fair reason to indeed explore if there is a different construction of a discourse within alternative music publications, and to

question how this fits within these waves. Precisely because it has a long history of gendered masculinist discourse within mainstream music journalism, research of non-masculinist voices in the music press is crucial. The feminist riot grrrl network is of primary importance here, as it is a notable example of such a counter-reaction to the gendered discourse in the music press (and the music industry in general).

The third and final section of this thesis will take a more practical case study approach, by looking at two contemporary alternative music press outputs, namely *The Wire* (a monthly UK-based magazine) and *Pitchfork* (an online music magazine based in Chicago). In this case study the alternative press will be taken to mean those music press outlets that stand outside of the mainstream music magazines (i.e. Rolling Stone, Mojo, Rock & Folk, Kerrang, Hot Press, etc.) An elaboration on their differences from the traditional music press will mark the start of the chapter. *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* have been chosen for multiple reasons. In the first place, the alternative music press has been largely neglected as an object of academic study. The main topic of academic study has been the mainstream music press from primarily the United Kingdom and the United States. *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* fit the tradition of United Kingdom and United States-based music journalism. Secondly, the chosen press outputs cover musicians that fit the indie music label. In this genre one will find the same type of musicians that have been covered in the past by the mainstream music press. Although these publications have largely moved on to new trends in the music industry, it will be important to stick with the indie genre, because previous studies have especially pointed out the gendered discourse of indie (rock). This is also the musical tradition that most riot grrrl zines were and are connected to. As such, a focus on indie musicians in the alternative music press will offer a continuity to previous work done by the academics used in the second chapter and researchers of feminism and riot grrrl like Helen Davies, Holly Kruse and Marion Leonard.

The final section starts by outlining a methodology for tackling these two journalistic outputs. Three areas will be of importance in this, covering both hard data and their specific use of language: the average number of male versus female musicians featured on the cover of the publications, the numbers of male versus female musicians in end-of-year 'best of' lists, and a consideration of the gendered approach to reviewing female musicians. Ultimately, the main question will be: how have the developments in the press perpetuated in the alternative media of the 21st century (*The Wire* and *Pitchfork*)? By questioning the representation of women in these alternative publications, one will get a clear idea of how gendered discourse has taken shape over the last sixteen years. This will be important in line with the academic research done around the evolution of the music press in general, and the surge of a feminist response (of which the riot grrrls network will be taken as an example). It will be argued that the studied alternative publications in the defined 2000-2015 time

frame should be seen as part of a fourth wave of feminism. Through this thesis one will come to see how the music press functions within society. It will contribute to ongoing debates of gendered discourse in music journalism by researching whether the publications of the alternative music press, taking *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* as its examples, offer an alternative, more female-friendly voice to the dominant masculine discourse of mainstream music publications.

In summation, this study is not intended as a way to speak *for* the female musicians. Speaking about their experiences of the treatment by the music industry is of course something it cannot do. Instead, its aim is to look specifically at the discourse recreated in alternative music publications, and to consider whether it presents female musicians in a way that is primarily concerned with their artistry and not their femininity or sexuality. Through a consideration of previous study of mainstream music journalism, and the resurgence of a feminist countermovement, it will consider whether there is a difference of approach and attitude within the alternative music press. A lot of previous research will be used in consideration of the mainstream music journalist material, as well as research on riot grrrl zines and their position as a feminist response to the music press's dominant discourse. Contemporary, alternative music journalism will be analysed through primary sources, specifically *The Wire* and *Pitchfork*.

1. Social identity and the press

Journalists are in the business of reporting current events. Their task is to research a specific topic and to present their findings as reliable facts to a broad audience. If one opens up a magazine and looks at the work of journalists, however, one does not merely see charts and graphs, nor does one read a summation of facts or a list of numbers. Instead, the factual data is used within a written text to support the story the writer wants to tell their readers. Because of this, when one looks at a journalist's publication, one does not only get a factual representation of the case they have written about, rather, one also gets to know the specific way in which a journalist talks about the subject. Their writing in itself tells one something about potential stereotypes that commonly occur in the discourse of the covered subject that the author may be perpetuating. As has been stated in the above introduction, it is the masculinist discourse of music journalism that plays a central role in this master's thesis. Before one can get into the history and development of the music press and the dominance of its gendered discourse, it is important to get a sense of why it is crucial to study the press at all and what its powerful role in society is.

Why would one study journalism or the press in general? In order to answer this, one needs to understand how scholars after the 'linguistic turn' have understood the 'meaning-making process' (something the press is involved in, as will be shown). In this understanding, things don't just 'mean' something in themselves, but are rather constructed through a social process.¹ This approach to meaning-making is called constructionism, of which there are two major variants: the semiotic approach mostly known from the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), and the discursive approach as known from the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984). The semiotic approach holds that meaning is not something fixed, but rather is constructed socially through the use of symbols/signs. Signs (words, letters, colours, etc.) represent a thing, but the meaning of these signs can vary between cultures. Communication happens when people have the same linguistic framework to talk about things. This means that the same signs refer to the same things. The signs in themselves are however arbitrary.² Even though one stops at a red traffic sign that says 'stop', and one shouldn't eat poisonous red yew berries, this does not mean red is a universal sign for stopping and/or danger (a red rose is also taken to be a symbol of love, after all). Rather, meaning assigned to a sign is, according to these scholars with a semiotic approach, based on convention and dependent on its context.

For other scholars with a discursive approach, this falls short and fails to take into account the power relations that play an important role behind the construction of meaning. It is out of the

¹ Hall, Stuart. "The Work of Representation". (In *The Media Studies Reader*, edited by Laurie Ouellette, 171-196. New York: Routledge, 2012), 177.

² Idem, 178.

reach of a single individual to claim that 'stop' now means 'go', whereas bigger, more powerful institutions may have the ability to enforce these kinds of changes and perpetuate a new meaning. For the remainder of this thesis, it is this understanding of the meaning-making process that will inform what follows. Discursive formations (in other words, frameworks of meaning) come about through the way language is used.³ Essentially, the construction of meaning-making thus comes about through a complex, asymmetrical power relation. This is where the press plays a leading role. As said above, the press plays an important role in society, because it has access to a broad audience of readers. While communicating their message to the public, writers do not merely share facts, but they also perpetuate stereotypes and a framework readers are familiar with.⁴ This does not mean that journalists merely put every news item into a transparent format that suits their public, rather they act as a filter in the process. The writers, or the company's leading editor, naturally get to decide what facts are actually used within an article, and thus filter out what information does and what does not reach the people through their own writing.⁵ Precisely because of the numbers of readers from the public, and their consistently timed release of new papers (a regularity which also accounts for the sense of reliability of the publications), journalists have much more impact on discourse than a single person communicating something privately to someone else.

This does not mean that a single writer, or a team of journalists, gets to decide how people think and talk about specific topics and events. Instead, the press should be seen as a complex interplay of power, beyond a collection of researching writers, which decides what gets expressed and how. This 'power constellation' ranges broadly from advertisers out to make money to politicians aiming to push an agenda.⁶ The decisions they make also include a consideration of the audience their particular publication has. As such, journalists have a relation to their audience, not just of educating them with facts they deem important, but rather one that is influenced by business and the economic climate. Different newspapers naturally present ideas and news differently, all following their own 'agenda'. This is then not only bound to the interests of the owner, but also bound to what 'voice' is economically most appealing to advertisers.⁷ But this can never happen without a consideration of the public itself, who actually have to go out to purchase the magazine. A make-up of the paper will have to be appealing to a target audience. As such, for journalists it is

³ Idem, 186.

⁴ Vella, Stephen. "Newspapers." (In *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*, edited by Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann, 192-208. London: Routledge, 2008), 192.

⁵ Idem, 192.

⁶ Idem, 193.

⁷ Idem, 195.

important to build a track record of reliability as well. A newspaper can only stay in business if the public continues to read it, trusting the output of the writers and the press in general.⁸

Naturally, a reading audience does not blindly accept everything a publication portrays. However, as one comes to see through the discursive approach, journalists are in a powerful position in the social construction of meaning. One also sees that this authoritative role comes from their impression of reliability and the number of people they can attain. A consideration of their writing is then crucial to get a sense of the dominant discourse in society. But how does this creation of meaning work? And what is the social function of this meaning-making? In order to understand this, a philosopher in the field of sociology becomes particularly interesting: Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs's ideas on 'collective memory' provide a clear framework through which one can understand how the press, its perpetuation of collective ideas and values (which gets expressed in the construction of a discourse), and the press's readers are connected.

Everyone has personal memories that concern events that happened in their private lives. Simultaneously, however, there are also memories that relate specifically to things that happened within one's social group as well as values that are held dear by one's social environment. Maurice Halbwachs explored the individual's participation in these two forms of memory: a collective, shared memory and the individual, private memory.⁹ Collective and individual memory are not independent from each other. Instead the two should be seen as being in a constant relation to each other. Collective memory, which is made up of all individual memories, is used by the individual to complement their personal memories and to connect them into an orderly narrative. This process means that this relation goes both ways: in using shared memories for the construction of a cohesive individual memory, the individual's personal memories are transferred into the impersonal cumulative consciousness.¹⁰ These two types are however clearly not the same. Individuals can never personally know the collective memory. It has to be recreated through the retelling of individual, personal memories, the total of which makes up a shared memory. Of course, to have a full overview of an event, idea or of shared values one needs to know all the individual memories that make up the collective memory and reconsider them in relation to each other. This is a daunting task, but it is required to happen because individual memories are never pure. Personal memories are always retold from the perspective of the person holding the memory and as such contain many distortions. This means that a decisive spatial and temporal barrier is found between the two kinds of memory: a collective memory which is a totality made up out of all

⁸ Broersma, Marcel. "Journalism as Performative Discourse: The Importance of Form and Style in Journalism." (University of Groningen, 15-35), 19.

⁹ Halbwachs, Maurice. "Historical Memory and Collective Memory." (50-87), 50.

¹⁰ Idem, 51.

the varying individual perspectives, and the individual memory which is always uniquely bound to a single person.¹¹ Whereas the latter is fixed to an individual's limited time and space (of their memories), a shared consciousness transcends this limitation.

Maurice Halbwachs distinguishes collective memory even further from individual memory by referring to it as 'social, external or historical memory'. Individual memory is on the other hand referred to as 'inward, internal or autobiographical memory'. As has become clear above, the 'inward memory' uses 'social memory' to give itself a contextual framework. In this relation, social memory is generally regarded as a compilation of raw historical data, a chronological sequence of events, dates and numbers. Furthermore, inward memory is seen as something uninterrupted, a fuller narrative.¹² Seeing social memory as a framework of raw historical data is however too limited and a further distinction has to be made. What is seen as a chronological progression of events, consisting of dates and other factual numbers, should be grasped as being a 'learned history', whereas the social or historical memory he refers to is 'lived history'.¹³ Learned history is not something a child knows, rather it is something that people learn over time through school and other ways of education. It does indeed provide a fact-based framework consisting of numbers, but it is not enough to understand social memory as a whole. Shared experiences of the past, shared ideas and shared values are more than a collection of numbers: it is a collective, psychological atmosphere of a specific time and place.¹⁴ This 'lived history' is what has a strong connection with the individual, even in children. One can already see here how this might tie in with the press as a core, which consists of more than mere facts, as shown above. Discourse can in turn be seen as an expression of a specific atmosphere: a way of seeing things and talking about them.

Maurice Halbwachs was, by separating lived history from learned history, one of the first to rethink the connection between history and psychology (specifically memory). In the past, memory was seen as being a direct reflection of history and, vice versa, history was seen as being an echo of memory.¹⁵ In this pure relation to one another, it was the historian's task to record memories of experiences, while memories copied experiences as history. Because they were both pure, nothing got lost: memory and history were identical to one another (maybe even one another's equivalent). This account of memory and history has clearly developed over time. While previously considered to be objective documentations of past events, today historians no longer see them as such.

¹¹ Idem, 52.

¹² Idem, 52.

¹³ Idem, 57.

¹⁴ Idem, 57.

¹⁵ Burke, Peter. *Varieties of Cultural History*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 43/44.

Rather, both memory and history should be seen as subjective interpretations. The narratives that are constructed by the historian, or any other author for that matter, are always informed by their everyday social background. The separation between lived history and learned history however, creates confusion as both derive from the overarching term 'history'. This is a problem because 'lived history' is seen by Halbwachs as a social construction, whereas 'learned history' is rather seen as based on facts.¹⁶ This problem Halbwachs himself never solved, but according to Peter Burke this semantic issue is not a problem within a contemporary post-modern framework. In this framework, learned history, seen as a chronological progression of events, dates and numbers, is the result of a social construction, just like lived history, and is thus not based on pure fact.¹⁷

The collective memory, understood as lived history as shown above, offers a framework for the individual in which to frame their own private memories, thoughts and ideas. Maurice Halbwachs's ideas, of there being a social framework to memory, remain still too abstract. One can indeed understand that people read newspapers and magazines to relate their own everyday experiences to them as a framework, but why is this necessary? In what way does this interaction happen, which is a clearly selective process, as not everything enters the collective consciousness, and what is its social purpose? Here, the writing of Jan Assmann (1938) comes in, who has continued building on the innovative thought of Halbwachs.

While Maurice Halbwachs makes a distinction between learned history and lived history, Jan Assmann distinguishes collective memory into communicative memory and object-based memory. For Halbwachs, as shown above, the difference was primarily one between raw historical data and the experienced atmosphere of a particular time and place, including ideas and values rather than the numerical framework of learned history. This explanation however falls short if we wish to understand why certain memories, ideas or values enter the collective memory, which is crucial to understanding what this social memory precisely is.¹⁸ Assmann's distinction between communicative memory, also called everyday memory, and object-based memory may help one further. Communicative memories are memories that one derives from interpersonal, everyday communication. They are essentially created through all forms of direct social exchange.¹⁹ Object-based memory is sometimes translated as objective memory, but it should not be understood as being objective as compared to an everyday 'communicative subjective'. The distinction between collective and objective memory is not one between the subjective and the objective, an

¹⁶ Halbwachs, Maurice. "Historical Memory and Collective Memory." (50-87), 78.

¹⁷ Burke, Peter. *Varieties of Cultural History*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 45.

¹⁸ Idem, 51/52.

¹⁹ Assmann, Jan. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." (Translated by J. Czaplicka. *Cultural History/ Cultural Studies in New German Critique* 65 (Spring - Summer, 1995): 125-133), 126.

interpretation versus a fact, rather objective memory should be understood as 'crystallised' memories, ideas and values as established in physical objects of culture from literature to statues. As such, object-based memory differs from communicative memory in that it is fixed, whereas everyday memory is fluid. This distinction between object-based and communicative is clearly a complex one, because people talk about literature and other cultural objects in everyday speech. Similarly, these objects are not blank sheets of paper. Especially literature can be said to be an indirect way to communicate thought, and they continue to engage people daily. While philosophically difficult to sustain, Assmann's contrast is nonetheless still useful, because it allows him to clarify a point that Halbwachs keeps rather vague, as will be shown below.

Every person has multiple groups of people they socialise with, through work, school, family and institutions devoted to leisure activities. With each one of these, one creates separate personal memories. These memories are linked to the daily communication one has with the specific people involved.²⁰ As a result, people do not end up with a single shared memory, but rather with a multitude of social memories tied to all these different groups. Even though these everyday memories are indeed never solid, as time keeps changing the constitution of this memory, collective memories can still crystallise in several ways. If one takes the simple example of a group of musicians, the creation of a piece of music or an album is precisely a case of this solidification. While their communicative memory may evolve over time with the development of the group of musicians, the object has been created and stabilises an idea. Thus, everyday memory is never wholly separate from object-based memory. Their dependence on one another doesn't only happen through the crystallisation of communicative memories, but rather ends up happening both ways. People are always in contact with the items of the past and the memories these encompass. Musicians look back at albums of the past for inspiration. The object-based memories get reinterpreted by the present in this process, and the memories, ideas and values these objects 'hold' end up reentering the present-day communicative memory. As a result object-based memories shape a social group's identity, just like they've been part of a past generation's identity. Through this exchange, social groups continue to receive moral values and guidelines, and a past generation's educating understanding of how the world works. In short, the reinterpretation of cultural objects plays an important role in society as providing 'formative and normative impulses', while shaping its identity.²¹

Assmann puts less emphasis on distinguishing the individual from the group, but rather goes into the crystallisation of memory. It is through this interaction of social memory with object-based memory that he comes to uncover their role in identity formation. Memory serves not just as a tool

²⁰ Idem, 127.

²¹ Idem, 128.

of reference for what's around someone, but also as a means to develop both a personal and a social identity.²² Groups share a cultural consciousness of memories, ideas and values, which gives them a collective identity. Objects are crucial to this process as they continue to instruct people throughout the centuries. However, people do not blindly interpret this past, they can indeed be critical of it. This process of looking back at the past through these objects, of 'retrospective contemplativeness', is never blind and people do not absorb its 'content' as being truths they must reinvigorate.²³ As shown above, object-based memories do inform in a 'formative and normative' way, which means they offer a degree of education, while instructing people on moral customs.²⁴ However, contemporary people do not adapt these blindly to their own time: rather, they reconsider them through their own acquired lens, which provides another framework. It is through this process that they consider whether aspects of object-based memory fit their shared identity, and thus their own identity as well.

While Maurice Halbwachs does address the interconnectedness of people, hinting at identity formation in the process, he does not develop this thought as in-depth as Jan Assmann. Assmann's thoughts help one understand that the different social environment of people plays an important role in their identity formation, thus creating this important connection between individuals. At the same time this allows individuals to understand themselves and the world around them (as one sees with Halbwachs, who focused more clearly on the connection between personal memory and a lived history). In summary, Halbwachs was the first to think about there being a memory beyond the individual, namely a shared, social or cultural memory. One can see discourse as an expression of these shared memories, values and ideas. Shared memory is continuously reinterpreted by subsequent generations, and as a result discourse too evolves over time. As such, it makes sense to use Halbwachs's thinking on cultural memory to elaborate on the workings of meaning-making. However, it took Assmann's clarification of its purpose of identity formation to understand why these shared memories crystallise and come to a perpetuated set of shared values (albeit reinterpreted with time, as shown above). Why is this important in relation to the music press? What is the role of music publications within this back and forth of ideas and values?

Readers of a music magazine like to read a specific critic or magazine, because they serve as someone they identify with.²⁵ As will be shown in the next chapter's layout of the history of the

²² Idem, 130.

²³ Idem, 129.

²⁴ Idem, 132.

²⁵ Forde, Eamonn. "From polyglottism to branding: On the decline of personality journalism in the British music press." (*Journalism* 2:1: 23-43), 39.

music press, a whole phase of the music press was built around the 'stardom' of certain critics. The critic, as a result, does not write out their own ideas: they have to write something that will be read. They must cater to their target audience. In doing so, they not only write out something for the reader to read, but also something for them to identify with. As shown above, we can understand that the press serves as a 'leader' in the perpetuation of shared values amongst readers, and thus in expressing its dominant discourse. Their writing therefore becomes the establishment of 'standards of values and ideological assumptions'.²⁶ This becomes even clearer when we consider that a music magazine does not only consist of straightforward album reviews. Critics do not only write reviews, they are also precisely a platform for memory-making: they review concerts which readers may have attended, they interview artists about their lives, again something which creates an intimacy between artists and their public, and they generally offer a letter to the editor section, which allows readers to engage in debate and comment on the content of the publications (albeit filtered through the magazine's editor). In other words, people are able to indeed reinterpret and challenge the values constructed in discourse. There is thus a case to be made for a social meaning-making process, controlled by the music press. The collective interpretation of music is never known fully by every person, but can be reconstructed through the memories of others. The press serves as a melting pot of individual experiences: it is a fusion where people come together to take part in a shared identity of music listeners. The press is thus a perfect example of an expression of dominant values and ideas.

A study of the Dutch *Top 2000* event, which happens each year from Christmas until New Year, reveals a similar social process. According to José van Dijck, this event serves as a platform for listeners to send in their personal stories surrounding the songs that are played. These are in turn recited by the radio broadcasters. For Van Dijck, this process results in an intimate experience for the listeners, because the recited stories are generally of a universal nature, meaning everyone can identify with them.²⁷ Similarly, the shared experience of tuning in to the show together, adds to the perceived intimacy of the moment. These experiences of sharing something, which could be argued happens similarly in the reading of music magazines, creates a new collective memory as understood by Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, thus giving way to a shared sense of identity.²⁸ The recollections made by radio broadcasters, as well as the sharing of New Year's wishes, resembles the music press's perpetuation of values and ideals in their own review ratings.

²⁶ Fenster, Mark. "Consumers' Guides: The Political Economy of the Music Press and the Democracy of Critical Discourse." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 81-92. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 84.

²⁷ Van Dijck, José. "Remembering Songs through Telling Stories: Pop Music as a Resource for Memory." (In *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*, edited by Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck, 107-119. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 109.

²⁸ Idem, 112-113.

Especially considering their own approach to music at the end of the year, which often results in a list recollection the best releases of that year, the two seem the more identical. Van Dijck's analysis of the *Top 2000* thus fits the theories of Halbwachs and Assmann like a glove. Radio broadcasters and music critics play the role of cohesion between readers, which results in the construction of a shared identity of a group of readers, which in turn gets expressed in a discourse.²⁹

How is this useful for understanding the role of newspapers and other publications? Newspapers should be seen to be in the contesting business of the production of 'cultural meaning'. Through this they have a large impact on cultural identity: how people see themselves and the world. This discursive element of newspapers can be considered from the perspective of those involved in the production of the papers (politicians, advertisers, etc.), but also through the format of the magazines (how are advertisements placed in relation to informative articles), and the values represented in the writer's text. How these authors write about specific races, genders, etc., all contribute to the construction of a discourse. It is this text's discourse, which can be understood as an expression of cultural ideas and values, that tells one something about how people view themselves and the world. In other words, it displays their shared group identity and its outsiders.

It is important to note, however, the extent to which the press's publications are informed by broader economic and ideological practices like the just mentioned politicians and advertisers. While the press does indeed speak to and for their readers, the relation between them is not one of a simple back and forth, wherein the publication serves as a filtered summation of its audience's dreams and values. While some scholars, like Paul M. Hirsch argue for the influential position of the critic, others have added to this that the journalist's position results in a 'perceived independence'.³⁰ But actual independence is far from likely as these writers are dependent on making an income.³¹ This income is not only generated through the audience that buys the papers, but comes for the most part from advertising. In the case of music magazines, the main investors in advertisements are record labels and other music-related vendors like instrument-specific manufacturers and sellers of audio equipment.³² Simultaneously it is of course important to note that the owner of a magazine has a say in what voice their magazines have. This ties in with the journalists' power to act as a filter of what does and what does not reach its audience. As such, if the owner has liberal political ideals, this will result in a different magazine than if they were

²⁹ Idem, 114.

³⁰ Fenster, Mark. "Consumers' Guides: The Political Economy of the Music Press and the Democracy of Critical Discourse." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 81-92. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 83.

³¹ Idem, 84.

³² Idem, 84.

conservative. It is important to keep these often complex dynamics in mind when considering the relation of the press to its readers. The following chapter will look at the development of the music press and the way in which its dominant discourse has come to be.

2. Evolution of the music press

To study the representation of female musicians in alternative music publications, one needs to look at the evolution of music journalism in general. It is important to outline the tension within the different forms of representation of female musicians in the past, in order to place contemporary alternative magazines within a longer tradition of music journalism and subsequently the academic research surrounding them. This chapter will thus explore the history of the music press of the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, that of the United States. Subsequently, this chapter will go more specifically into the gendered discourse of the music press, by emphasising its portrayal of female musicians in its publications. In doing so, this chapter will also consider how feminist responses have risen, most notably in the form of the riot grrrl network, while placing them in the context of larger feminist movements.

A stable music press first took shape during the 1950s. In the British music press of the end of the fifties, this was a weekly paper, which reported on new music releases and updated people on the sales charts.³³ In the United States this kind of promotion was more widely done by radio stations, but for the UK this was not the case. The BBC, having a monopoly on broadcasting radio at that time, rarely played modern 'youth music', and preferred to broadcast light orchestra and variety acts. As a result, the music press was the most central figure in the reporting of pop music in Britain.³⁴ By the end of the fifties, *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker* were the most notable weekly publications in the UK. During the fifties and the first half of the sixties, serious music criticism was rare and could only be found in fanzines and publications of the underground press.³⁵ It was only halfway through the sixties that a diversification of musical genres through rock music started to demand a journalist response that fit its specific culture and aesthetic. This 1964-69 period is seen as the first development of music criticism (then specifically rock criticism) in the United States, but it was only at the beginning of the seventies that the often referred-to scholar Jason Toynbee sees a development of British music criticism. Similarly, the scholars Gestur Gudmundsson, Ulf Lindberg, Morten Michelsen, and Hans Weisethaunet, recognise the early seventies as a first 'turning point' of three in the evolution of British music journalism.³⁶ The specialised critical approach to rock music was the first change, in which journalists no longer

³³ Toynbee, Jason. "Policing Bohemia, Pinning up Grunge: The Music Press and Generic Change in British Pop and Rock." (*Popular Music* 12:3 (Oct. 1993): 289-300), 290.

³⁴ Idem, 290.

³⁵ Jones, Steve. "The Intro: Popular Music, Media, and the Written Word." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 1-15. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 2/3.

³⁶ Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 41.

merely reported new releases and the sales charts, but also started to engage more seriously with the musical material itself.

Gudmundsson et al. see an important difference between the US and the UK up to this point of music journalism. In doing so they make use of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) writing to argue that judgements of taste serve social distinctions. The legitimation of cultural ideas and values happens through cultural 'centres', that express their power by separating the 'legitimable' and 'illegitimate' from one another.³⁷ What is and what is not 'legit' is however fluid, and evolves over time. This idea fits what has been shown in chapter one, in which magazines, papers and other media are important perpetuators of a group's values. Simultaneously however, new generations don't adopt old values blindly, rather they are reinterpreted and reevaluated. In recognising this, Gudmundsson et al. also make a division between an 'autonomous' and a 'heteronomous pole' within culture, both of which are in an essential dynamic to one another if something is to be culturally recognised.³⁸ The heteronomous pole, which is also called the commercial pole, should be seen as that element of culture in which its producers seek to gain economic success. The autonomous, or 'pure pole', on the other hand aims for artistic or stylistic recognition.³⁹ Accordingly, the two poles are always in a dynamic struggle with one another, and the same can be said of the development of a field of rock music. This dynamic in turn gets reflected in newspapers, an important element of which is rock's focus on authenticity. Authenticity served as a way for rock music to prove itself in the face of its own growing commercial success.⁴⁰

In the United Kingdom, Melody Maker, which started in 1926, was one of the first major music publications that wrote about jazz and popular music. Rock on the other hand was seen as a threat to the values established by years of development of the jazz culture.⁴¹ In the United States there was a divide between two 'aesthetic conceptions' of the other, which thus related to the autonomous pole: on the one hand blues and folk were idealised for representing the oppressed in society, while on the other hand bebop, jazz and hipster culture were associated with the African American's 'free spirit'.⁴² Simultaneously there was a more strongly heteronomous culture of music, that was being celebrated in the United States more so than in the UK. This embrace of consumer culture however largely neglected the black population and southern 'white trash'. But

³⁷ Idem, 42.

³⁸ Idem, 44.

³⁹ Idem, 44.

⁴⁰ Idem, 44.

⁴¹ Idem, 45.

⁴² Idem, 50.

their appropriation in rock music through its adoption of blues and jazz mannerisms, including a growing value of authenticity, gradually made these cultures more acceptable.⁴³

The development of new musical genres, most notably the rise of rock, changed the press situation of the mid-1960s. This new music listening audience meant that a new style of music journalism was required to cater to their needs. In Britain the music press only slowly started to take rock music more seriously after 1964, when The Beatles had already broken through.⁴⁴ One of these journalists, who was writing for *New Musical Express*, was Charles Shaar Murray, who was able to find a new writing style that suited the genre of rock.⁴⁵ His style was a mixture of critically approaching the music, while also being in touch with the emotional side of the music. His writing was also more hip and contained Americanisms, which is partly due to *New Musical Express's* agreement with the American *Creem* magazine to republish their articles in the United Kingdom. During the seventies, renowned journalists like Lester Bangs wrote for *Creem*, who have thus had a big influence on British writers like Murray.⁴⁶ During this counterculture period in music there was roughly a divide between mainstream 'teeny-bop' or pop audiences and rock (which was considered to be more 'serious' than the mainstream). This would prove a stable situation for the music press until the rise of punk music (and other, smaller musical genres) in the early eighties.⁴⁷

This 'New Journalism' period of the music press, which essentially means it took a more subjective approach of the critic instead of the objective reporting of chart sales and new releases, should as a result not be understood as developing separately in the United States and in Britain. Rather, this was specifically the moment when music journalism in the UK and the US started to become more alike, albeit with minor differences. Gudmundsson et al. recognise the beginning of the *Crawdaddy!* magazine as the 'birth of rock criticism' in the United States in 1966. However, *Crawdaddy!*'s founder Paul William looked at the music press of England for inspiration, and its first issue included quotes from the UK's *Music Echo* magazine.⁴⁸ As such, the 'beginning of rock criticism' cannot be said to be a purely American or British invention. Both were influenced by one

⁴³ Idem, 50.

⁴⁴ Idem, 45.

⁴⁵ Toynbee, Jason. "Policing Bohemia, Pinning up Grunge: The Music Press and Generic Change in British Pop and Rock." (*Popular Music* 12:3 (Oct. 1993): 289-300), 291.

⁴⁶ Jones, Steve. "The Intro: Popular Music, Media, and the Written Word." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 1-15. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 3.

⁴⁷ Toynbee, Jason. "Policing Bohemia, Pinning up Grunge: The Music Press and Generic Change in British Pop and Rock." (*Popular Music* 12:3 (Oct. 1993): 289-300), 291/292.

⁴⁸ Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 46/47.

another, as has also been shown above when the British *New Musical Express* borrowed from the American *Creem*. An important aspect of this period of music journalism is that it had a polyglottic identity.⁴⁹ This means that music magazines were made up of different journalists each with their own identity and style/voice. These writers themselves were highly iconic and valued almost as much as the musicians they wrote about. Using the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, these journalists are often referred to as the ideal reader of their own articles, and thus represent a point of identification for the average reader.⁵⁰ This was very much the case in the rock journalism of the sixties and seventies: people read a music journal for a specific journalist, a voice with which they could identify.

While the differences between American and British approaches to music journalism have been greatly diminished at this point of the evolution of the music press, the 'New Journalism' phase in music journalism does feature some differences in their approaches. The American approach was more mythological, in the sense that they considered musicians to be geniuses and were quick to praise new releases (in case it became the 'next big thing'). The British rock music press, however, emphasised musical meaning and subcultures more. In their analyses of music, the British music press was influenced by postmodern and poststructuralist ideas, and as such can be said to be even more on the autonomous side of the spectrum, while the American journalists were still more heteronomous.⁵¹ Through the all-over increasing sense of autonomy, and its assessment of values like authenticity, which it initially derived precisely from earlier jazz, blues and folk cultures, one can understand that music journalism was critically involved in exhibiting the 'deeper meaning' of pop musicians and thus of bringing their alternative ideas into public youth discourse (presumably more so in Britain than in the American music press, which again was more sensationalist).

Rock music's sense of authenticity played an important role within the press itself as well. For the music it was through authenticity that its autonomous pole was embraced more and more, while the importance of record sales and popularity diminished in importance for receiving critical acclaim.⁵² This authenticity should be taken to mean 'being sincere', in the sense that a musician was authentic if he wrote his own songs, about his own heartfelt issues. Money mustn't play a role whatsoever. Similarly, political involvement was praised, as well as talking about difficult issues like depression. This 'authentic discourse' was not only constructed by the musicians themselves,

⁴⁹ Forde, Eamonn. "From polyglottism to branding: On the decline of personality journalism in the British music press." (*Journalism* 2:1: 23-43), 24.

⁵⁰ Idem, 39.

⁵¹ Idem, 31.

⁵² Davies, Helen. "All Rock and Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press." (*Popular Music* 20:3 (Oct. 2001): 301-319), 305.

rather the music press played a crucial role in its creation. The personality journalism exhibited by rock critics exemplifies that these writers themselves gained a rockstar-like status through their work. Music journalists became intertwined with their subjects.⁵³ This attitude also became apparent in their writing, as sentences became shorter and more direct or raw, for example in the case of the American critic Nik Cohn.⁵⁴ Other critics took to writing about rock music in a way that would approach it more like an art form. This happened for example most clearly in the case of British critics like Nick Kent and the earlier named Charles Shaar Murray, both of whom took a more intellectual approach. Similar key values and tensions between the autonomous pole of authenticity and a heteronomous pole of commercial success have been recognised in other musical genres such as hip-hop and its music journalist publications like *Source* and *Vibe*⁵⁵, as well as country music's struggle to stay authentic despite its American commercial success in the nineties.⁵⁶

For Steve Jones and Kevin Featherly, music critics have often focused intently on the politics of music through the music's lyrics, which is in fact the only truly narratable element of the music as there is no common vocabulary for discussing and clearly communicating the sound of the music. In elaborating on its message, three 'themes' have been of major importance and have been greatly influential on the future of the music press, namely the before-mentioned authenticity, but also race and mass culture.⁵⁷ The early writing on these themes is regarded as a crystallisation of what music journalists in the future would focus on, as it is through these topics that they discussed broader societal issues.⁵⁸ This period served as the groundwork for viewing music in a specific way, which has continued to evolve into today's discourse. While there were these important social values on which the music journalists elaborated intensively, the formative 'personality journalists' have more recently been critiqued by scholars. Taking the example of

⁵³ Forde, Eamonn. "From polyglottism to branding: On the decline of personality journalism in the British music press." (*Journalism* 2:1: 23-43), 24;

Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 48.

⁵⁴ Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 49.

⁵⁵ Chang, Jeff. "Word Power: A Brief, Highly Opinionated History of Hip-Hop Journalism." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 65-71. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 70/71;
McLeod, Kembrew. "The Politics and History of Hip-Hop Journalism." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 156-167. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 162/163.

⁵⁶ Jensen, Joli. "Taking Country Music Seriously: Coverage of the 1990s Boom." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 183-201. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 183.

⁵⁷ Jones, Steve, and Kevin Featherly. "Re-Viewing Rock Writing: Narratives of Popular Music Criticism." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 19-40. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 19.

⁵⁸ Idem, 20/36.

authenticity, many of the music critics ascribed this value uniquely to male artists. Generally, the writers of music magazines were convinced of the fact that they were all male writers, writing for a male-only audience. This was later of course found out to be false, as a lot of women read the music press as well.⁵⁹ Even while they did introduce their audiences to a critical way of seeing the world, nonetheless they ignored women in doing so. The apparent sexism within the music press, and the journalists' conviction that they found themselves in a male world, is something that will shortly be further discussed.

Gudmundsson et al. recognise the rise of punk rock music in 1976-78 as the second turning point of the British music press, which by that time had become closely related to the American press, as seen above. Punk rock was a strong reaction against the two poles of music, the autonomous and heteronomous poles, and aimed to balance both 'bohemian ideals of authenticity' and 'pop art ideals of artifice'.⁶⁰ In this one can make a rough division between the punk acts of the autonomous pole that embraced and expanded on rock's primary barbarism, while those of the heteronomous pole took a more avant-garde, experimental approach. The prior was mainly concerned with 'realist/populist street politics', whereas the latter took ideas of Dada and situationism to ridicule and subvert rock's manifested authenticity.⁶¹ After 1980 this avant-garde approach to punk music, also called New Pop, gradually became more relevant than authentic punk rock. While both movements did not do much to change values and standards, they did greatly increase the interest for music publications. In part this happened because their music was dependent on journalists for exposure, as punk was for example banned from radio and live venues.⁶² Simultaneously, while some critics continued to write in a reflective mode concerned with politics, others embraced this new postmodern pop art. This was also apparent from the style of the critics' writing as they began to adapt similar experimental approaches like stream of consciousness and cut-up technique writing, while their subjects were presented more as cartoon-like fantasies with exaggerated traits.⁶³ New types of publications appeared to cater to the New Pop audience's needs as well, namely in 1978 the biweekly *Smash Hits* and in 1980 the monthly

⁵⁹ Davies, Helen. "All Rock and Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press." (*Popular Music* 20:3 (Oct. 2001): 301-319), 301/302.

⁶⁰ Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 54.

⁶¹ Idem, 54/55.

⁶² Idem, 54.

⁶³ Forde, Eamonn. "From polyglottism to branding: On the decline of personality journalism in the British music press." (*Journalism* 2:1: 23-43), 27.

'style bible' *Face*. Both were 'glossies', instead of the weekly 'inky' releases, and catered more to a 'consumer ideology'.⁶⁴

The third and last turning point is seen by Gudmundsson et al. as the 1986-88 period. During the eighties the increasing development of different genres of music resulted in teenagers forming a variety of subcultures, each getting their own niche-magazine.⁶⁵ As a result, competition increased a lot between magazines, and the music publications' initial approach to their subjects was not sustainable anymore. Music journalism had to undergo another change. Instead of weekly releases, the monthly glossies were rising in popularity, which became even more niche-oriented. This increasing division between listeners of different musical genres in these glossies is also referred to as 'conscious segmentation', which means that consumers were being catered to more specifically on the basis of age and musical genre.⁶⁶ While publications were meant to direct their writing to more specific audiences, this also had important commercial purposes. The specialisation went hand in hand with targeted commercialisation, as articles in these glossies are closely bound with lifestyle products that are being marketed to their readers (often to the point where it becomes difficult to discern the article from the advert).⁶⁷ In this new phase there was a more uniform brand identity for a specific music magazine, whereas in the past every writer could have his own identity within a single journal. This need of forming a single brand identity (in order to deliver a standard of quality in this highly competitive field), meant that the free, critical writing of the journalists had to be toned down in favour of a standard of quality harmonious to its role as a 'consumer guide'.⁶⁸ As a result, the voice of music critics became more objective and less confrontational towards political issues.⁶⁹ Most glossies take part in this heteronomous pole of music publications, and are part of the same giant publishing groups.⁷⁰ Gudmundsson et al. consider more recent publications that focus on dance music and rap to largely fill the same

⁶⁴ Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 56.

⁶⁵ Toynbee, Jason. "Policing Bohemia, Pinning up Grunge: The Music Press and Generic Change in British Pop and Rock." (*Popular Music* 12:3 (Oct. 1993): 289-300), 291.

⁶⁶ Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 57.

⁶⁷ Toynbee, Jason. "Policing Bohemia, Pinning up Grunge: The Music Press and Generic Change in British Pop and Rock." (*Popular Music* 12:3 (Oct. 1993): 289-300), 291.

⁶⁸ Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 58.

⁶⁹ Forde, Eamonn. "From polyglottism to branding: On the decline of personality journalism in the British music press." (*Journalism* 2:1: 23-43), 28.

⁷⁰ Idem, 26.

position, despite the initial autonomous movements in rap writing as shortly referred to above. It is magazines like *The Wire* that, while relatively rare, still offer an autonomous voice as music critics.

In the above brief overview of the development of the American and British music press, one can recognise through the work of Gudmundsson et al. three major turning points. Up until the first turning point, the press should be understood as a largely commercial exercise in keeping readers updated on sales charts and new releases. The first turning point was one in which the new counterculture and genre of rock music required a writing style that suited their anti-commercial lifestyle. The response was to make use of the value of authenticity. This became increasingly important as was exemplified by the press's discourse, resulting in music criticism's strong autonomous pole. While the differences between music journalism in the United States and the United Kingdom grew closer together, there were still some differences, mainly in that the American music press was more heteronomous and their writing more objective than in Britain. The rise of punk music is identified as the second turning point, which sought to balance rock's barbarism with an ideology of pop art artificiality. The latter gained more attention over time, and while it didn't change the content of music writing per se, it did increase the interest in the writing itself. This growing interest continued well into the eighties, when new music styles and their subcultures demanded their own music publication. This is seen as the third turning point, which resulted in a growth of competition between the different magazines.

One key aspect of these developments of the music press is that a standardised way of talking about music has developed during the rock period of music criticism, when values like authenticity gained importance, which is largely still instructing music journalism today. This one can explain through this last large phase of music journalism, in which magazines have taken on a single brand identity to provide a continuous standard of quality. From the nineties onwards, music journalists have seen new genres, but no major changes within their own structure. The glossy magazine's consumer guide style of more neutral journalism and specific commercial entertainment is still today the most dominant mode of music writing. For Helen Davies, it is clear that notable elements of the discourse earlier expressed in music publications are often being perpetuated in music journalism today, in both paper writing and online texts.⁷¹ Another important aspect of the music press became most notable during the rock period of music criticism as well. The polyglottic identity of the publications during the seventies featured writers who themselves gained a reputation similar to that of the musicians they covered in their writing. As has been shown in the previous chapter through the development of Maurice Halbwachs's thought, the press plays an important role as a melting pot of individual experiences, values and ideas, because they

⁷¹ Davies, Helen. "All Rock and Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press." (*Popular Music* 20:3 (Oct. 2001): 301-319), 317.

do in essence not write for themselves, they write for their readers. Readers in turn identify themselves with and feel represented by the writers they regularly read. Music publications are a place where people 'come together' to take part in a shared identity between music listeners. The discourse found in magazines is a perfect example of an expression of their dominant values and ideas. Here then, one can clearly see how a theoretical formation of discourse takes shape in practice. In short, the press doesn't serve just as a bridge between musicians and their audience, but rather contribute to the construction of shared values, and thus also of identity. The expressed discourse in music publications is a reflection of the shared identity that has been constructed over time between a music magazine and its large group of readers.

The music press's ideas of themselves as being a man's world, which have also found expression in its discourse, have of course not been without criticism. Despite their overall liberal attitudes and openness to discuss 'authentic' political issues, there has been a significant amount of critique on the 'personality journalists' of the sixties and seventies, who have in turn influenced the writing of the following generations of music critics. As has become clear, authenticity was an important aspect in music. Male musicians received a lot of praise for being sincere in their actions, for expressing themselves emotionally, and for speaking up against social issues like poverty and discrimination. There was a strong appreciation of connections between the artist's music and the artist's political involvement. Simultaneously, however, when writing about female musicians, journalists seemed to only focus on their appearance. Women were highly sexualised and could not attain a sense of authenticity in the way that men could.⁷² When women did actually try to get politically involved, or spoke about issues like depression, they were either mocked or called hysterical for doing so. At the same time, the man's world of music journalism has barely seen any esteemed female music critics. In fact, Gudmundsson et al. state that only Julie Burchill has reached infamous heights, and no other female music journalist after that.⁷³ Helen Davies argues that female music journalists were outnumbered by more than two to one. Because of the relatively few female critics there were (and still are), they adapted to this idea of the music press being a man's world, while they also often fulfilled less important positions within the magazine.⁷⁴ This led to them, for example, having to review lesser subjects (like a reader's submission). In turn, due to the dominance of masculinity within the music press, this resulted in female critics replicating the same kind of language that men were using to discuss female musicians in order to fit in.

⁷² Idem, 301.

⁷³ Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 59.

⁷⁴ Davies, Helen. "All Rock and Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press." (*Popular Music* 20:3 (Oct. 2001): 301-319), 301/302.

In recognising that female musicians have barely been able to receive esteem for being credible or authentic in a way that male musicians do, one can understand how the discourse of the music press has always been essentially gendered. This does not mean that praise was inherently impossible for women to attain in other ways than merely through their appearance.⁷⁵ Women could be taken more seriously, but this generally meant that they either had to be associated with respected men in the music business, had to adopt a more intellectual image, or that they had to let go of their own femininity. However, while possible, Helen Davies shows that this was a rarity. In the case of the musician PJ Harvey, who attempted to be perceived as intellectual, she was still sexualised in music magazines, and Kylie Minogue's collaboration with Nick Cave has often been perceived as a calculated sexual relationship in order to further her own career and her credibility. On the other hand, female musicians who let go of their own femininity by becoming 'one of the boys', tend to get criticised by feminists like the riot grrrls as having sold out and, by succumbing to masculinity, no longer representing women.⁷⁶ Of course, the image of an artist is not solely interpreted by music critics. A musician's image is often carefully constructed and controlled by themselves and the business surrounding their work, for instance including the record company they are signed to.⁷⁷ The press does however play an important role in the perpetuation of this image, and has a large say in this portrayal due to their large public reach.

In other words, what becomes clear is that the gendered discourse of the music press means that musicians are being regarded with an intense focus on their gender. While the above forms of sexism, relating to the value of authenticity, are more subtle, there are also more blatant expressions of sexism within the press. Female musicians are, for example, often ignored in retrospectives of music genres, which tend to celebrate male musicians, and they feature on the cover of music publications a lot less frequently than their male colleagues.⁷⁸ When they do get featured or interviewed within magazines, female musicians are often asked about issues relating to their femininity or sexuality. In doing so, Helen Davies argues, music critics unrightfully do not regard these women primarily as musicians. In the few exceptional cases where they do, female musicians are presented as a novelty and a new opportunity for women within music.⁷⁹ This simply blurs the fact that these musicians were previously ignored while simultaneously making the writer look good for giving them attention this time. Other notable issues are the comparison of women

⁷⁵ Idem, 309.

⁷⁶ Idem, 308/309.

⁷⁷ Swiss, Thomas. "Jewel Case: Pop Stars, Poets, and the Press." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 171-182. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 176.

⁷⁸ Davies, Helen. "All Rock and Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press." (*Popular Music* 20:3 (Oct. 2001): 301-319), 302.

⁷⁹ Idem, 302.

as a 'female version' of a famous male star, remarks on their physical appearance, as well as suggestive titles and the emphasis on their bodies in the article's accompanying photos.⁸⁰

Taking the example of rock music, the scholar Holly Kruse notes that its aesthetic is considered to be 'transcendental', and is only truly understood by men (the exceptions being non-traditional female 'others').⁸¹ What this means is that critics see the music as not being bound to a time or place. Instead, good music transcends its listeners beyond daily life. According to Kruse this is ignorant as music is clearly interpreted differently at different times and places by different people. Music should be seen as being part of people's daily lives, instead of lifting them outside of it. Music is intertwined with everyday experiences and takes part in the construction of individual and group identities. This is of course in accordance with what one has seen in the previous chapter. In the context of Maurice Halbwachs, music can be seen precisely as a framework of 'lived history'. Its constant reinterpretation in turn makes it part of a perpetual construction of identity, as understood by Jan Assmann. Because of this, Kruse emphasises that music critics do indeed impact how people socially see themselves and the world around them.⁸² Several music journalists have reflected on the inherent sexism of the press, specifically Simon Frith, Larry Grossberg and Simon Reynolds.⁸³ Thus, while there is a dominant sense of masculinity, and a misrepresentation of female musicians within the music press, this does not mean that there were no critiques from within.

These three critics are taken by Holly Kruse as representing more critical perspectives on the music press as an imagined masculine playground, which is often not able to consider women within this picture and perhaps even downright refuses them in it. Music critics write about music that is considered to be serious and cerebral, traits that women certainly are not perceived to have.⁸⁴ Simultaneously, the female musicians that are covered often serve the purpose of fulfilling male fantasies of a female culture, from which men themselves are excluded (something which is for example specifically remarked by Simon Frith).⁸⁵ Even though Simon Frith, Larry Grossberg and Simon Reynolds have written in their reviews about gendered discourse and its social

⁸⁰ Idem, 304.

⁸¹ Kruse, Holly. "Abandoning the Absolute: Transcendence and Gender in Popular Music Discourse." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 134-155. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 134.

⁸² Idem, 135.

⁸³ Idem, 138.

⁸⁴ Davies, Helen. "All Rock and Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press." (*Popular Music* 20:3 (Oct. 2001): 301-319), 313.

⁸⁵ Kruse, Holly. "Abandoning the Absolute: Transcendence and Gender in Popular Music Discourse." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 134-155. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 139.

construction, they often still fall into generalisations of men and women. Most notably Reynolds, whom Kruse is rather appreciative of, used theories of post-structuralism and deconstruction in his work as a music critic. In his writing on the musician Kristin Hersh, Reynolds wants her (and women in general) to be heard as voices of universal experience, instead of being repressed under the current domination of the male music press.⁸⁶ In doing so, he projects his own desires on someone else, specifically Kristin Hersh in this case. For Kruse this is still a problematic move within music journalism, as this still portrays the dominant structure of a man imposing his wishes on a woman. Kruse further argues that this problem is not just centred around the female musicians, but involves the listeners as well. Thomas Swiss too observes that there is no room for women in a discourse which expresses values of authenticity. Inauthentic modes on the other hand, are appropriately popular with women and gay audiences.⁸⁷

What exactly does this mean for the identity construction within the music press? Maurice Halbwachs clarified the meaning-making process and the creation of socially shared memories, values and ideas. Jan Assmann helped clarify its purpose of identity formation through the crystallisation and perpetuation of these shared values (reinterpreted anew each time they are perpetuated). Clearly, the press placed an emphasis on values like authenticity, especially in rock music at the first turning point. It is through this that a stronger autonomous pole was achieved, and a sense of identity was derived from precisely that. The dynamic relationship to these values has evolved over time, and the balance between the autonomous versus the heteronomous pole changed along these developments. There is thus not one single identity for all publications in the whole existence of the mainstream music press. The three different phases that Gudmundsson et al. recognise clarify this, as different publications represent different social groups (and should thus be seen on different parts of the spectrum between autonomous and heteronomous). Multiple scholars have nonetheless identified a common thread within these developments, namely that of the exclusion of women. As such, the identity created by the mainstream music press is one that is essentially male. Despite the variations within the discourses they create, due to their focus on different kinds of music and values, one can recognise a shared identity. There is an overall shared idea of gender between the various publications, namely their belief that they are all part of a male world of music. In this they also share a way of seeing the world around them, in which the masculine is enforced as the serious, deep, authentic gender. Women are largely excluded from these values, and femininity is instead associated with inauthentic modes of sexualisation and commercialisation.

⁸⁶ Idem, 142/143.

⁸⁷ Swiss, Thomas. "Jewel Case: Pop Stars, Poets, and the Press." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 171-182. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 177.

Punk music offered a new image for non-traditional female musicians, but did not do enough to restructure the role of gender in music.⁸⁸ The new diversification of musical genres after the punk era of the eighties eventually did pave the way for the riot grrrl network, which sits in the midst of a scene that was more critical of the domination of a masculine culture, and which dared to offer an alternative to women. This was not only a response to music journalists. It should also be seen as a larger critique on the relation of women to the music industry. This is something that Holly Kruse pointed out as well in involving the role of the fans within discourse.⁸⁹ As such, the problem is larger than just the press, and it involves the listeners and their subcultures, but also the entire productive process behind the music. Most scholars have focused precisely on these broader elements of music subcultures and the role of women within them (i.e. Helen Reddington, Sheila Whiteley), instead of researching the press. On the other hand, Marion Leonard has looked extensively at specifically feminist music publications, which came out of a network which called itself 'riot grrrl'.

Riot grrrl was initiated in the United States in 1991 by two female-centred indie bands, Bratmobile and Bikini Kill, with the idea of 'girls and women asserting themselves through underground music'.⁹⁰ In the nineties the visibility of female musicians increased overall, with several other musicians starting feminist organisations as a critique on the masculine culture of the music industry. Riot grrrl can best be situated amongst those, but also had connections with the above-mentioned underground post-punk scene as well as queer groups.⁹¹ It is referred to by Marion Leonard as a network instead of a scene, a group, or a state of mind. This is important, because the riot grrrl network does not feature one single set of ideas that are shared by its members. Therefore, riot grrrl should be seen as a net of connections between its participants, in which ideas are exchanged and developed.⁹² The term riot grrrl itself has a double meaning in that it suggests a state of rebellion, while also encouraging actual action against male domination in the music industry. Simultaneously it embraces the word 'girl' as something positive, rather than calling

⁸⁸ Kruse, Holly. "Abandoning the Absolute: Transcendence and Gender in Popular Music Discourse." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 134-155. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 141.

⁸⁹ Idem, 149.

⁹⁰ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 115.

⁹¹ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 116;
Kearney, Mary Celeste. "The Missing Links: Riot grrrl - feminism - lesbian culture." (In *Sexing the Groove: Popular music and gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 207-229. London: Routledge, 1997), 218.

⁹² Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 117.

themselves women.⁹³ Primarily, the exchange and development of ideas happened through social communication at concerts and through the exchange of zines during the performances of female musicians. During these performances, bands like the American Bikini Kill and the British Hubby Bear would renegotiate women's relation to live music performance by for example demanding that all women came to the front, breaking the barrier between performing and being part of the audience by giving others the microphone to express their frustration, and by directly confronting hecklers (which were supposedly often men that did not agree to the riot grrrls' approach).⁹⁴ Similarly, riot grrrl bands would juxtapose typical feminine dress codes with slogans and words written on their limbs such as 'slut' and 'whore' in an attempt to confront gendered discourse.⁹⁵ Throughout their zines similar ideas were employed as to what was enacted during live shows. Images from fashion magazines and advertisement posters were cut-up and reorganised in collages along similar written slurs (a do-it-yourself writing style which put them close to the raw punk scene). In doing so, the zine writers, which were made up of both riot grrrl musicians and non-musicians, aimed to critique the way in which women were presented in mass media, while simultaneously offering alternate ways of representing women, which their readers could actually identify with.⁹⁶

Thanks to the distribution of zines and the exchange of ideas during live shows, the network expanded visibly by an increase in the amount of new riot grrrl zines that associated themselves with the network. Despite this expansion, the content of riot grrrl zines remained broad with a range of influences. Zines mixed coverage of music with discussion about inequality issues relating to gender and sexuality. While many writers were students who recommended traditional feminist works, other dismissed these and praised radical feminists like Valerie Solanas who founded the 'Society for Cutting Up Men'.⁹⁷ Other riot grrrls were quick to dissociate themselves from these more radical writers. The network was first covered in the mainstream music press by *Melody Maker*, and it has received more media fascination over the years of its still ongoing existence. In its misrepresented coverage, critics have often tried to define the network as a subculture.⁹⁸

⁹³ Leonard, Marion. "Rebel Girl, You Are the Queen of My World: Feminism, 'subculture' and grrrl power." (In *Sexing the Groove: Popular music and gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 230-255. London: Routledge, 1997), 232.

⁹⁴ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 119/120.

⁹⁵ Idem, 121.

⁹⁶ Idem, 122.

⁹⁷ Idem, 123.

⁹⁸ Kearney, Mary Celeste. "The Missing Links: Riot grrrl - feminism - lesbian culture." (In *Sexing the Groove: Popular music and gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 207-229. London: Routledge, 1997), 209.

According to Marion Leonard, these critics attempted to dismantle the network in doing so by pointing towards a lack of unity in their various ideas, while also not being grounded enough in the work of serious feminist thinkers.⁹⁹ Even though initial coverage was celebrated by riot grrrls and it allowed their network to expand, they were wary of any future coverage as mainstream celebration of the network would risk a rigid, false definition of it, and thus a quick death as just another subculture trend.¹⁰⁰ Often this resulted in media silence, in an attempt to maintain authority over the network and its zines, with riot grrrls refusing to co-operate by either ignoring interview opportunities or withholding information on riot grrrl bands. A similar attitude has been held towards scholars studying the network, as riot grrrl authors refused to cooperate in research. A rare exception to this resulted in the work of Leonard.

Due to the low circulation of these zines, it is difficult to determine how many there actually were, but they have been found especially in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Similarly, it is hard to tell how many bands associated themselves with riot grrrl. Riot grrrl was not a protected name, and women were widely encouraged to take the name and start their own zines. There was even a foundation of the Riot Grrrl Press, located in Olympia in Washington, which aimed to copy and distribute all riot grrrl zines it received.¹⁰¹ Despite this, riot grrrl has never reached a substantial amount of circulation. In part this happened because of the highly personal content their zines contained, as zines were self-published by small groups or individuals. Riot grrrls were not bound to a geographical location. Because the riot grrrls often lived far away from each other, zines served as a way of communicating with others outside of the live show setting, while organising events to get together.¹⁰² The publicised zines never attempted to overthrow the dominant masculine discourse directly, despite their criticism of it. This was a conscious move, as it would have placed them in a direct opposition to mainstream culture, which would have made themselves 'other'.¹⁰³ Instead, the goal was to educate women and to empower them by giving them a voice. Discussion was encouraged in this, as it would give rise to new ideas and options. At

⁹⁹ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 126.

¹⁰⁰ Kearney, Mary Celeste. "The Missing Links: Riot grrrl - feminism - lesbian culture." (In *Sexing the Groove: Popular music and gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 207-229. London: Routledge, 1997), 211.

¹⁰¹ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 118.

¹⁰² Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 140;

Leonard, Marion. "Rebel Girl, You Are the Queen of My World: Feminism, 'subculture' and grrrl power." (In *Sexing the Groove: Popular music and gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 230-255. London: Routledge, 1997), 238/239.

¹⁰³ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 130.

the same time riot grrrls encouraged each other to learn an instrument, form bands and be productive in the arts, while trying to further expand their reach.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, as stated above, the zines never had a large reach, and it did not affect the masculinity of the mainstream press's gendered discourse. As such, Marion Leonard concludes, the riot grrrl network never had the right 'base in a concrete reality' to achieve more than 'a degree of female empowerment'.¹⁰⁵ Riot grrrl authors have, through their practice of setting up and writing for a zine, created opportunities for themselves to work at bigger mainstream music magazines and other occupations within the music industry.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, today there are also art and workshop festivals in the spirit of riot grrrl, such as Ladyfest.¹⁰⁷ In time, Leonard speculates, these developments may still come to influence the mainstream's gendered discourse.

The riot grrrl network has also inspired and led to other, more successful music publications. One of these was the award-winning American magazine *Rockrgrrl*, which was started by Carla DeSantis in 1995. Athena Elafros has studied this magazine, which ran until 2005, and found that its goal was to correct the 'masculinist tendencies of the mainstream music press'.¹⁰⁸ Similar to riot grrrl zines, it approached this by talking about the music women made (covering artists that the mainstream press ignored), discussing the equipment these musicians use, offering specific advice for starting female musicians, and by criticising the gendered discourse of the mainstream music press which focused on women's sexuality instead of their musicality. Despite its goal to represent all women however, Elafros argues, *Rockrgrrl* perpetuated similar divisions as the mainstream press when it came to racial differences.¹⁰⁹ While *Rockrgrrl* criticised these music critics for a lack of coverage of female musicians and for presenting women as novelties within music, *Rockrgrrl* did the exact same thing when it came to non-white musicians and hip-hop culture. This is reflected in the fact that, for the most part, women featuring in the magazine were white, and that the few notable hip-hop acts that were covered were presented as a 'solution to the depoliticization of mainstream music'.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Kearney, Mary Celeste. "The Missing Links: Riot grrrl - feminism - lesbian culture." (In *Sexing the Groove: Popular music and gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 207-229. London: Routledge, 1997), 215.

¹⁰⁵ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 131.

¹⁰⁶ Idem, 154.

¹⁰⁷ Idem, 163.

¹⁰⁸ Elafros, Athena. "'No Beauty Tips or Guilt Trips': *Rockrgrrl*, Rock, and Representation." (*Popular Music and Society* 33:4 (Oct. 2010): 487-499), 487.

¹⁰⁹ Idem, 494.

¹¹⁰ Idem, 495/496.

Riot grrrls and their zines offered an alternative voice celebrating the achievements of female musicians and women in general. Nonetheless, in these alternative publications, inequality issues, concerning for example race, come to the fore, and there is a great difficulty in defining who and what the various riot grrrls represent. Marion Leonard suggests that riot grrrl may be situated within third-wave feminism, but what is this third-wave exactly? First-wave feminism was of course concerned with women's right to vote and other legal inequalities. The second-wave was concerned with the right to work, to divorce, as well as issues such as (sexual) violence against women and the right to have an abortion. It is important to note that developments, especially in the case of abortion, differ greatly per country. The following should therefore be seen as a rough overview of the different waves of feminism, not an in-depth historical layout of feminism. While some people recognise only these first two waves of feminism, and include ongoing feminist debates within the second wave, others recognise a third and even a fourth wave. This distinction into four waves will be useful here to more accurately place riot grrrl within feminism, and to possibly position the case study's publications, *The Wire* and *Pitchfork*, within these different 'waves' as well. That being said, the concept of different waves of feminism should be taken with a grain of salt, as they cannot be perfectly defined and delineated from one another (the different waves grew out of each other, after all). Simultaneously, there's the issue of the above-named differences per country. Nonetheless, the distinction is useful, because it helps create a rough overview of feminism and a context for these different publications.

Third-wave feminism was a product of the early nineties. Its focus lies on reclaiming femininity as a positive thing. What this means in practice is that words like 'girl' are being embraced by third-wave feminists, in light of the negative connotations associated with these words. In doing so, they hope to get rid of a standard conception of women, as to undermine assumptions of what a woman should be or do. Similarly, strongly negative expressions such as 'slut' and 'whore' were embraced in order to further women's sexual liberation. The third-wave movement aimed to give women an opportunity to be loud and clear about political issues, by expressing themselves creatively, despite the mainstream expectations of women to be too busy with their personal lives to take a part in the political.¹¹¹ In doing so, third-wave feminists look back with criticism at the previous wave of feminists, because these were largely occupied with a specific group of 'rich white women', while ignoring other races and those with a lower income.¹¹² Third-wave feminists instead claim to embrace women from all walks of life, different races, sexual preferences and different incomes. Third-wavers emphasise precisely this diversity of identities, while fighting against

¹¹¹ Garrison, Ednie Kaeh. "U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologicals of the Third Wave." (*Feminist Studies* 26:1 (Spring, 2000): 141-170), 143.

¹¹² Tobias, Sheila. *Faces of Feminism: An Activist's Reflections on the Women's Movement*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 253.

(sexual) violence, homophobia, body-shaming, and fighting for reproductive rights, in short: equality for all. Important in this is that not everyone faces the same forms of oppression, nor do all women necessarily hold the exact same standpoints (especially sex work and pornography are contested issues amongst feminists). As such, third-wave feminism should be understood as having different focus points for different people, instead a single set of issues. All of these issues together belong to the feminist politics of the third-wave, and it is thus polymorphous.¹¹³ Technology plays an unmistakable role in this: the creation and self-publishing of zines, starting a band, and other creative do-it-yourself projects were a large part of the third-wave. These alternative media should however be understood as a response to the movement's deliberate misrepresentation in the mainstream press.¹¹⁴

Fourth-wave feminism is the latest, most contested wave to be recognised, and is roughly situated halfway through the noughties and onwards. Fourth-wave feminists, the author understands here, express the fact that everyone needs feminism. Fourth-wavers should largely be understood as embracing a wider sense of social justice: they criticise previous generations for often still neglecting transwomen and cisgender men, while advocating complete equality. Intersectionality, or the overlapping of separate elements of social life, plays an important role. In this, being a woman shouldn't matter, nor should any other gender matter.¹¹⁵ Any issue of oppression is part of the feminist program, as the recognition of power structures are a prominent goal.¹¹⁶ Because of this, fourth-wavers can be considered to embrace the idea of being 'post-gender', as the movement is largely concerned with making gender labels irrelevant. This definition is of course still not accepted by all; the large scope of the wave means there is not a single uniform idea of what feminism is or should be. The approach of fourth-wave feminism is most apparent, for example, in their attitude towards everyday sexism as displayed in the media, which they strongly criticise for pointing out femininity as soon as a woman is mentioned (despite a general sentiment

¹¹³ Garrison, Ednie Kaeh. "U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologic of the Third Wave." (*Feminist Studies* 26:1 (Spring, 2000): 141-170), 149/150; Baumgardner, Jennifer. "Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?." <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/baumgardner2011.html> (accessed June 24, 2016); Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." October 25, 2015. <http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism> (accessed June 24, 2016).

¹¹⁴ Beck, Debra Baker. "The 'F' Word: How the Media Frame Feminism." (*NWSA Journal* 10:1 (Spring, 1998): 139-153), 150.

¹¹⁵ Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." October 25, 2015. <http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism> (accessed June 24, 2016).

¹¹⁶ Cochrane, Kira. "The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel women." *The Guardian*, 10 December, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women> (accessed June 24, 2016); Baumgardner, Jennifer. "Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?." <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/baumgardner2011.html> (accessed June 24, 2016).

that all genders are equal). This criticism is not limited to female representation, instead it is concerned with general expressions of suppression. In a sense then, fourth-wave feminists can be seen as pursuing the same ideas that were already around during third-wave feminism.¹¹⁷ Technology, specifically the internet, plays a big role in this, in that sexism is easily pointed out in far-reaching social media campaigns and feminist blogs — compared to the small scope of third-wavers' zines. Borders thus become less of an issue: as social media shorten the distance between continents, fourth-wave feminists are able to easily express criticism of inequality around the world. Equality being its goal, fourth-wave feminists target stereotypical representations in the media, ranging from print publications (*The Sun's* 'Page 3') and online pages (misogynist Facebook pages) to music videos and song lyrics (Robin Thicke's 'Blurred Lines').¹¹⁸ Fourth-wave feminists argue that men too need feminism, as not only women experience the oppression of gender expectations. The media's stereotype of dominant masculinity and its negative view of female qualities disregards more 'feminine' men (thus holding back a proportion of the male population as well). It is crucial to stress that the 'waves' are a metaphor, and that these different waves should not be seen as being bound to a specific age group or generation. This is important, because contributions to feminism do not come from a single group of people with a single, specific identity: diversity is central.¹¹⁹

Marion Leonard's suggestion that riot grrrl may be situated within third-wave feminism (which looks out to support queer and non-white women as well), could be seen as problematic as the network largely attracts white middle-class women.¹²⁰ Identifying riot grrrl specifically as a network made up of different voices and ideas of course makes it even more difficult to make generalising statements about riot grrrl as a whole. The zines were personal expressions of their authors and riot grrrls themselves were quick to note that they don't represent all other riot grrrls per se. This is even more clear considering the diversity in terms of traditional feminism and radical feminism, both of which were present to different degrees in the various zines. However, one can see that, from the nineties onwards, there has been an overall feminist response that tried to overcome the dominant, masculine discourse that is manifest in mainstream publications. Riot grrrl can be seen as one of these. As mentioned above, riot grrrls empowered women through their zines, educating

¹¹⁷ Baumgardner, Jennifer. "Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?." <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artsspeech/genwom/baumgardner2011.html> (accessed June 24, 2016).

¹¹⁸ Cochrane, Kira. "The fourth wave of feminism: meet the rebel women." *The Guardian*, 10 December, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women> (accessed June 24, 2016).

¹¹⁹ Bardsley, Alyson. "Girlfight the Power: Teaching Contemporary Feminism and Pop Culture." (*Feminist Teacher* 16:3 (2006): 189-204), 202.

¹²⁰ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 148/149.

them and giving them a voice, while encouraging each other to speak through music and to be creative in the arts. Simultaneously, the label 'riot grrrl' has been shown to be precisely an embrace of previously disregarded words. While not confronting the mainstream press directly, these do-it-yourself projects served to build an alternative discourse for women (against the misrepresentation of the mainstream press).

Despite the difficulty in defining riot grrrl, the network still makes sense within the broader framework of feminism. Through their projects, riot grrrls created an alternative identity of women as being able to express themselves authentically, through raw music and self-published, highly autonomous zines, while discussing serious issues and ideas. It mixed ideas prevalent in third-wave feminism with punk, in a do-it-yourself approach that is traditionally associated with men, showing that women are just as capable. Social memories, values and ideas are thus created through their exchanges (*cf.* Maurice Halbwachs), and a new sense of identity is openly discussed, formed and crystallised within the works of riot grrrls (*cf.* Jan Assmann). In conclusion, riot grrrl fits the context of third-wave feminism, precisely because of the way they use zines and punk music to be loud about political issues, despite their representation in the mainstream press. They embrace traditionally negative terms like 'grrrl', 'slut' and 'whore' to challenge a dominantly masculine discourse, while empowering women from multiple walks of life (as shown, there is a strong connection with queer groups to riot grrrl). This is not to say that all riot grrrls embody a precise set of ideals third-wavers stand for, as there is some difficulty in defining riot grrrl: different members have different ideas, and riot grrrls themselves state they do not represent all other riot grrrls. But this is precisely one of the points of third-wave feminism, which embraces the fact that there is not a single set of feminist ideals. Due to the low circulation numbers of riot grrrl zines, and the perpetuating unfriendliness towards female musicians in the mainstream music press, one can nonetheless conclude that these countermovements have not had much impact on mainstream discourse.

3. Case study: the discourse of *The Wire* and *Pitchfork*

Chapter two has shown that female musicians are presented in various sexist ways in the mainstream music press. Simultaneously there have been small independent publications or zines, for instance as part of a larger riot grrrl network, that expressed an alternative voice for women to that of the mainstream, dominantly masculine music press. These were generally of low circulation and did not reach a broad audience. Today, thanks to the internet, publishing and reaching an audience is much easier. There are also a few print magazines that still approach writing in a different way from today's mainstream press (much more like the old polyglottism of around the seventies). How do these alternative publications of today present female musicians? Do they adapt to the mainstream and try to reach some readers in this highly competitive field, or do they use their position to offer a different voice to the dominant one? And if so, how does this fit in the ongoing feminist debates?

In order to analyse the two examples of the alternative music press, namely *The Wire* and *Pitchfork*, one will need to look at several elements of their publications. Of particular importance here are a focus on the frequency in which female musicians appear on the cover of the publications of *The Wire* and in the end-of-year lists of *Pitchfork*, as well as the language used when writing about these artists. While *The Wire* does have end-of-year lists as well, in a section they call 'Rewind' (featuring a list of fifty albums, as well as genre-bound and personal lists of each of the magazine's music critics), its writers do not use any rating system to put their reviewed albums in a bigger hierarchy. Because of this it proved hard to determine how their lists exactly came to be, whether they were discussed by the whole team (thus representing the magazine as a whole), or whether they let their subscribers decide by voting on their favourite releases (therefore representing the readers). At the same time, these lists do not only feature new studio releases. Previous work can be found in there as well, such as old Miles Davis live recordings that have been (re)released during the year. Due to the ambiguity of these lists, the author has decided that these will not be analysed in this case study. The frequency in which female musicians appear on the covers of *The Wire* seems a suitable alternative for analysing whether or not women are often the subject of these music publications (considering the mainstream press's disregard of female musicians). The first part of the analysis will thus focus on whether female musicians are being covered by these publications, or whether they are being ignored in favour of male musicians. The second part will focus on the way in which women are discussed. First, it will be necessary to make a distinction in the approach between *The Wire* and *Pitchfork*. It will also be necessary to delineate them as 'alternatives' to mainstream music publications. Is the mode of production different, the scale, the approach, the readers, the journalists, or all of the above? Then it will be necessary to delve into the actual approach of this project by conducting both a statistical analysis and an analysis of the actual coverage of various female artists in *The Wire* and *Pitchfork*.

Both *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* are focused on indie music, obscure acts (more so in the case of *The Wire*) and more popular ones (mostly in *Pitchfork*, although there is an overlap between the two). The genre of indie music is rather difficult to pinpoint as its boundaries are not set in stone. In the eighties the genre developed together with independent record and distribution companies, which meant the indie label was in part due to its economical position.¹²¹ Over time major record companies have invested in the genre, which has caused it to unite with the mainstream music industry. As a result, the genre is no longer bound to economics. Instead, what keeps the genre together as a genre are the initial aesthetic and discursive ideas that still play a role in the music today.¹²² Indie music still has a sense of the raw punk spirit of being opposed to mainstream developments in music and of valuing artistic, do-it-yourself autonomy.¹²³ On the other hand, its open boundaries and exchange with other genres means the definition of indie music is unmistakably subjective. It grew out of a variety of alternative genres from (psychedelic) rock music, to noisy punk, to electronic music, and today the genre is still evolving by mixing up with other genres like contemporary RnB and hip-hop. According to Marion Leonard, it is mainly a masculine culture.¹²⁴

Today, *Pitchfork* is one of the most widely read online publications (which is able to update its readers immediately, instead of doing a weekly or daily release), whereas *The Wire* is a monthly glossy print magazine, which is much wider in scope than a fanzine but small enough to stand outside of the mainstream magazines. This is reflected in what a previous editor of *The Wire*, Tony Herrington, has said, namely that there is still room for a stylistic and ideological approach to music criticism if the focus is not on mainstream subjects.¹²⁵ In doing so it faces less intense competition than the mainstream publications. Supposedly, people also rely on a higher quality of writing in the magazines of *The Wire*, which is why it is one of the few remaining magazines that has a polyglottic agenda and identity.¹²⁶ *The Wire* says of itself that it is run by a small, dedicated team

¹²¹ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 4.

¹²² Idem, 4.

¹²³ Idem, 5.

¹²⁴ Idem, 44/45.

¹²⁵ Forde, Eamonn. "From polyglottism to branding: On the decline of personality journalism in the British music press." (*Journalism* 2:1: 23-43), 38.

¹²⁶ Forde, Eamonn. "From polyglottism to branding: On the decline of personality journalism in the British music press." (*Journalism* 2:1: 23-43), 39;
Gudmundsson, Gestur et al. "Brit Crit: Turning Points in British Rock Criticism, 1960-1990." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 41-64. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 58;
Atton, Chris. "Writing About Listening: Alternative Discourses in Rock Journalism." (*Popular Music* 28:1 (Jan. 2009): 53-67), 55.

and a large group of freelance writers across the globe: “There’s no written constitution and no hardened music policy for inclusion or exclusion. *The Wire* seeks out the best current musics in, and between, all genres; and is committed to investigating music’s past as well as its present and future. We are a 100 per cent independent operation, owned outright by the staff. There is no pressure from a publishing house to compromise our content, and we are at liberty to decide everything that’s printed in our magazine — we won’t let advertisers, record companies or press agents set the agenda.”¹²⁷ *Pitchfork* on the other hand, is especially interesting for being a publication within a new, contemporary medium, namely the internet. This also means that it is more directly subject to feedback through social media and the blogosphere. Multiple academics were quick to declare that the discourse of internet music journalism does not take place within a vacuum. It should rather be seen as a continuation of mainstream music journalism.¹²⁸ Similar to *The Wire* however is that *Pitchfork* features think pieces by its journalists as well. In this, it does not seem to take a purely heteronomous approach of being a consumer guide, as the mainstream press does. Its inclusion of more obscure indie musicians enforces this impression. In conclusion, one can set up these publications as being alternatives to the mainstream music press for multiple reasons. *The Wire* is presented as leaning more towards the autonomous pole of the spectrum. This can be applied to *Pitchfork* as well, although it may also take a more sensationalistic approach due to its coverage of more popular artists. Both publications state the writers behind the published pieces, and they both have think pieces as well. This does of course not mean that the discourse within these publications is by default different to that of the mainstream press. It does however mean that one can see them as being more or less independent from them. Their suggested position of leaning more towards the autonomous pole opens up the possibility of a development of their discourse towards alternative voices. This may mean the inclusion of female musicians within values of, for example, authenticity. On the other hand, the indie music genre is dominantly masculine in the mainstream press’s discourse (which does focus on the more popular artists), making these two alternative publications worthy subjects of study.

In this case study two approaches are being used, namely what has been called a frequency or statistical analysis, and a focus on the actual language used within the publications. The first one takes a look at the number of times female musicians appear on the cover of a publication of *The Wire* in comparison to male musicians, as well as the number of times female and male musicians

¹²⁷ “About Us.” *The Wire*. <http://www.thewire.co.uk/about/> (accessed June 19, 2016).

¹²⁸ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 31;
Swiss, Thomas. “Jewel Case: Pop Stars, Poets, and the Press.” (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 171-182. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 175;
Davies, Helen. “All Rock and Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press.” (*Popular Music* 20:3 (Oct. 2001): 301-319), 317.

appear in the end-of-year lists of *Pitchfork*. Secondly, this case study will look at the language used when discussing female artists, both within featured interview articles and shorter music reviews. Several scholars have done similar studies of the press, as seen below. These studies have served as an inspiration for this new research.

Kembrew McLeod notes that the dominant discourse as found in mainstream music journalism consists of several key masculine and feminine terms. Masculine terms are 'aggressive intensity', 'violence', 'rawness', 'simplicity', 'personal expression', 'seriousness', and 'originality'. Feminine terms are 'softness', 'blandness', 'vapidity', 'commercialism', 'formulaic unoriginality', and 'sweet sentimentalism'.¹²⁹ These words of a man's valuable qualities fall under the larger umbrella of his being authentic, as one has seen in the above chapters, while the female qualities are meaningless and fabricated for shallow consumption. McLeod's approach in this is not so much a look at the way in which these words are used in a critic's reviewing of specific male or female artists, rather he is interested in the type of words music critics prefer to use when talking about music in general.¹³⁰ The terms are thus a typical representation of what one might find within the discourse of music criticism. Nonetheless, McLeod argues for a gendered distinction between the terms, not as something inherent to the words themselves, but rather in the way they are used within the music press.

Marion Leonard on the other hand focuses more thoroughly on the language used by critics when reviewing female musicians. Leonard argues again that the music press has written about mentally tormented musicians differently in relation to their different genders. Men like Kurt Cobain, the front man of Nirvana, and Richey Edwards, the front man of Manic Street Preachers, were respected in their suffering.¹³¹ The press covered their deaths in a way which portrayed them as troubled, tortured souls. The expression of this pain in their music was part of their artistry, a logical response to their depression which resulted in part from the pressure of fame. A female artist like PJ Harvey on the other hand was pathologised on a personal level.¹³² Her art is seen as an expression of her own madness as an evil, avenging woman. Similarly, Courtney Love is described as unstable and dangerous.¹³³ In short, a man will be deemed courageous and putting himself out there like a hero, whereas a woman is either mad, or will be considered childlike. She also notes

¹²⁹ McLeod, Kembrew. "Between Rock and a Hard Place: Gender and Rock Criticism." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 93-113. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 97.

¹³⁰ Idem, 107/108.

¹³¹ Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 70.

¹³² Idem, 74.

¹³³ Idem, 78.

that men are discussed with more emphasis on their musical intention, whereas women's art is often linked to their age, nationality or sexuality. Björk's supposed madness and quirkiness is linked to her nationality for example.¹³⁴

Anna Feigenbaum has done a somewhat similar study to Kembrew McLeod while focusing on discourse surrounding the artist Ani DiFranco, a musician who is often considered to be a feminist icon.¹³⁵ Looking at the frequency of such gendered words within reviews of DiFranco's work, Feigenbaum identifies for example that esteemed male qualities tend to be a man's musical influence and ability to play an instrument, whereas female qualities are either a woman's body or her voice. The voice is often seen as a quality that many women performers have, and it is not esteemed as something of high value, because women can naturally sing.¹³⁶ Male performers on the other hand are esteemed impressive, because they are much more brute and not born with such delicate qualities. It is important to note however that in this thesis's case study, the author does not make a difference between vocalists and instrumentalists. Seeing that some artists may use found metal objects as an instrument, for example, all of these artists are considered to be musicians (the vocalist of course using their vocal chords as an instrument).

While looking at the language of music critics, Helen Davies has noted a more extreme case of sexually representing women within the music press. In this case she quotes the British newspaper *The Guardian*, in which an interviewer meets with Natalie Imbruglia and writes: "She's yawning and rubbing her eyes. Along with those eyes come that skin, that smile, those lips, that cute accent. If anything she's too perfect — like a tiny toy person. ... She doesn't sit still, but squirms about on the sofa like a playful kitten. ... Winning me over takes about seven seconds."¹³⁷ Similarly, Holly Kruse quotes a critic reviewing a Hole concert. In this review, he writes about the band's front woman Courtney Love who wore "a silky pink wraparound skirt and sequined halter, [while she] pouted and flirted like a hyperactive tart on a losing streak, [inhaling] lustily on a cigarette."¹³⁸ There are clearly various different ways in which such a representation can take place. But it is important to note the (extreme) degrees to which previous academic studies have identified a gendered discourse, several of which will be useful in this case study.

¹³⁴ Idem, 84.

¹³⁵ Feigenbaum, Anna. "Some guy designed this room I'm standing in': marking gender in press coverage of Ani DiFranco." (*Popular Music* 24:1 (Jan. 2005): 37-56), 39.

¹³⁶ Idem, 43.

¹³⁷ Davies, Helen. "All Rock and Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press." (*Popular Music* 20:3 (Oct. 2001): 301-319), 303.

¹³⁸ Kruse, Holly. "Abandoning the Absolute: Transcendence and Gender in Popular Music Discourse." (In *Pop Music and the Press*, edited by Steve Jones, 134-155. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2002), 135.

This thesis presents a selection of what has been analysed. The articles are chosen in a way that best represents these publications' overall voice. As such, the publications that will be summarised here, the author has esteemed to best reflect the journals' general discourse. This will of course also take into account that these articles are written by different persons. As such, the author decided to avoid articles by the same music critics. Articles have been chosen fairly random, from as many different writers as possible, because these publications have more of a polyglottic identity compared to the mainstream press. One will get a clearer picture of a publication's general discourse if one takes a look at various writers, instead of different pieces all from the same few critics. Unfortunately keyword searching was not an option in the databases. Because of this, there was no possibility to perform a research focused on specific keywords, inspired by the findings of scholar Kembrew McLeod. One can still take the work of McLeod as an inspiration however, as his key terms lay out the interesting opposition between masculine and feminine words. Specific words concerning passion, intensity and authenticity traditionally suit male musicians, while feminised words relate to blandness and sappy sentimentality. Marion Leonard on the other hand showed an interesting approach, precisely because these kind of key terms were used rather blatantly in articles on female musicians. One sees through these previous studies that there are specific terms that point towards a gendered discourse. This is of primary concern within the second part of this case study. Thus, this analysis of the publications' use of language does not primarily aim to compare the way different critics write about female musicians. It does not compare the language used, by focusing on the same specific artists, between *The Wire* and *Pitchfork*, rather it wants to know about their representation of women in general. In doing so, it looks at both the album review format as well as featured interview articles. Most previous studies have researched both album reviews and interviews, which would allow this case study to be an accurate point of comparison to those of previous researchers. In conclusion, key to the use of language is thus the question whether music critics refer to the female musicians' gender or sexuality, either explicitly or implicitly, or whether there is a focus on their artistic endeavours.

The Wire is published monthly and has therefore seen 192 glossy magazines from 2000 up until 2015. In all of these, female musicians have appeared 37 times on the cover, with the lowest number in 2001, 2003 and 2009, and the highest number in 2015. There is not a clear trend towards more or fewer women on the covers over time, and there is no good reason to assume the more balanced average of 2015 will continue towards the future. A full representation of the number of times men and women appeared on the cover of *The Wire* per year can be found in table 1 below. Some covers featured abstract art or an object instead of an artist. These covers have therefore not been included in calculating the averages. The number of covers that feature artists per year are visible in the first row along the pound sign. Bands with both men and women

in them have been added to both the number of female and male musicians on the cover. This explains, for example, why 2011 exceeds the 12 magazines per year. These were rare however, and most full bands that appeared on the cover of the magazine were only men. As stated above, a total of 37 times women were on the cover of *The Wire* from 2000 up until 2015. Men were found 140 times on the cover in that same time frame. This means that of the 163 covers that featured musicians (29 of them featured a more abstract design), 37 of them showed either bands that included women or a single female musician. Of the total number of musician-featured covers, women make up on average 22.7% of *The Wire's* covers from 2000 up until 2015. Male musicians, on the other hand, make up about 85.9% of the covers.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	total
#	10	12	11	11	8	10	11	10	10	11	9	11	10	10	9	10	163
♂	9	11	8	11	7	10	8	9	7	11	8	11	9	8	7	6	140
♀	2	1	4	1	1	1	4	3	4	1	2	2	2	2	2	5	37
% ♂	90	91.7	72.7	100	87.5	100	72.7	90	70	100	88.9	100	90	80	77.8	60	85.9
% ♀	20	8.3	36.4	9.1	12.5	10	36.4	30	40	9.1	22.2	18.2	20	20	22.2	50	22.7

Table 1. The number of times men and women appeared on the cover of *The Wire* per year (including the percentage of men and women per year).

Pitchfork on the other hand does not allow for an evaluation of magazine covers as it is uniquely an internet publication. It does however have a special list dedicated to the best new music, which features every new release that has gotten a laudatory review. *Pitchfork* also publishes lists at the end of the year with the best album releases of that year. Because there is a large overlap between these two lists, and the end-of-year lists with the best albums of that year are selected by the entire *Pitchfork* staff, the focus will be on the latter in this case study. The number of female artists within these lists are taken to be reflective of their overall presence in *Pitchfork's* publications. This seems plausible, because there is no reason to assume that either gender would make better music than the other. In table 2 below, both the number of female and male musicians in the 'Best Albums of the Year' lists have been written out. As was the case concerning the covers of *The Wire*, if a band features both men and women they are added to both counters. Musical acts that the author could not identify as either male or female have been left out of the equation. Since this happened only three times over the whole of 740 albums (in cases of compilation albums with various artists), these have been dismissed as they would not have made a significant impact on the equation.

From 2002 up until 2015, each year fifty albums appeared in the best music of that year category. The years 2000 and 2001 are an exception to this, as they have shorter, twenty album long lists. Relatively, 2002 saw the lowest number of female musicians, with only seven playing a part on the fifty most esteemed albums of that year. 2005 had relatively the most women of all these lists, but it was not much higher than other years. Female musicians were a part of 237 records in total in these sixteen end-of-year lists, either as a solo artist or as part of a band. Out of the 740 albums that have been featured in total, women were thus part of about 32% of them. Men were part of 637 albums, making up about 86.1% of the featured albums. If one would leave out bands that featured both men and women, the number of women in the end-of-year lists would be significantly lower up until 2014. The last two years, 2014 and 2015, have seen a decrease in the number of male musicians in the best-of-the-year list. Meanwhile the number of female musicians has not risen. What became apparent in looking at these years was that fewer bands featured in their lists. Instead, solo artists were more favoured in those years, with a specific growth of interest into electronic and hip-hop acts. The percentage of female musicians over the last sixteen years has not particularly changed all in all.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	total
#	20	20	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	740
♂	18	20	47	46	44	41	46	44	45	45	45	41	42	42	38	33	637
♀	7	6	7	17	16	21	19	14	20	16	13	15	18	13	17	18	237
% ♂	90	100	94	92	88	82	92	88	90	90	90	82	84	84	76	66	86.1
% ♀	35	30	14	34	32	42	38	28	40	32	26	30	36	26	34	36	32

Table 2. The number of times the albums of male and female musicians appeared in *Pitchfork's* best albums of the year list per year (including the percentage of albums of male and female musicians per year).

Contrary to the analysis of male and female musicians' frequency of appearance on *The Wire's* covers and in *Pitchfork's* end-of-years lists, the analysed interview articles and reviews focus on musicals acts that are only made up of women. A couple of them will be shortly analysed here, before making a more general statement concerning both *The Wire's* and *Pitchfork's* discourse in relation to female musicians.

The average review in *The Wire* is in the 250 to 600 words-per-article range, with a few reaching up to a thousand words. In a publication, multiple reviews feature after each other without visible cues as to which article is more important, with the exception of three or four reviews that feature in a separate box and have a longer length. As said above, the reviews are written by different critics, who don't give these albums any form of ranking. Their writing goes directly into its subject

while focusing on a couple of aspects the critic deems important. Jennifer Allan's review of Pantaleimon's *Mercy Oceans*, in *The Wire* of February 2008, is a good example of this. Allan gives the album review some initial context by writing that it is "UK based musician Andria Degens's second album", whose artist moniker "sprang from Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy and was further carried by the discovery of St Panthaleimon (a healer), [and] means 'all is merciful'."¹³⁹ These references are meaningful, according to Allan, because they relate to "Degens's nature, her awareness of karmic burden and innate naturalism."¹⁴⁰ This is reflected in Pantaleimon's music, which is rather meditative and offers a minimalist sound of "layered, simple melodies coated in gentle whimsy."¹⁴¹ Specifically these heavenly features are what Allan continues to focus on, while clearly linking it to both the origin of Pantaleimon's name, and the artist's spiritual convictions. This continues as she describes the albums and its songs as a 'dreamless sleep of repetition', a 'spiritual hinterland' and a 'magical time'. While this review does not state whether it is a good or a bad album overall, the descriptive words incite the imagination of its readers, leaving it up to them whether to explore the artist further or not.

Nick Richardson's review of Grouper's *A I A: Dream Loss / Alien Observer*, in *The Wire* of June 2011, says of the double album that "Portland based Grouper singer delivers [Judee] Sill-channelling, multitrack harmonised, almost chorale-ish melodies, in a limpid tone uncorrupted by vibrato. She accompanies herself on guitar, or piano; occasionally there's the shadow of some lush orchestration: a discreet swimming of cellos (on *A I A Alien Observer*'s 'Vapor Trails'), a roving flute (on *A I A Dream Loss*'s 'I Saw A Ray'). And her themes are the ancient ones: love, loss, rapture."¹⁴² In his description of the album's tonal qualities, Richardson describes the emotions he associates with them, such as a "guitar [that] dissolves in an orange fuzz to evoke something like frustration."¹⁴³ During this review, Richardson describes the songs in different circumstance, where Grouper sounds 'on her own' or appears 'upset'. More precisely, "both LPs frame the basic experience of solitude, countryside and euphoric exhaustion. What's more, [Grouper's] representation of this state feels immediately familiar, and true."¹⁴⁴ Richardson notes that Grouper's new release reminded him that music is about 'telegraphing states of listening', and that Grouper does exactly that as she gives the listener an experience of spending time alone "in a log

¹³⁹ Allan, Jennifer. Review of *Mercy Oceans*, by Pantaleimon. (*The Wire* (Issue 288), February, 2008: 51), 51.

¹⁴⁰ Idem, 51.

¹⁴¹ Idem, 51.

¹⁴² Richardson, Nick. Review of *A I A: Alien Observer / Dream Loss*, by Grouper. (*The Wire* (Issue 328), June, 2011: 45), 45.

¹⁴³ Idem, 45.

¹⁴⁴ Idem, 45.

cabin in Appalachia, cut by crisis but bearing up, gazing out over the landscape with Judee Sill playing in the background.” While this experience is something the listener probably never actually experienced in reality, Grouper is able to transform the listener to this state. Richardson appears appreciative of the double album in his writing, as he says that Grouper gives one a moment of ‘enchanted experience’, enriching one’s inner life.

In these two reviews one can see that the kind of words these critics use are mostly descriptive. An important factor in this is the general ambience a record gives off for the reviewing critic. Descriptions like “almost imperceptibly quiet percussive crunches that suggest footfall in fresh snow”¹⁴⁵ and “‘Click Piece’ evolves a few isolated staccato dashes into a piquant wash of pointillistic specks.”¹⁴⁶ are common occurrences in *The Wire*’s articles. But not only the music itself plays a role, its lyrics do as well, and other writers choose to put more emphasis on those: “As vocalist and lyricist, Foster breaks the fourth wall time and again to make what sounds like a sincere offer of companionship and adventure.”¹⁴⁷ Other writers use comparison with other artists as a tool to describe the music: “Her velveteen voice has a sobbing tinge in common with Kate & Anna McGarrigle. ... ‘The Whole Is Wide’ is a lonely lament sitting on a simple, PJ Harvey-like piano vamp. ... Big electric snares and 1980s chiming keyboards propose a sub-Kate Bush runaround.”¹⁴⁸ It must be noted that many more articles have been analysed than are shown in this thesis, as showing more would merely be a repetition of the same style of writing. The above, and the following, is a selection that is taken to be an accurate representation of both publications’ writing on female musicians.

Throughout the multitude of analysed articles, there were barely any articles that used language referring to femininity or women’s sexuality (disregarding the times when it was the topic of a specific song). A single one stood out, namely Chris Sharp’s review of Chicks On Speed’s *Will Save Us All!*, in *The Wire* of April 2000. In it, Sharp writes that the consumer press presents Chicks On Speed as the ‘future of pop music’: “There’s an element of truth in the claim. For a start, it doesn’t take a genius (any Spice Girls fan or major label marketing apparatchik will do) to work out that the future of pop music will somehow manage to find a place for presentable young women

¹⁴⁵ Gibb, Rory. Review of *Ett*, by Klara Lewis. (*The Wire* (Issue 363), May, 2014: 65-66), 65.

¹⁴⁶ Clark, Philip. Review of *For John Stevens*, by Maggie Nicols & The Gathering. (*The Wire* (Issue 233), July, 2003: 67), 67.

¹⁴⁷ Stannard, Joseph. Review of *Blood Rushing*, by Josephine Foster. (*The Wire* (Issue 343), September, 2012: 58-60), 60.

¹⁴⁸ Bell, Clive. Review of *Little Hells*, by Marissa Nadler. (*The Wire* (Issue 302), April, 2009: 58), 58.

endowed with that easily applied and quasi-fictitious commodity known as ‘attitude’.”¹⁴⁹ In doing so, Sharp suggests all Spice Girls fans are unintelligent due to their choice of music. He goes on to dismiss pop music in general, writing that Chicks on Speed’s “particular diet [has] clearly been New Wave synth pop (1978-84). Nobody else seems to be regurgitating that particular epoch at the moment, which is [as] close as pop gets to originality — hence those glossy magazine features.”¹⁵⁰ Concerning the title, Sharp goes on to say that “the problem, though, in sharp contrast to, say Atari Teenage Riot, is that there isn’t any real urgency here. ... There’s nothing wrong with being meaningless, of course — unless you’re claiming to offer more than that. And Chicks On Speed have promised to Save Us All!”¹⁵¹ Atari Teenage Riot is a band that has (had) women in it. Because of this, one can’t say that this is a direct disregard of women in music. Instead, Chris Sharp’s annoyance seems to be with pop music in general, which he considers to be a mindless, empty commercial product. In making this clear he does insult Spice Girls fans, generally considered to be young girls, although he does not define this group as such. ‘Attitude’ on the other hand, is an ‘easily applied and quasi-fictitious commodity’. While still not saying that this is unique to women, the link between vapid pop music and women is definitely suggested.

This instance of a gendered account of the music is, however, not something that is common to negative reviews in *The Wire*. Other reviewers of other albums, while negative, did not show a similar gendered approach as Chris Sharp. Elisabeth Vincentelli expresses, despite a negative review of Le Tigre’s *The Island* in *The Wire* of October 2004, an ongoing interest in the band’s political project: “Le Tigre believe politics shouldn’t be separated from an empowering pleasure principle, which on This Island translates as an unabashed dedication to the direct impact provided by pop music. ... How can you be politically aware in 2004 America and not be angry, yet how do you express that emotion without digging yourself into an artistic hole? This Island doesn’t offer answers, but it’s fascinating to hear Le Tigre keep on looking for them.”¹⁵² Despite her disappointment in the final product, Vincentelli focuses on the political intentions of these female musicians. Even though their political message is placed within pop music songs, she never suggests disgust at this decision: it is seen as a fascinating, daring approach. Russell Bruce writes, reviewing Marisa Anderson’s *The Golden Hour*: “It refuses resolution, shies away from logical structure and explores the abstract sound of string for a full 90 seconds, but then slips back to a hoedown denouement. ... I hope she takes her technique and knowledge and boils the whole thing

¹⁴⁹ Sharp, Chris. Review of *Will Save Us All!*, by Chicks On Speed. (*The Wire* (Issue 194), April, 2000: 58), 58.

¹⁵⁰ Idem, 58.

¹⁵¹ Idem, 58.

¹⁵² Vincentelli, Elisabeth. Review of *This Island*, by Le Tigre. (*The Wire* (Issue 248), October, 2004: 58), 58.

up with something really dangerous next time.”¹⁵³ Bruce wishes Anderson’s ideas would have been worked out better, but never suggests it has anything to do with her being a woman. Clearly, he believes she has the technique and the knowledge to make it happen. Russell Bruce stays in a descriptive mode of writing about the music, a style that pervades many of the articles in *The Wire*.

The overall use of language of *The Wire* seems to be one that emphasises description and intellectualism. Authors tend not to involve their personal reaction to the music in their writing. Instead, critics often end up describing the music in several ways. Most commonly, writers depict an atmosphere or scene they thought of when listening to a particular detail of a song. In these descriptions there is generally not an evaluation of whether these experiences are good or bad: value judgements have to be deduced by the readers themselves. Intellectually, there is a focus on the artistic ideas that motivate a musician’s release. Comparisons between artists are not drawn uniquely with men, but also frequently with other female musicians. The same kind of language use appears to be the case for interviews, such as David Sims interview with Björk in *The Wire* of September 2001. During the interview, the two discuss topics like religion, the Icelandic environment and collaboration with other artists in relation to Björk’s new album *Vespertine*. The music is discussed in more detail as well, along with Björk’s inspirations and approach to writing the music: “I use micro-beats, a lot of whispery vocals, which I think sound amazing when they’re downloaded because of the secrecy of the medium. The only acoustic instruments I would use would be those that sound good after they’ve been downloaded.”¹⁵⁴ Questions asked during interviews focus on the artist’s ideas and approaches, they remain serious and steer clear from gossip. In its use of the different tools of approaching and discussing artists, there is no clear presence of a masculine discourse. With the exception of the one article shown above, there have not been any articles that suggested a disregard of female musicians or women in general. Instead, the other articles have engaged with the musical material for what it is, without reference to the musician’s life as a woman or her sexuality.

Pitchfork reviews are slightly longer than those in *The Wire*, ranging from around 400 up to 1200 words per article, the average article being around 800 words long. Articles have a headlining sentence that either summarises or introduces the writing of the author. Next to it there is a rating which ranges from 1 to 10. In the reviews in *Pitchfork*, the most common approach is to describe the album through a breakdown of what it sounds like, or by comparing it to other genres and artists. In Mike Powell’s review of Courtney Barnett’s *Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit*, Powell says of the record that “its music is descended from 1990s grunge, descended in

¹⁵³ Russell, Bruce. Review of *The Golden Hour*, by Marisa Anderson. (*The Wire* (Issue 328), June, 2011: 44), 44.

¹⁵⁴ Sims, David. Interview with Björk. (*The Wire* (Issue 211), September, 2001: 30-37), 37.

turn from '60s garage and psychedelia — the rocks to the balloons of Barnett's thoughts, which blow back and forth above the distorted guitars buoyed by gas we can't actually see. Without her words, the music would sit there; without the music, Barnett would drift away. Half the time, she doesn't even sing, but talks, slipping into melody midline as though she just remembered she was playing music."¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Philip Sherburne says of Grouper's *Ruins*: "Her phrasing is tentative and guarded; even without recourse to her trusty loops, she finds ways to muddy the atmosphere. Multitracking offers a way of hiding behind her own shadow, and her foot rarely leaves the piano's sustain pedal, even on the instrumental numbers."¹⁵⁶ Just like *The Wire*, *Pitchfork* writers aim to describe the music. They do so, not through sentences reflecting the ambience of a given piece of music, but by describing the sound the instruments themselves make such as the phrasing of the singing, and the way a sustaining piano and multitracking muddy the atmosphere. The music journalists of *The Wire* instead opt for more imagery in their description, such as the above seen 'crunching footfalls in snow'.

Generally, *Pitchfork* critics take this familiar approach of describing the music: an album is compared to the work of other artists, both male and female, and the music itself, including the lyrics, is described in fairly straight-forward terms. However, throughout this case study a few exceptions have been found. The most forthright one is a review by Amy Phillips, who reviewed Cat Power's *The Greatest*. Phillips writes: "But Marshall doesn't wallow long, following the track with 'Living Proof', Cat Power's most conventionally sexy song yet. As it swaggers on lazy horns and careening 'Like a Rolling Stone' organ, you can almost picture Marshall in a pair of tight jeans, swinging her hips in front of a jukebox. ... After beginning as a late-night smoky bar lament, the song lifts off on shoo-ba-doo harmonies and a bouncy beat; all of a sudden, it's getting hot and heavy in a pickup truck."¹⁵⁷ Out of all the articles read, this was the only one to make a direct reference to the artist's body. Similarly, Phillips comments on several other songs how Cat Power "purrs over call-and-response horns and hotel bar piano ... moans the title ad infinitum."¹⁵⁸ Purring and moaning being words suggestive of Cat Power's sexuality (of course while playing off the artist's moniker 'Cat' Power). Both these sexual remarks and the imagination of the artist's body in

¹⁵⁵ Powell, Mike. Review of *Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit*, by Courtney Barnett. *Pitchfork*, March 23, 2015. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/20268-sometimes-i-sit-and-think-and-sometimes-i-just-sit/> (accessed June 19, 2016).

¹⁵⁶ Sherburne, Philip. Review of *Ruins*, by Grouper. *Pitchfork*, October 28, 2014. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/19820-grouper-ruins/> (accessed June 19, 2016).

¹⁵⁷ Phillips, Amy. Review of *The Greatest*, by Cat Power. *Pitchfork*, January 22, 2006. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/1346-the-greatest/> (accessed June 19, 2016).

¹⁵⁸ Idem.

the mind of Phillips go on throughout the reviewing, as she makes direct remarks like: “I envision Marshall in a fluffy white gown with a plunging neckline singing this song out a balcony window.”¹⁵⁹

Despite these heavy references to sexuality in the previous review, comments like these are not common in *Pitchfork*. Gender, in general, does not play a role in *Pitchfork*'s articles. In a mediocre review of Bat for Lashes's *Fur & Gold*, critic Matt LeMay says “‘Sad Eyes’ never quite fulfils the emotional potential generated by Khan’s voice and some sparse piano chords, and it also illustrates a wider point: Uncomplicated and vaguely mystical lyrics generally make sense here, but Khan occasionally sings like she’s not really sure what she’s saying.”¹⁶⁰ Despite its disappointment, the LeMay does not link his criticism of the album to Bat for Lashes’ femininity. There is no explicitly or implicitly mentioned (gendered) reason that made Bat for Lashes’ attempts a failure. “Many of the album’s biggest disappointments come simply because the band’s potential is so palpable, especially during more restrained and focused moments. But as strong as *Fur & Gold*'s individual tracks can be, the record as a whole is frustratingly dilute. While Khan has a real talent for edging towards emotional extremes, she seems to get lost in atmosphere.”¹⁶¹ For LeMay the potential is definitely there, as real quality shows up in several places on the record. Although it is not as good as he would have liked it to be, his attitude towards the record displays an open, positive outlook towards the future: despite this album being a miss, the future of Bat for Lashes can definitely turn out for the better. The author concludes that, similar to *The Wire*, there is no referral to female musicians’ femininity or sexuality in *Pitchfork*'s negative reviews.

One of the interviews read for this case study did show a gendered approach, yet it did so in an unsuspected way. In this case, an interview with the artist Grimes, the interviewer explicitly directs the conversation towards issues of women and sexuality within the music industry. The interviewer, Carrie Battan, also talks with Grimes about being a star, and discusses her artistic influences as well. Concerning women in music, Battan wonders about the ‘feminine sound’ of Grimes new record, and asks: “It seems that female artists within the indiesphere are subject to a lot of the same things that mainstream pop artists are. ... Do you want to push back against that at all? Obviously people like the way you look. But how do you feel about the idea of being sexualized?”¹⁶² Through this question the two engage in a conversation concerning sexualisation in the music industry and the use of sexual imagery by stars. Grimes’ reply is reproduced in the

¹⁵⁹ Idem.

¹⁶⁰ LeMay, Matt. Review of *Fur & Gold*, by Bat For Lashes. *Pitchfork*, February 8, 2007. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/9855-fur-gold/> (accessed June 19, 2016).

¹⁶¹ Idem.

¹⁶² Battan, Carrie. Interview with Grimes. *Pitchfork*, February 16, 2012. <http://pitchfork.com/features/interview/8774-grimes/> (accessed June 19, 2016).

article: “Music is an inherently sexual thing. ... Though I can’t say that I respect the gender politics of some of the female artists I like the most. When Regis [Philbin] grabbed Nicki Minaj’s ass on TV, she just giggled. I was like, ‘What the fuck! Come on! Punch him in the face!’”¹⁶³ Battan does not go on to make this the topic of the entire interview. Instead she steers the conversation towards Grimes’ inspirations, both male and female, and asks her questions about her songwriting process. “The song ‘Vowels = space and time’ was actually me angrily writing about the fact that people were always getting on me for not writing songs about things. It’s based on a theory from Russian Zaum philosophy, which is this weird pre-Dada early-1900s surrealist group that believed language was false because vocal expression had inherent emotional meanings or qualities.”¹⁶⁴ While the artists’ ideas are being reflected, both on their work and the bigger context of their work, *Pitchfork* interviews tend to go less in-depth than *The Wire* (Battan immediately goes on to ask about Grimes’ connection to internet culture). However, in this example one clearly sees that artistic ideas are addressed. What is interesting here is that Grimes is being represented in terms of her femininity (in this rare case), without getting sexualised by the interviewer. Instead, she opens up the debate by asking about Grimes’ experience of being a woman in the male-dominant discourse of the music press and the music industry in general.

Compared to *The Wire*, interviews are less focused on delving into the artistic ideas behind the endeavours of its subjects, and mix it up with more general questions. This is especially apparent in the latter part of an interview with Neko Case, which shows a particular interest in her opinion and anecdotes of other artists and getting Case to share her opinion on the music of her contemporaries. “When I hear auto tune on somebody’s voice, I don’t take them seriously. Or you hear somebody like Alicia Keys, who I know is pretty good, and you’ll hear a little bit of auto tune and you’re like, ‘You’re too fucking good for that.’”¹⁶⁵ It would be unfair to state that this is just a gossip article. Ryan Dombal, the interviewer, goes into the songwriting process of Case for the most part of the conversation: “Do you go out of your way to make things cryptic? ... From *Fox Confessor*, on a song like ‘Star Witness’, I’m guessing there’s a car accident involved but the details are sketchy.”¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, *Pitchfork* does reveal a different approach to *The Wire*. In this example, it is clear that *Pitchfork* takes a more sensationalistic approach, which can also be said of the interview with Grimes, because of the specific interest in current debates about women in the music industry. *The Wire* takes a more distant approach by ignoring these topics and instead

¹⁶³ Idem.

¹⁶⁴ Idem.

¹⁶⁵ Dombal, Ryan. Interview with Neko Case. *Pitchfork*, April 10, 2006. <http://pitchfork.com/features/interview/6306-neko-case/> (accessed June 19, 2016).

¹⁶⁶ Idem.

delving into the music itself and the world the music's atmosphere creates for the listener (including the more philosophical ideas behind the artists' work).

One final review that was particularly interesting was one of Sleater-Kinney's *The Beat*. The writer, Rob Mitchum, begins it immediately with a notable statement (which is also used in bigger print in the headlining sentence above the article): "I have issues with women in rock. Not so much the actual act of female human beings playing that rock n' roll music, but the entire media concept of in-quotes 'women in rock.'"¹⁶⁷ Mitchum addresses gendered discourse directly in his review of *The Beat*. While tired of the 'condescending, patronizing bullshit', he does not want to go into the issue of misogyny in music journalism, but has a different target. "Far too much writing about female musicians gets caught up with the idea that the artist must be saying something about the 'female experience.' ... Being a woman playing rock music is automatically assumed to be a declaration of activist intentions."¹⁶⁸ According to Mitchum, Sleater-Kinney is one of those bands that often gets hailed as the musicians rock music needs. It would be through them that the gendered discourse of the press could be broken. "But what of those girl bands that just want to rock, without all that role model jazz? ... With *One Beat*, Sleater-Kinney have turned in an album that absolutely, positively OBLITERATES the gender card, an album so colossal that all prefixes to the label 'rock band' must be immediately discarded."¹⁶⁹ Mitchum goes on to applaud the album for its music, which contains a 'forest of monumental riffs' and moments of 'mighty fist-pumping'. Notable about this review, is its irony. Mitchum takes an interesting position by stating that he is sick of the ascription of an activist position to female musicians: women should not have to be role models, and they should be just as free to make music for the fun of it. While critiquing this claim of Sleater-Kinney being female saviours (similar to what has been shown with Helen Davies's critique of women in music as a novelty, or Holly Kruse's criticism of the dominant structure of a man imposing his wishes or desires on a woman), Mitchum himself starts the whole article off by introducing the framework of women in rock music, whereas he could have completely ignored that fact. Similarly, while these music journalists seem sympathetic to the empowerment of these female musicians, a focus on the 'female experience' takes place in the Grimes interview.

Pitchfork writes about women in several ways. The multitude of articles that have been read for this case study have not shown any mention of a female musician's femininity or sexuality. A few however stood out, which have been analysed above. While only one of these showed a focus on the artist's sexuality, the others instead focused on the position of women in relation to the music

¹⁶⁷ Mitchum, Rob. Review of *One Beat*, by Sleater-Kinney. *Pitchfork*, August 27, 2002. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/7237-one-beat/> (accessed June 19, 2016).

¹⁶⁸ Idem.

¹⁶⁹ Idem.

industry in general. In this, they reveal a support for these women and an advocacy for equality. This is not a bad thing. *Pitchfork* articles represent women in a way that empowers them. Critics give their subjects a voice and represent their artistic ideas, while simultaneously aiming to address the issue of a masculine discourse in the mainstream press (and the music industry in general), as seen in the Grimes interview and the Sleater-Kinney review. However, in focusing on these issues, it can be argued that the critics perpetuate the problem by not focusing solely on the art instead. A consideration could be to precisely focus on their art in order to move past the inequality of mentioning these artists' place as women. *The Wire* on the other hand does not focus on these issues of inequality. Instead it goes straight into the artist's work without mention of their femininity. The few *Pitchfork* critics that engage with this topic have clearly not done this.

Overall, the analysed articles of both *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* do not appear to exhibit feminised words in a way that the mentioned scholars, like Kembrew McLeod, have recognised gendered discourse in the mainstream press. Instead, words that are masculinised in the music press, concerning passion, intensity and authenticity, are used frequently to describe the records of female musicians as well. They are considered to be just as capable of creating raw, intense music and it is barely ever suggested otherwise: the only review that does, Chris Sharp's review in *The Wire*, holds a specific grudge with pop music and commercial blandness. While there are exceptions of a very few critics that do take a gendered approach to their subject, this seems to depend on the writer of the piece. It is important to remark here, again, that both of these publications have a polyglottic identity. They consist of multiple writers, each with their own voice, and a single person's writing cannot be said to reflect the publications in their entirety. *The Wire* even has a disclaimer in the cover page of their magazines explicitly stating: "The views expressed in *The Wire* are those of the respective contributors and are not necessarily shared by the magazine or its staff." With the exception of Chris Sharp's disregard of pop music and its culture in *The Wire*, and Matt LeMay's sexualisation of Cat Power in *Pitchfork*, there is no indication of a general dominating discourse of masculinity in these publications.

Despite their articles, which do not betray a male-dominated discourse, the percentage of female musicians on the cover of *The Wire* and in the end-of-year lists of *Pitchfork*, which is taken to be a representation of the overall coverage of women on their platform, is clearly not balanced. There is a clear difference in the percentage of female versus male musicians, both on the covers and in the end-of-year-lists (a difference which is reflected in the content of their publications: when skipping through a magazine of *The Wire* or the *Pitchfork* site, one mostly finds male names). It has been shown that the content of their articles is largely female-friendly; but an important factor in the mainstream press is also the way in which women are actually represented on the cover of their publications. *The Wire* takes a similar approach to both male and female artists in this. There

is not a single cover in the 2000-2015 period that shows a focus on the female musicians' bodies. Every photograph depicted shows the artist without emphasis on their breasts, backside or other (slightly) unveiled body parts, nor are there any suggestive poses. Rather, the artists are shown in a way as one would take a picture of them in daily life, albeit with some wearing their stage make-up. None of the stereotypes of women appear on the covers either (such as being depicted as cute, childish, sexy, weak, dependent, not serious or intellectual). Despite the fact that 22.7% of the covers featured women, and 85.9% men, the actual depiction itself cannot be said to reveal a gendered discourse either.

Of course the unbalanced percentages of male and female musicians in these publications beg the question whether the fault lies on the press's side. Is this a case of still ignoring female musicians too much in favour of male artists? On the other hand, one should ask what the percentage of female musicians in the music industry is overall. Does this balance out the number of men in the industry, or are there actually significantly fewer female musicians? This is an important point, because this of course means the blame is not necessarily on the press's selection process. Or both could be the case (there being fewer women, while also being covered less by these publications). All in all, the uneven division of focus on male and female artists does play a role in the representation of female musicians in general. The observation points towards a lack of role models for women reading these publications.

So what about those few articles in *Pitchfork* that do mention femininity, but in a way that aims to empower female musicians by explicitly mentioning the sexist industry these artists face? While they do indeed situate their subjects in the debate concerning gender, it does so precisely in order to hear their opinions, or to make a statement that wants to push beyond this gendered discourse. *Pitchfork* thus creates a different social identity for their readers than *The Wire* does. Taking Halbwachs back into account, it becomes clear that *The Wire* creates an intellectual identity. The articles clearly show a tendency to go into artistic ideas and the ambience of artists' work. This was seen several times, for example in the Björk interview concerning microbeats and the sound of downloaded music, as well as reviews of Grouper and its reminder that music is about 'telegraphing states of listening'. *The Wire* thereby fits the autonomous side of the spectrum, through an interest in the art and style of the music, instead of commercial, economic success. As such, it does not pursue popular trends, and is rather interested in the deeper thought behind these artists' work. A reader will typically be someone with an interest in these ideas, the philosophy behind the music, as well as new experiments in music. Similar to *Pitchfork*, in doing so *The Wire* creates an identity which does not exclude women. There is no indication of the mainstream's dominant masculine discourse, as identified by previous academic study in the mainstream music press. Exceptions can be attributed precisely to their polyglottic identity which

means their publications consist of different critics with different voices (another way in which these publications celebrate diversity). *Pitchfork* can be seen as taking a more popular approach, where ideas intertwine with lighter, less profound content. While still on the autonomous side, and clearly interested in the ideas and processes of the artists, it is certainly more sensationalistic than *The Wire*: mentions of more popular topics in today's culture, as well as trending debates such as the representation of women's sexuality, reveal *Pitchfork's* tendency to lean more towards this heteronomous pole and commercial journalism, compared to *The Wire*. This became clear through the interview with Neko Case and her opinion of contemporary musicians, as well as the focus on ongoing debates, specifically that of female sexuality in the music industry. The typical reader of *Pitchfork* will likely be someone with more affinity with popular culture, and an interest in more common everyday topics, than those of *The Wire*.

The Wire and *Pitchfork* thus have a clearly autonomous identity, mainly concerned with discussing the musical content of albums. *The Wire* takes the more intellectual approach of the two, while *Pitchfork* is a bit of a lighter read. The previous chapter elaborated on the characteristics of third- and fourth-wave feminism. While both publications in this case study do not show a similar approach to female musicians as that of riot grrrls, who had a clear place in third-wave feminism, *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* can be seen as being informed by the currently ongoing fourth wave of feminism. Riot grrrl embraced an alternative culture in which women expressed themselves, contrary to the mainstream's position that women are too preoccupied with their personal lives. Networks like riot grrrl showed, through creative work imbued with serious political issues and ideas, that women can be serious and authentic too. Riot grrrl endeavoured to strongly empower women. *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* do exhibit a general concern with giving female musicians a voice and thus empower them, contrary to the dominant masculine discourse in the mainstream music press. However, the way in which they do so is different. While *Pitchfork* is quicker to call out issues of sexism and sexualisation, *The Wire*, on the other hand, does what fourth-wave feminism advocates: it ignores gender altogether. Both fit under the label of fourth-wave feminism, because femininity is represented as something that should not matter. The way in which almost all *Wire* and *Pitchfork* critics approach female musicians is by considering femininity and female sexuality irrelevant to the content of the music (unless it is the specific topic of the music). Contrary to *The Wire*, some *Pitchfork* critics explicitly address this issue, by pointing out the mainstream's general emphasis on female musicians' femininity or sexuality, as a way to move past the issue of gender. Because of this then, both publications can be seen as contributing to the creation of an alternative social identity (in the ways described by Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann), in which women have an equal position to men and their gender identity is regarded as irrelevant. The overall sense of identity, created by these alternative publications, consists of social memories, values and ideas that do not perpetuate gender as a musically relevant factor. While these publications do not

have a balance in the number of female and male musicians represented, and while their polyglottic identities do raise problems of their own, the author finds that they can be seen as fitting in the ongoing fourth wave of feminism when it comes to the matter in which women are represented in their publications.

4. Conclusion

This master's thesis has questioned how alternative music publications represent female musicians from the year 2000 until 2015. Several other questions were key in this project, namely how and why discourse formation happens, how the music press has developed to its current state, and whether there is a relation of fourth-wave feminism to the alternative music publications that were analysed. The time frame of 2000 until 2015 served as a way to set up this possibility.

A discursive approach to understanding meaning-making, which was derived from Michel Foucault, shows that there is an asymmetrical power relation in the construction of discourse, in which the press holds a powerful position. This approach fell short, because it did not sufficiently show what this creation of meaning is in relation to the press's readers, nor did it explain what the actual (social) function of this meaning-making is. Through the philosophical theories on cultural memory of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, these questions on discourse formation in relation to people became clear. Assmann's idea of social identity formation plays a vital role, and it is precisely in this that one can see the centre-stage role of the press as a (co)constructor of identity. Language is not innocent, and it has been shown to impact a group's identity and their way of seeing the world. A philosophical approach to this understanding is thus crucial because it allows one to see the press in a bigger context. The study of the different discourses within music journalism is in turn important, because of their influential position in the way people see themselves and the world around them. As such, it offers an insight into the different cultures surrounding music.

The evolution of the press shows how values like authenticity have been formed at the first turning point of the press. These values have been perpetuated over time, present in varying degrees depending on the target group of a publication. The subsequent development towards branding has resulted in less critical positions of music journalists, due to their lack of freedom within publications and their lack of time to do serious research (due to the economic pressure of press competition). As such, despite the rise of strongly autonomous, polyglottic publications at the first turning point, over time the economic context has turned them into more objective consumer guides: specialised, heteronomous publications. Despite changes (such as their position as autonomous versus heteronomous), critics have shown that the mainstream publications have continued to have an inherently gendered discourse over time. Their identity is understood as male writers writing for a male audience. This is reflected in the way in which they write about their subjects. The key values in music journalism, like authenticity, are ascribed to male musicians only, while female musicians are either viewed as male fantasies or rejected for being hysterical when an attempt at a serious message is made. The constructed identity within the mainstream music

press is as a result dominantly masculine, which gets expressed in the gendered discourse of their publications.

Countermovements like the riot grrrl network were a response to the sexism of the music press and the music industry in general. They have been shown to fit within the larger context of feminist responses to a dominantly masculine culture. Their identity as creative women, empowering other women through do-it-yourself projects like zines and music, both of which discuss serious topics, aimed to show that women could be raw, political and sincere too. Their zines are clearly autonomous, as they are personal, self-published expressions of their feminist ideas and those of the artists they cover. This identity, while polymorphous, makes the riot grrrl network a clear expression of third-wave feminism, that embraces the diversity of identities, while fighting issues such as (sexual) violence, homophobia and body-shaming.

The next question was how alternative music publications can be placed in this context: how do they represent women, and how does this relate to the currently ongoing fourth-wave feminism? The case study of *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* focused on the frequency in which female musicians were covered compared to men, as well as the way in which female musicians are written about in the articles themselves. While there were clearly fewer female than male musicians in these publications, the actual content of their writing did not display a gendered approach. Despite two exceptions, gender was either not considered at all (in *The Wire*) or, in the rare cases it was mentioned (in *Pitchfork*), it was done as a critique of the mainstream music press: stop treating women differently (sexually) because of their gender. It is precisely because of this, that they can be seen as an expression of fourth-wave feminism: femininity is understood as something that should be considered irrelevant. Through this analysis, it has become apparent that these publications offer a clearly different representation of women to the mainstream press. Both publications have a polyglottic identity, unlike the present-day mainstream press, and lean on the autonomous side of the spectrum (*The Wire* more so than *Pitchfork*).

The connection of these alternative publications to the larger context of the music press shows that, despite their participation in the same field, they do not take the same stance as the mainstream press. Both take a different approach to gender from the mainstream press, and can be seen as a continuation of feminist critiques of the mainstream's gendered discourse. While riot grrrl was a self-published alternative to mainstream music journalism, an expression of third-wave feminism in the nineties, *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* are, in conclusion, clear expressions of noughties' fourth-wave feminism in their attempt to move past gender inequalities. The case study of these alternative music publications thereby fills a gap within the ongoing debate of misogyny in the music press, while placing them in the context of the developing waves of feminism.

Beyond the scope of this thesis lie many questions that still merit further research. While the press is not the only element in the construction of a social identity, and of a discourse which expresses its values and ideas, its reach is large and should therefore not be ignored. It is of course difficult to determine who precisely has agency in modern-day branded magazines and who is influential in the more polyglottic papers (in which the editor takes final decisions). Other actors play a role as well, from advertisers to fans leaving comments on a music blog. While it is the cumulative effect of everyone's expressions that create a discourse, it is hard to measure the impact the critic has in this. Who exactly has control, and why is this the case? What role do money and politics play in identity formation? And what is the influence of the internet and social media on these? Have technological developments like the internet, which has become increasingly important, given more freedom for alternative voices to express themselves? And what about riot grrrls, who may have gone on to actually work a job in the music industry or as critics in the mainstream music press?

It is also important to ask, considering the representation of women, what the number of male versus female musicians is overall. Do *The Wire* and *Pitchfork* indeed favour male artists over their female colleagues? Are there more male artists in the business overall? Or do both factors play a role in the coverage of women? Simultaneously, the question remains how these publications treat other labels of social life, such as race, age and sexual preference. There is a lot to chew on for cultural historians, sociologists and philosophers alike. Nonetheless, the development of feminist ideas in alternative publications may be an indication of the direction music journalism is taking.

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